

VOICES[®] OF LAUREL



FREE
SUMMER 2024
VOL. 4, NO. 3

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

Chief Firestarter



*The Strange Case of the
Former Laurel Police Chief
and Serial Arsonist*

PAGE 10



VOICES OF LAUREL

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

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LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys



Donna Schneider, president of the Prince George's County Historical Society, presents (left to right) Jeff Krulik, Richard Friend, and Kevin Leonard the St. George's Day Award at the 2024 Prince George's County Historic Preservation Reception for their work producing the book *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*.

Board of Directors News

We were saddened by the resignation of Board member Carl DeWalt. He's been a good friend to The Laurel History Boys and always encouraged our efforts to educate the community about local history and report the news truthfully. We wish him well. He will be missed. See the article on page 15.

Board member Diane Mezzanotte submitted the winning entry for the City of Laurel's Laurel Pride logo contest. The L incorporates a rotating series of colorful lines that represent the diverse makeup of the Laurel LGBTQ+ community and allies. The Lambda symbol also resembles a high-heeled shoe often worn by drag performers, and the heart

jewel on the "toe" symbolizes our community leading with love.

Grants and Donations

Thank you to Jane Abshire, James Bowman, Fran Fliss, Connie Lucas, and Kathie Peterson for their monetary donations to *Voices of Laurel*. We are grateful. We were thrilled to receive scanned pages from an original Maryland City realtor pamphlet from Melody Carnell. Original model homes were featured on the pages, which we posted as a Saturday photo of the week on our Facebook page.

Capital Centre: A Retrospective Receives Award/Recognition

The Prince George's County Historical Society recognized our book, *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*, with a St. George's Day Award! We very much enjoyed attending the 2024 Prince George's County Historic Preservation Reception at the beautiful Newton White Mansion, just a stone's throw from where the Capital Centre itself once stood. Rich, Kevin, and Board member Jeff Krulik received awards.

Also, the May issue of the *Business Monthly* featured an article by Mark Smith about the production of the book. And on radio station 106.7 The Fan, the Sports Junkies discussed the book, raving about it.

The book can be ordered at www.laurelhistory.com. Click "Shop."

Spring Book Fair Celebrated LHS Graduate Authors

The Laurel History Boys sponsored a Spring Book Fair in April, which featured the first-ever collection of Laurel published authors, some of whom are Laurel High School graduates. One of our guest authors, Jim Clash, wrote an article about it for *Forbes* magazine.

Voices of Laurel now in the Howard County Historical Society's Collection

Our friends with the Howard County Historical Society have added a complete collection of past issues of *Voices of Laurel* to their archives. Executive Director Mark Stout said, "We would gladly accession the *Voices of Laurel* collection. We actually have a fairly extensive newspaper collection, which includes some rare papers such as the *Ellicott City Times* and the *Howard Gazette* from the mid-1800s. It makes sense to add this to our collections." The Howard County Historical

Society has contributed articles to most of the past issues of *Voices of Laurel* and is one of our most valued collaborators.

Main Street Festival

We were at our traditional spot in front of Oliver's Old Towne Tavern for the Main Street Festival on May 11. We always enjoy meeting new people and talking to many who are familiar with our work. Thank you to all who stopped by!

Presentations

Upcoming presentations by The Laurel History Boys:

- On September 6, as part of the Howard County Historical Society's "Lunch Date with History" Lecture Series, Kevin will present "Capital Centre Stories." He will describe how the arena came to be and tell backstage stories from sports to concerts by virtually every major performer in every genre, as told by the dozens of former employees interviewed for the book *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*. The Museum of Howard County History, 8328 Court Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043. FREE; 11:00 AM. Please register in advance at www.hchsm.org/lunch-lectures-2024/.
- On September 10, Kevin will present "Laurel's Housing Boom," focusing on West Laurel, the Fairlawn district, the Route 197 corridor, and Maryland City, from the mid-1950s to the mid-60s. North Laurel Community Center, 9411 Whiskey Bottom Road, Laurel, MD 20723. FREE; 10:30 AM.

City Beat

A roundup of local events and announcements, compiled by *Voices of Laurel staff*



CITY OF LAUREL

Adrian Simmons Elected to City Council

On July 1st, the Laurel City Council interviewed council candidates to fill the vacant Ward 1 seat. In a 3–1 vote, Adrian Simmons was elected the new Councilman for Ward 1. He was sworn in on July 3rd.

Recognition for Mike & Mary Eileen Leszcz

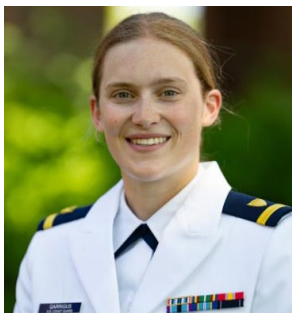
During the Farmer's Market on June 6, 2024, Mayor Keith R. Sydnor, the Laurel City Council, and the Community Redevelopment Authority held a Service Appreciation Ceremony for the honorable Michael R. and Mrs. Mary Eileen Leszcz to recognize their dedication and commitment to the community over the years. Their plaque is located at the Laurel Quill Lot.

[Source: City of Laurel]

Laurel Native Named Top Graduate at Coast Guard Academy

Madison Garrigus, a Marine and Environmental Sciences major from Laurel, was named the Distinguished Graduate of the Class of 2024. To receive this award a cadet must earn the highest military precedence average, which includes academic, military, and athletic components of the entire 200-week program.

Garrigus earned a 3.99 GPA and holds both the indoor facility and outdoor Academy records in the pole vault (11' 9.75" and 11' 8" respectively.) She served as Captain of both the indoor and outdoor Women's Track and Field teams and is one of the fastest runners in Academy history, holding a top ten time in the



60-meter dash after a meet earlier this year.

She also won a series of academic awards, including the Class of 1931 Prize in Chemistry, awarded to the cadet who attains the overall highest cumulative grade point average in multiple chemistry courses taken during the full course of instruction.

"She always wants to do her best," said Cmdr. Victoria Futch, Associate Dean for the School of Science, Mathematics, and the Humanities, who also served as Garrigus' academic advisor. "She really chases excellence

and does not want to leave anything on the table."

Reflecting on her time at the Academy, Garrigus said, "Over the past four years I have seen my mindset shift from looking to others for solutions to creating solutions."

After graduation, Ensign Garrigus will report to the CGC Venturous homeported in St. Petersburg, Fla., as she and her classmates head out to their first Coast Guard assignments this summer in the service of their country and humanity.

[Source: U.S. Coast Guard]

Shake-up at City Hall (cont'd)

Mayor Keith Sydnor has named Natalie Williams the new Director of the Department of Communications, replacing Audrey Barnes, who was fired in April. The City Council approved the hiring. Also, Jimmie Rodgers was appointed vice chair of the Environmental Affairs Committee.

[Source: City of Laurel]

15,000 Stolen Construction Tools Recovered

Howard County police have recovered approximately 15,000 stolen construction tools in what is believed to be one of the largest and most expansive theft cases in the region in recent years. The investigation is ongoing; no charges have been filed yet.

Police estimate that the total value of the stolen tools is between \$3–\$5 million. During the investigation, which began in late January when a tracking device in a stolen tool led officers to a storage unit in Elkridge, detectives have conducted search warrants at 12 locations—11 of which are in Howard County—from where they recovered the tools.

Detectives believe the tools were stolen from retail

stores, businesses, vehicles, residential properties, and construction sites primarily in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. The stolen tools were mostly kept in storage units in Howard County and detectives believe they were sold at a variety of locations and through different means.

More than 80 victims have been identified and detectives believe there are hundreds if not thousands more. Anyone with information on this case should contact police at 410-313-STOP or HCPDCrimeTips@howardcountymd.gov.

[Source: Howard County Police]

\$1.5M Wire Fraud Scheme Leads To Prison Sentence For Laurel Man

A 29-year-old Laurel man has been sentenced for his role in a wire fraud conspiracy and aggravated identity theft scheme totaling more than \$1.5 million.

According to Michael Akame Ngwese Ay Makoge's plea agreement, from March 2020 to October 2021, he and his co-conspirators impersonated victims to submit fraudulent claims for pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits in Maryland and California. As part of the scheme, Makoge and his co-conspirators obtained the birthdates, social security numbers, and other personal identifying information of numerous victims that they used on fraudulent applications for unemployment insurance benefits.

Various financial institutions then loaded unemployment insurance benefits onto debit cards and mailed the cards to the addresses created by Makoge and his co-conspirators who used the debit cards for cash withdrawals and other purchases, court documents showed.

A search at Makoge's residence on Feb. 16, 2021 recovered 11 unemployment insurance debit cards in the names of six victims. The investigation also revealed numerous text messages between Makoge and his co-conspirators exchanging the personal information of victims and discussing the fraud scheme, his plea agreement stated.

Makoge also made numerous ATM withdrawals using the identities of victims, personally obtaining at least \$35,540 in the scheme. Additional accounts were opened using the victims' identities, too, according to court documents.

Makoge has been sentenced to 53 months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release. He also was ordered to forfeit more than \$297,400 and to pay restitution of \$2,094,319.

Of the 11 defendants charged in this fraud scheme, five have pleaded guilty and two have been sentenced.

[Source: Patch.com]

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Oldtown

Local news covering the Oldtown area



BY CAITLIN LEWIS | OLDTOWNVOICES@GMAIL.COM



The Zahradka Family Farm stand at the Laurel Farmer's Market.

Greetings from your new Oldtown columnist! If you don't know me personally, you may recognize my family as "the red-haired family" that frequently takes evening walks around Oldtown. My own hair is blonde, but my husband and three of our four children are redheads, so we're pretty easy to spot from a distance (except for the one time we visited Ireland).

Some background: I grew up in Stamford, Connecticut, but when I was 16, our family moved to Jackson, Tennessee. After completing an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, I attended Asbury University in Kentucky, and majored in Secondary Education in English. At Asbury, a handsome red-haired student from Rome, Georgia, caught my eye. Unfortunately, he wasn't interested in me, but we did become friends. More on him later.

After college, I taught high school English in Tennessee for five years, then followed my dream of teaching overseas. The American Community School of Athens offered me a job, and thus began the lengthy process of procuring a work visa—a process which required a trip to the Greek Consulate in Atlanta. On the drive to Atlanta, I passed a sign for Rome, which reminded me of my

handsome red-haired friend, Benjamin. I wrote him a quick email, asking how life was going and explaining why I was driving past a sign for his hometown. Benjamin wrote back immediately. He was then living in Laurel, studying for a doctorate at the Catholic University of America. We resumed a lively written correspondence, and before I left for Greece, Benjamin asked to visit me.

Fast forward through two years of a long-distance relationship (me in Athens, Benjamin in Laurel), and we tied the knot in August 2015. Benjamin moved out of Laurel and joined me in Athens. Nine months later, our daughter Monica was born—the only red-haired baby in the Greek hospital. Prior to her birth, Monica was diagnosed with rhombencephalosynapsis—a rare brain malformation that affects about 250 people in the world. When she was two, Monica was diagnosed with another rare disease: erythromelalgia—a neurovascular disorder that causes episodes of painful red swelling in her limbs.

In October 2018, we moved from Athens to Laurel. We bought a house in Oldtown, and Benjamin began full-time work for ICEL (the International Commission

on English in the Liturgy), based in Washington, DC. We loved that Benjamin could scooter to the train station for work.

In March of 2019, I gave birth to our second child, Charles Shaw Lewis (yes, we named our kid C.S. Lewis), who made a dramatic and premature entrance into the world. He's been dramatic ever since and also sports the distinctive red hair.

Not to be outdone by the women who gave birth to one pandemic baby, I birthed two pandemic babies: Genevieve in 2021 and then Peter in 2022. The latter was born while I actually had Covid. I can assure you that double-masking while breathing through contractions was not nearly as fun as it sounds. Between the birth of Genevieve and Peter, we moved from one end of Oldtown to the other. Now we're even closer to the charming Laurel train station!

While I am not from Laurel, I love living here. In some ways, Oldtown reminds me of Athens. The sidewalks and front porches make for more social interactions than the typical American suburb. Our neighbors are friendly and welcoming, especially to our daughter Monica with her special needs. The houses are brimming with character and stories.

If you have a story to tell about Oldtown or the people who live here, please contact me at oldtownvoices@gmail.com. I would love to share your story with the rest of the community.

But enough about me. Here's a snippet of Oldtown news:

On the second of May, the Laurel Farmer's Market started up again in the Quill Lot on Main Street. The market will now be held from 3:00-7:00 pm every Thursday (except July 4th) through September 26th. On opening day, some of the vendors included The Garden International LLC, Millie Farms, and the Zahradka Family Farm.

[Source: City of Laurel Green Living]

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.

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North Laurel

Local news covering the North Laurel and Scaggsville areas



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI | HOCOVOICES@GMAIL.COM



Volunteers helped clean up the Savage Mill Trail on Earth Day, removing some 375 pounds of waste and debris.

Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks News

North Laurel Community Pool: The groundbreaking for the long-awaited, indoor community pool at the North Laurel Community Center took place on June 18, following the Howard County Council's unanimous approval in May of the county executive's Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget. The budget included full funding for the construction of a 25-yard main pool with eight lap lanes and ADA access, as well as a second, warm-water leisure pool.

Since 2005, Howard County has planned to construct a public community pool at this site. This project is identified in Howard County's 2005, 2012, 2017, and 2022 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans, and is supported by many community organizations. However, due to budgetary constraints, funding for the pool was consistently pushed back until now, according to Howard County Councilwoman Christiana Rigby's May newsletter.

Badminton, Anyone? The Department of Recreation & Parks has six brand-new badminton net systems ready for use. Bring your racket and a friend and visit the North Laurel Community Center to play a game. Learn more at www.howardcountymd.gov/nlcc.

Celebrate Recreation and Parks Month in July. There will be activities throughout the month of July around the county, including Art in the Park with Pinot's Palette at NLCC, Thursday July 25, from 6–8 PM. For more information visit: www.howardcountymd.gov/rec-pks-month.

Earth Day Clean-up a Success

The Upcycled team held an Earth Day Clean-Up of the Savage Mill Trail, along the Little Patuxent River and the area by the Old Mill, in Historic Savage on April 21. Thirty volunteers joined the effort, including a group from CyberCare Technologies in Elkridge.

The volunteers picked up 375 pounds of waste and debris in two hours on the

trail, according to Upcycled's Instagram account.

Curbside Food Scrap Collection Program Expands to Emerson, Savage area

Starting in late April, an additional 4,200 households in Emerson and Savage became eligible to join their neighbors in the Feed the Green Bin food scrap collection program. Online sign-ups for these areas are now open. The county accepts items for recycling that go beyond the traditional fruits, vegetables, and coffee grounds. Greasy cardboard pizza boxes, meat, fish, shellfish (including bones) can also be tossed into the green bin. The county's website has information about what is acceptable and what is not. For more information about the program and to sign up to participate, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/bureau-environmental-services/feed-green-bin.

New Bookstore Opens with a Charitable Cause

The Books for Life bookstore held a grand opening on May 27. A curated used bookstore, Books for Life donates a portion of its proceeds to children's charities and "rehomes" books that were destined for landfills; Books For Life claims to have rehomed over 1 million books to date. The store accepts book donations, with many children's books being given in turn to a children's literacy program called Booksmiles. More information on the store and its mission, as well as online shopping opportunities, can be found at booksforlife.store. It is located at 9125A Bursa Road in Laurel. Business hours are Monday–Friday, 10 AM–6 PM, and Saturday 10 AM–7 PM.

Farm Fresh Food for You!

The Savage Farmer's Market is held every Wednesday from 3:30 to 7:30 PM from May 9–August 28 at Baldwin Common.

Also, the new Roving Radish mobile market provides healthy meal kits of locally produced food from Maryland farms directly to our communities. This Howard County Government program is dedicated to promoting healthy farm-to-table eating habits in our community, while creating sustainable markets for local and regional farms. The meal kits are available to all Howard County residents and are offered at a discounted price to those in need. The Roving Radish Mobile Marketplace will be at Laurel Woods Elementary School (9250 N. Laurel Woods Rd.) on Wednesdays from 5–7 PM.



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



Denise Brenner and Catherine Wade chat while crafting at the Starbucks at Cypress Street and Route 1.

South Laurel Crafting Group Produces Fabric and Friendships

It started with a late-January Facebook post by South Laurel resident Heidi Temple. Posting to the popular Laurel MD Connect! group, she asked, “Would anyone be interested in being part of a crochet and knitting group in Laurel?” Heidi had learned to crochet from female family members when she was growing up in a town northeast of Philadelphia, but she says it wasn’t her thing at the time so she didn’t pursue it. Then last winter, she decided to learn again and picked it up with help from YouTube videos. But something was still missing, as she wanted to share in the craft with others, which led to the Facebook query. The responses started to come in immediately: Yes, people were interested. Some didn’t know how to knit or crochet; some were looking to ply their craft in a social setting; some, like Heidi, were looking to get back into fiber arts after many years. Several people offered to help teach others.

A schedule and venue were chosen: The 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays of every month, at 9 AM, at the Starbucks in the Laurel Lakes Shopping Center at Route 1 and Cypress Street. Heidi was happy to see four or five people show up, and says that the group formed instant bonds. And while the numbers change from one session to the next, there is almost always a core group of three in attendance.

On a recent Sunday, I gathered my latest knitting project and headed to Starbucks.

When I arrived, two women were already seated at a corner table with iced lattes and pastries, chatting and smiling amid a flurry of colorful yarns. One was Denise Brenner, a resident of Russett, who had offered to help Heidi get the group off the ground and then step back to focus on another Laurel-based knitting group she belongs to. That was back in February, and although the new group is doing well and has regular participation, Denise decided to remain active in both groups. “You form friendships,” she said, “and that’s really more important than the knitting.” Describing herself as “a knitter who also crochets,” Denise was working on a pair of socks, which she says is her favorite thing to make. “Knitting socks takes me to my happy place.”

Meanwhile, Catherine Wade, a North Laurel resident by way of Australia and Arizona, was crocheting squares for a blanket to be donated to Project Linus, a national charity that provides handmade blankets to children facing difficult situations, such as serious illness, trauma, or other special needs. She, Heidi, and Denise all have contributed items to a local chapter in Anne Arundel County. Catherine also crochets scarves and beanies for the Mateship Foundation, an Australian-run charitable group. Catherine noted that, while Mateship focuses on helping the homeless, they also provide warm winter accessories to crews of cargo ships originating in warm climates, who often are not equipped to deal with cold

conditions in northern ports.

Catherine learned to crochet from her grandmother, and Denise learned from her mother but, like Heidi, she didn’t necessarily take to knitting back then. “I didn’t value it so much at the time,” she says, “but then one of my retirement goals was to get back into knitting. I picked up the needles, and I just haven’t put them down!” She shared the craft with her late husband, who “also knitted a little.”

Both women had high praise for Heidi, who teaches theater at Bladensburg High School, and whom they described as being “super creative” and really caring about her students. Heidi revealed that, after being approached by some students wishing to learn to crochet, she will lead an extra-curricular crocheting group at the school next year.

Heidi emphasizes that the group is open to anyone and everyone who wishes to learn, teach, or just socialize while knitting or crocheting. No RSVP is needed: just show up! Bring your own yarn and needles if you have them; if you don’t, reach out to Heidi on Facebook and the group will help out with that.

Beltsville Firefighters, County Officials Still at Odds Over Station’s Fate

In April, I wrote about ongoing tensions between the Prince Georges County Fire Chief, Tiffany Green, and firefighters at Beltsville Volunteer Fire Station 831. Citing unsafe conditions at the station, Green had planned to pull all 20 of the paid county firefighters from the station, which would have left it understaffed with an all-volunteer force of just 18 firefighters to cover a wide area of the county—including South Laurel, which then would have placed more coverage demands on Laurel’s volunteer stations. That decision was reversed after a loud public outcry, and it was announced that three trailers would be used as temporary housing solutions for both career and volunteer firefighters until the building’s safety issues could be resolved.

But now the *Beltsville News*, which played an instrumental role in publicizing the situation, alleges that no major safety issues ever existed at the station and that the whole situation was a “sham” used to justify building a new fire station. Those

claims were made in an editorial in the June 6 edition of the volunteer-staffed media outlet led by News Director Rick Bergman, a Beltsville native. Having examined a safety report on the station, the editorial writers claimed that the report made no mention at all of the two issues initially cited by Green as the reason to pull the paid staff: namely, sewage issues and air-quality problems. The editorial notes that the report does list some needed repairs but adds that those issues would have been caught and fixed during routine inspections, which reportedly had not occurred in over 10 years, as revealed in a public meeting. Further, the plan to place temporary trailers on site apparently was rejected by Station 831’s volunteer force when they learned—only upon reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding—of a provision that the County would control the land for 15 years. This led the firefighters to reject the plan.

The *Beltsville News* went on to theorize that the ultimate goal is to shut down all volunteer companies in the county. It claimed that Green recently announced plans to remove paid staff from stations in Greenbelt, Berwyn Heights, Bowie, and more county locations.

Personally, I have mixed feelings about that last claim, if true. Perhaps Prince Georges County does need to move toward an all-paid fire department model, over time, in the interest of 24/7 public safety. More developments are being built, which means population growth; meanwhile, there is a dire lack of volunteerism—PTAs, youth programs, churches and the like are short on helpers, and both the Glen Burnie carnival and the Prince Georges County Fair were canceled this year for a lack of volunteers. But if all-paid firefighters are indeed the plan, that should be stated up front, publicly, so that we all can be part of discussions for a long-term sustainability plan.

==

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



Fehr's Nursery and Garden Center has been doing blooming business in Burtonsville since 1939.

I like to focus on the local aspects of the West Laurel/Burtonsville area, because that is what makes the area interesting and unique. Here's the story of a longtime local business.

Fehr Family Marks 85 Years of Bringing Color to Area Landscapes

If you drive west on Rte. 198/Sandy Spring Road toward Burtonsville, you might notice Fehr's Nursery and Garden Center on the right-hand side of the road. Fehr's is a three-generation, family-operated business in Burtonsville. Walter Fehr was born in Zurich, Switzerland, and was able to realize his American dream in 1939 when he had saved enough money to buy land near what is now the intersection of Routes 29 and 198. There, he established what was one of the first landscape nurseries in the Burtonsville area.

When Walter's son, Norman, finished college in 1954, he joined his father, together operating what was called "Walter Fehr and Son" for many years. Norman Fehr was a prominent member of the Burtonsville community who lived near the nursery. He ran the company and raised his five children there. Norman took over most of the operation in the early 1970s, and his son, Robert, joined him when he finished college in 1981.

When Walter died in 1983, Norman and Robert continued to run the business together. They moved the business to the old Snyder Farm and began operating from that 44-acre location in the spring of 1989, calling

it "Fehr's Nursey and Garden Center." Another one of Norman's sons, Brian, joined the operation in 1994.

Fehr's now operates with a 5,000-square-foot greenhouse and storage garage. It is still a thriving business that Walter's grandsons, Robert and Brian, run with two full-time employees and four part-timers. What a delightful bunch of people! When I visited Fehr's with my family's plant expert, she noted that their hanging baskets of flowers were the healthiest she had ever seen.

The Fehr family insists that even a few bedding plants can add just the right amount of color and create a better landscaped appearance. The nursery supplies flowers to several local churches, including lilies at Easter and poinsettias for Christmas. Several area landscape contractors also rely on Fehr's for their products.

Fehr's Nursery & Garden Center is open 7 days/week from April 1 through December 24, with some periods busier than others. 4340 Sandy Spring Rd, Burtonsville, MD 20866; 301-384-5222.

West Laurel-Sponsored Red Cross Blood Drive

According to the event coordinator, the West Laurel-sponsored Red Cross blood drive on May 14 was a success, with 32 individuals showing up to donate. Nine individuals were first-time donors, which is vital to building up the blood supply. Six units of blood were identified as Black or African American, which

is critical because of the inherited blood disorder Sickle Cell Disease. Much more help is needed in this area to ensure that hospitals have as close a match as possible for patients who might need a transfusion due to Sickle Cell Disease. One in three Black or African Americans is a potential donor match for patients with the condition. In all, the blood drive collected 23 pints of whole blood and 4 pints of red blood cells; 27 pints equates to 73 lives saved! Thank you, West Laurel.

Update on Burtonsville Crossing

The rejuvenation of Burtonsville Crossing continues, as more businesses open in the shopping area. Sprouts Farmers Market was the first store to open, and now TJ Maxx is open for business. Ulta has appeared but is not yet open for business. In addition, Chipotle reportedly has signed on as a tenant and will occupy the former KFC/Taco Bell space that closed 14 years ago. Other restaurants expected to open at Burtonsville Crossing are Moby Dick House of Kabob and Eggspectation, although exact dates have not been announced.

Want to get in touch with me? Send me an e-mail at WestLaurelVoices@gmail.com, and please call me Ginny!



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



JOHN ANTHONY GRISWOLD

Russett's dedicated runner, John Anthony Griswold.

Challenge Accepted: Russett Resident Is Outrunning Kidney Disease

Sixty-year-old Russett resident John Anthony Griswold is the picture of dedication! In 2015, he was challenged by a member and good friend, Charles Brown of Street Runners International, to run one mile a day for a month. Skeptical at first, Griswold accepted the challenge and hasn't wavered, even after receiving a diagnosis of kidney disease in 2010.

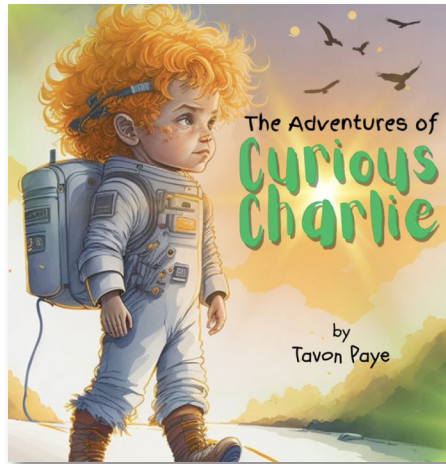
Physical activity and sports have always been a part of this Philadelphia, PA native's life: he participated in four sports in high school, including football and wrestling. When diagnosed with high blood pressure, he chose a different path, opting to run and bike in order to manage the condition. A Morgan State graduate, Griswold has lived in the Russett area since 1991. In 2012, he joined a bike club and embarked on 50-70-mile rides on weekends, exploring the East Coast.

When challenged to join Street Runners International, Griswold accepted the challenge and said, "Okay, let me see if I can run a mile every day for a year." And off he went, braving the weather and running outside daily through rain, snowstorms, and 100-degree heat because he didn't have

a treadmill. Most of his running occurs in Russett, where he enjoys the various trails and scenery. He said that people wave to him and stop their cars so he can cross the street. He has had just one negative experience with a dog, and that was because the owner was inattentive.

In 2015, Griswold experienced hip pain and took cortisone shots which, when combined with the purchase of a new pair of running shoes, helped alleviate the pain. To add to the injury, in 2016 he was hit by a car while riding his bike; he was shy of reaching his daily running goal so, bandaged and achy, he took off running, with his wife following him in a car just in case he might need to stop. Fortunately, he got right back on track toward his accomplishment.

Although he never had to go on dialysis, Griswold recently underwent a kidney transplant, donated by the younger of his two daughters. The surgery only occurred once he'd completed day 3,182 on May 5, which marked eight years and eight months of running at least one mile daily. The surgery went well for both him and his daughter; he currently is taking a three-month recovery period but says that he'll be back. "It's not the end of my running, just the end of my streak for the time being."



Meade Graduate Publishes Inspirational Children's Book

Russett resident Tavon Paye is a budding author and self-proclaimed entrepreneur. However, his biggest job is parenting his 4-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son. Paye, a 2012 Meade Senior High School graduate, is a self-proclaimed creative who has been drawing since age five. Multi-talented, he is an artist, digital creator, and much more.

When asked about his decision to write the children's book *The Adventures of Curious Charlie*, he shared, "I have children, and I wanted to create something that has a profound and lasting impact. I aim to guide children in the right direction, leaving a meaningful legacy." The book, a tale of a young boy named Charlie who is filled with dreams and curiosity, has the power to ignite confidence and determination in children. Charlie dreams of becoming an astronaut and an inventor, but often lacks confidence. As the story progresses, he receives encouragement from an unexpected source. With a new determination, Curious Charlie accomplishes his goals, fulfills his dreams, and much more.

After reading the book, I spoke with Paye and asked if the book was his memoir because (spoiler alert!) ultimately Charlie writes a book. Titled *Dream Big, Believe in Yourself*, Charlie's book shares his story and encourages children to embrace their passions and believe in their abilities. In answer to my question, Paye revealed that much of the book is, indeed, his life story.

The Adventures of Curious Charlie is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Walmart, and other outlets.

Quarterly Russett Award Goes to Will Alberts

Will Alberts is the recipient of the Russett Good Neighbor Award for the first quarter of 2024. The award was given to him for his act of kindness in using his snowblower during a snowstorm this past winter. Not only did Will clean his own property, but he also used his new snowblower to remove the snow from the sidewalks on Old Channel Road, making them walkable and safe for his neighbors. He will receive a gift certificate, and his name will be added to the list of past recipients on the Good Neighbor Award Plaque displayed in the Russett Community Center.

Coming Soon to Russett Green: Four "Surprise" Tenants

If you've traveled to the Laurel Walmart lately, you're probably wondering, just as I am, what's going on with the Russett Green retail space. When will tenants move in? The six-unit commercial space was built in 2023, and in mid-Spring of this year, I noticed utility trucks and cars in front of the building. So, curiosity prompted me to contact a real estate advisor for MacKenzie Retail, LLC, to ask what was happening. According to the agent, "We have two spaces leased to national tenants along with two more leases in negotiations, one with a national tenant and the other with a local medical group. The remaining space of 1,500 square feet is available, and we can't help but anticipate the exciting businesses that will soon be a part of our community." The agent did not share the prospective businesses' names, so the suspense persists, and we'll just have to wait and see.



Brenda Zeigler-Riley is a retired educator and entrepreneur with a marketing, public relations, and fundraising background. Please send information on Russett/Maryland City (historical pieces, stories from first responders, hometown memories, resident profiles, etc.) to russett.mdcinfo@gmail.com.

Crawford's Reign of Terror



BY KEVIN LEONARD



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

jurisdictions. After months of sifting through evidence and comparing notes, investigators zeroed in on someone who had previous disagreements with the victims—David Crawford, the former Chief of Police in Laurel.

When investigators told the victim of the 2019 Laurel fire—former Laurel Police Chief Rich McLaughlin, who succeeded Crawford—McLaughlin realized that Crawford's distinctive gait was on the video all along. According to multiple former Laurel cops, including two former Chiefs, Crawford walked kind of slumped over like someone with a bad back. It was distinctive to those who knew him well.

Police alleged that Crawford, in exacting revenge on people who had allegedly wronged him, committed a series of almost identical arsons and malicious burnings in multiple counties in Maryland.

A Mountain of Evidence

On January 4, 2021, a search and seizure warrant was executed at Crawford's home. In his garage police found a bag in a toolbox containing a lighter, hat, and gloves. The hat and gloves tested positive for the presence of gasoline. A number of plastic containers of the same size and shape were found stored in a cardboard box in Crawford's shed.

Police also seized numerous electronic items, including devices with Internet search histories, stored electronic documents, applications, notes, and photographs. Most damaging of all, in Crawford's phone, police located a "target list" concealed deep in his phone's directory. Nine of the people or families on the target list were arson victims.

Also on Crawford's cell phone, Apple Health data tracked his movements. On many of the specific dates of the fires in the early morning hours, Crawford's Apple Health information indicates that he was awake and moving around. This same type of movement is not noted on other days when there were no fires.

In the videos, the suspect drives a vehicle similar to a 2005 silver Toyota Camry. Crawford owns a silver 2005 Toyota Camry with a Maryland vanity

PART 1 — WHAT HE DID

It was his gait. That's how they knew it was him.

After almost 30 years in law enforcement, first with the Baltimore Police Department; then the Prince George's County Police, where he retired with the rank of Major; and then as Chief of Police in District Heights, David Crawford was appointed Chief of the Laurel Police Department in 2006. Then-Mayor Craig Moe appointed Crawford after he served only three months as Acting Police Chief following the departure of Chief David Moore. Unlike Moore's appointment, which followed an extensive country-wide search by committee, Crawford's appointment was Moe's alone.

According to the *Laurel Leader*, "Moe said he picked Crawford because he has a lot of confidence in Crawford's ability."

"He's a go-getter, he puts his mind to things and completes jobs," Moe told the *Leader*.

He certainly did. For almost 10 years, families in six different counties in Maryland were victimized by terrifying arson fires to their homes and cars. Two victims endured three separate arsons each on their property. Even though there were identical clues to the fires, the fact that they occurred in so many jurisdictions enabled the arsonist to go undetected for so long.

Different Jurisdictions, Separate Investigations

For eight years, separate jurisdictional investigations all uncovered identical evidence. The fires were all set between 1:30 and 4:30 am. In most of the arsons, families were inside their homes asleep.

When some of the crimes were recorded on home security systems, the arsonist always dressed the same: he wore a sweatshirt with a hood drawn tightly, obscuring his face, and long pants, white or black gloves, and dark colored shoes. The videos also showed the arsonist used jugs filled with gasoline and a stick wrapped in cloth to set the fires, and he drove a silver sedan.

The break in the case came after investigators in Prince George's County released surveillance video from a 2019 fire in Laurel. Months later, a fire official in Montgomery County saw the video and realized the man bore a striking resemblance to the person recorded in a 2017 arson he was investigating. The connection set off a multi-jurisdictional effort.

The video was shared with other



(Left): Crawford poses with a recruiting car during his time as Laurel Police Chief.

(Below): At the time of the arsons, Crawford's personal vehicle bore a vanity license plate reading "SURECAN"—a brand name of portable gas cans.



license plate that reads "SURECAN," a manufacturer of gas cans.

Crawford was arrested at his home in Ellicott City on March 3, 2021. He was denied bail and has been in custody ever since. The arrest was the culmination of a collaboration between the Prince George's County Arson Task Force, Howard County Fire & Rescue Services, Howard County Police, Montgomery County Fire & Rescue Service - Fire and Explosives Investigations Unit, Montgomery County Police, Frederick County Division of Fire & Rescue Services, Frederick County Sheriff's Office, and in partnership with the Maryland State Fire Marshal and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Charges

The felony charges against Crawford illustrate the enormity of his crimes:

In Frederick County, Crawford was charged with one count of 1st Degree Arson, one count of 2nd Degree Arson and one count of 1st Degree Malicious Burning.

In Howard County, Crawford was charged with eight counts of Attempted 1st Degree Murder, eight counts of Attempted 2nd Degree Murder, three counts of 1st Degree Malicious Burning, two counts of 1st Degree Arson, two counts of 2nd Degree Arson, one count of 2nd Degree Malicious Burning, and various Malicious Destruction charges.

In Prince George's County, Crawford was charged with four counts of 1st Degree Attempted Murder, four counts of 2nd Degree Attempted Murder, one count of 1st Degree Arson, six counts of 1st Degree Malicious Burning, and five counts of 2nd Degree Arson.

In Montgomery County, Crawford

was charged with three counts of 1st Degree Arson, three counts of Malicious Burning 1st Degree, and one count of 2nd Degree Arson.

The attempted murder charges reflect that the residents were inside the homes at the time Crawford set fire to the structures.

Timeline of Crawford's Reign of Terror

The following timeline of Crawford's activity was pieced together from the Howard County Police Department Statement of Charges; the Howard County State's Attorney's Office Motion to Permit Introduction of Other Crimes, Wrongs, or Acts; interviews with prosecutors, police, and victims; Laurel Police reports; and media accounts:

Arson #1 – Marty Flemion, Laurel, Prince George's County

Target name on Crawford's phone: "Martin"

May 28, 2011 – 1:43 a.m.

The victim was Marty Flemion, who, at the time, was the Deputy City Administrator with the City of Laurel.

Video surveillance showed a silver 4-door sedan drive by the home and out of the camera's view. Minutes after the vehicle passed, the suspect appeared, walking up the sidewalk.

The suspect was staging items behind a car parked in front of Flemion's home. The suspect walked over with two jugs to Flemion's white, Laurel city-issued Ford Explorer and poured a liquid all over the driver's side and top of the vehicle. The suspect then returned to the staging area to retrieve two additional jugs and poured the liquid from those jugs onto Flemion's personally owned Saturn. The suspect

then retrieved a large stick, wrapped in cloth, from the staging area, lit the stick on fire, and then lit the liquid vapors on fire on both the Explorer and the Saturn.

A neighbor heard a commotion outside and noticed a male next to his vehicle. The witness believed the individual may have been breaking into his vehicle and came outside to confront the suspect. When the witness came outside, he saw a White male, approximately 5'8"-6'0" tall, ignite the Saturn, at which time the suspect's clothing also caught fire. The witness saw the suspect stomping his shoe in the road, trying to extinguish the fire.

During a canvass of the scene, investigators located a black Nike Monarch, size 10 shoe in the roadway, near the scene. Additionally, a black hat, white Bic lighter, and a wooden stick with cloth wrapped around the end was recovered. Investigators also found a pair of jeans almost completely consumed by fire in the storm drain, close to where investigators believe the suspect parked.

In the shoe left at the scene, investigators located hair consistent with Crawford's dog, a German Shepard. Crawford wears size 10 shoes, and his Facebook page showed him wearing the same style shoes as the shoe left at the scene.

Searches of Crawford's electronics show an online posting, created 17 days after the fire, to a medical forum. On the forum, Crawford indicated he was burned approximately two weeks prior to the posting and noted that he burned his calf. This is consistent with the suspect's clothing that caught fire during the burning. During the warrant execution at Crawford's residence, investigators took photographs of Crawford's body and

located what appeared to be a burn scar on his leg.

Crawford and Mr. Flemion worked together at the Laurel Police Department. Mr. Flemion was the Laurel Deputy City Administrator at the time Crawford was the Chief of Police. Crawford was forced to resign from that position in 2010 and Mr. Flemion was involved in the hiring and firing of the employees, including the Chief of Police. Mr. Flemion told police that he and Crawford did not have a good relationship.

Crawford's trial in Prince George's County is pending.

Arson #2 – Justin Scherstrom, Clarksburg, Montgomery County

Target name on Crawford's phone: "Justin(3)"

Sept. 5, 2016 – 2:24 a.m.

The home's owner, Justin Scherstrom, is the son of Crawford's wife, Mary, and David Crawford's stepson.

Firefighters found a fire burning in the rear of a townhouse, extending up the vinyl siding and onto the townhouse next door. An Accelerant Detection Canine Team positively alerted to the presence of an ignitable liquid along the base of the garage door. Samples taken from that area were submitted to the Maryland State Police Laboratory for analysis and were found to contain gasoline. Video surveillance from near the scene picked up the sound of liquid being poured along the garage door and three distinct clicks of a lighter. The surveillance caught the ignition and visual light change.

This was the first of three fires that occurred at Scherstrom's home. Mr. Scherstrom described his relationship between Crawford and his family as strained and told investigators that numerous arguments occurred shortly before each of the fires.

Crawford's trial in Montgomery County is pending.

Arson #3 – Erica Byrne, Ellicott City, Howard County

Target name on Crawford's phone: "White Privilege"

March 5, 2017 – 3:50 a.m.

Howard County police responded to a vehicle fire in Ellicott City. The vehicle was identified as a 2014 Toyota Camry belonging to Erica Byrne's mother. The rear fenders, bumper, and trunk lid were significantly damaged by the fire. The fire damage was contained to the vehicle itself.

One of the names on Crawford's target

Update

Just before going to press, *Voices of Laurel* learned of yet another twist in the DPW push for unionization. Just days before the contract was to go into effect on July 1st, city-appointed Labor Commissioner Leonard Lucci informed all parties of a petition to decertify the collective bargaining agreement. Lucci confirmed in a phone call that the 30 percent of contract signees required by the Labor Code had petitioned him to hold a vote, which he scheduled for July 16th. If the vote passes: UCFW will no longer represent Laurel's DPW; the collective bargaining agreement signed in June would be null and void; and a two-year period must pass before any other attempts to unionize could be started. Similarly, if the vote fails, no more petitions to dissolve the agreement could occur for at least two years and the CBA would remain intact.

In response, UCFW alleged that city officials were spreading falsehoods about the provisions of the contract, which caused some of those who had signed on to the union to rethink their choice. Supposedly, DPW workers had been told—incorrectly, per UCFW—that the contract would require longer work days, among other things.



City, DPW Workers Sign Landmark Contract After Contentious Bargaining



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

A saga that played out in Laurel City Council meetings over the past 18 months came to a somewhat awkward ending for the city administration and the Laurel Department of Public Works on June 10. At a public meeting on that date, the Council voted 4-0, with mayoral concurrence, to adopt Resolution 3-2024, approving a 3-year contract between the city and DPW. The vote and signing seemed almost anti-climactic after much discourse, some of it heated, as two disparate accounts emerged over what went on in the bargaining sessions.

Although many of their “asks” were not granted in the contract, the DPW workers who signed onto the union celebrated what they considered an overall win: they are now officially represented by MCGEO UCFW (United Food and Commercial Workers) Local 1994, headquartered in Gaithersburg. City officials expressed support for DPW workers and pledged to abide by the union contract, which covers the period of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2027.

Rocky Beginnings in 2023

On February 27, 2023, the Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center was filled with DPW workers

wearing yellow shirts. One by one, they expressed to the City Council a desire to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. They had chosen that date to appear because it coincided with the Council’s vote to approve the third 3-year Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) for Laurel’s Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 11, which unionized in 2017. All five Council members and then-Mayor Craig Moe expressed support for unions and pledged to work toward a good solution for DPW; some voiced surprise at what they called an unexpected development. Moe noted that certain processes would have to occur and promised to “see that they got done.” Those processes, as reportedly explained to MCGEO, included changing city laws to allow for a DPW union, amending the city’s charter, and drafting a DPW-specific labor code.

Three months later, on May 22, 2023, the Council unanimously approved a resolution allowing DPW to unionize and negotiate a CBA. But what had happened in between caused a rift in the Council and set the stage for a year-long airing of grievances and conflicting claims. On several occasions, DPW and UCFW personnel publicly questioned why the city was taking so long to sign a resolution. City officials responded

that going through the “proper process” takes time. Twice during the May 22 Council discussion, then-Councilman Keith Sydnor criticized fellow Councilmen Martin Mitchell and Carl DeWalt for not informing the Mayor and other Council members of DPW’s desire to unionize when they first learned about it in December 2022. The question of “Who knew about it and when?” was clearly a point of contention, as Moe also mentioned it upon his concurrence: “The first time I heard about this is when it came up on [February] 27th. Everyone supported this; no one was opposed to anything.” He characterized things as having moved “very quickly, for a charter resolution” and cautioned against unrealistic timeline expectations because of “so many other things going on.” Moe also advised, “Everyone take a deep breath; we all have opinions, but there has been no issue. If you want to speed up the process next time, follow the right way to do it—start with the City Administrator and Mayor’s office.” Union representatives later criticized this statement, noting that “Employees don’t normally ask their employers for permission to form a union.”

Over the ensuing months, the city was indeed caught up with “many other things,” including an

(Right): Supporters of the Department of Public Works employees have consistently turned out to City Council meetings, such as this one in May.

often controversial election campaign that resulted in a new Mayor and three new Council members. In that span, several pertinent things happened under the outgoing administration: Laurel Police successfully negotiated a salary adjustment over each of the next 3 years for a total raise of 23% by 2026; DPW workers were provided new uniforms (a safety issue that had been raised at public hearings); and DPW workers were given one-time raises ranging around 15% for most employees, which the city termed a parity adjustment. Those actions later were called out by several union representatives and DPW supporters as preemptive moves by the city to discourage DPW from organizing and as potential leverage during collective bargaining.

In the Fall of 2023, the city announced that it had hired the law firm of Jackson Lewis to represent city interests during CBA talks. While it's not unusual for municipalities to hire legal representation in these situations, DPW advocates were quick to point out that Jackson Lewis has a national reputation as a "union-busting" firm. That term is used without qualification in numerous news items, including posts by the legal services guild Law360; Jackson Lewis itself uses the term "union avoidance" on its website. Union representatives say that, by hiring Jackson Lewis, the city sent a clear sign that it wanted to eliminate the union as a bargaining agent.

Negotiators Reach Early Agreements, but City Declares Impasse on Wage Issues

(Note: For ease of reading, the terms "city" and "union" are used to refer to the two collective bargaining sides. The city was represented by two lawyers from Jackson Lewis, City Administrator Christian Pulley, and a handful of other city officials. The union was represented by MCGEO Senior Representatives John Barry and John Kilker, as well as five DPW employees. That number was gradually reduced to two after one member was promoted out of his unit, one was fired, and another resigned after sustaining an on-site injury.)

On December 14, 2023, the union and the city met to discuss ground rules and introduce team members. This meeting would later be a subject of contention. The union maintains that the meeting did not qualify as a bargaining session since no negotiations about the contract occurred, and since the team members had not yet been certified. According to the union, nonfinancial proposals were sent on January 8, 2024 and bargaining rules were signed on January 11, which the union considers the start of actual negotiations. Later, in an April 3 press release, Mayor Sydnor referred to the December 2023 meeting as "the first meeting of negotiations."

Bargaining discussions on January 11, 18, and 25 focused on issues related to work conditions. The union says the meetings lasted just two hours each, in part because DPW management allegedly authorized only one hour a week for member representatives; the union paid those members for the additional time. The workers' top nonfinancial issues included health and



safety, improved working conditions, and a grievance process allowing them to appeal disciplinary actions. Agreements were reached on those items.

But when negotiations moved on to financial issues, the union claims, the city suddenly pushed for an agreement by February 1. Although the deadline was later moved to February 15, a total of just 15 hours of discussions had occurred by then, according to a union representative, who calls the deadline "absurd, particularly when a first contract is being negotiated." The representative adds that the time crunch left little opportunity for the union to discuss options prior to meetings. He sees it as a tactic to "force snap decisions to be made at the table."

The union says it submitted its initial wage proposal on February 2, asking for a 6% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and a 3.5% step increase. It claims that the city responded with a proposal of the status quo of a 2.5% COLA and 2.5% step increase and "refused to budge," rejecting any further union proposals. The last session was on February 15, after just 6 hours of bargaining on wages had occurred, and reportedly ended abruptly with the city shutting down bargaining by saying the two sides were at an impasse. Believing that an agreement could still be negotiated, the union says it offered to meet on February 22 to discuss existing agreements and possibly find a way forward. The city responded with an official declaration of impasse, citing Labor Code 13, Section 13(b), titled "Impasse Procedure."

Union representatives say they were stunned by that development, particularly since the cited labor code subsection allows for an impasse to be declared if disputes still exist "by January 1 of the year following the year in which negotiations were initiated," which the union interpreted as January 1 of 2025. They realized that the city considered the December 2024 meeting as the start of negotiations—which Mayor Sydnor's April 3 press release confirmed—resulting in a schedule that allowed for just six negotiating sessions. The union says that this does not meet the "reasonable period of negotiations" the code states must occur before impasse can be declared.

Feeling there was no other recourse, the union filed an Unfair Labor Practice against the city for bad-

faith bargaining. The union alleges that the city asked Labor Commissioner Len Lucchi to dismiss the ULP, but he did not; instead, he recommended initiating an investigation. However, the union's request for an investigation allegedly went unanswered, and it ultimately did not pursue the matter upon learning two things: the union would be required to pay \$15,000 for the investigation, and the Commissioner's decision could ultimately be overturned by the Mayor, based on the authority written into the code.

Instead, the city scheduled an impasse hearing before the City Council, as called for by the labor code. Under the code—which, the union often points out, was written by the city—the Council is authorized to accept either party's proposals or to initiate a mediation process in hopes of reaching agreement. At the April 1 closed-door impasse session, the Council accepted all the city's financial proposals and rejected all those of the union. Therefore, the contract put forth to the DPW workers listed an annual 2.5% COLA and 2.5% step increase—the city's one and only proposal and the same amount already granted city employees for years.

Union representatives criticized the labor code for essentially denying the union the ability to take disputes to a third party. They say they have urged the city to change that aspect of the code, feeling that without neutral third-party oversight the city has no incentive to ever bargain wages fairly. They also criticize derogatory comments allegedly made by one Council member—as confirmed by another source who attended the impasse hearing—recommending that instead of focusing on wage increases DPW workers should become "less greedy" and work on personal budgeting and even higher education as routes to better pay.

Despite the rough proceedings, union representatives call the outcome a "mostly happy ending" for the DPW workers. Upon presentation of the CBA to DPW workers, a required "clear majority" opted to sign it, with others later following suit. City Administrator Pulley presented Referendum 3-2024 at the June 10 City Council meeting with a recommendation that it be accepted. Following the unanimous vote to do so, the CBA was signed by MCGEO and city leadership.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38



Cheryl Poulos holds her Laurel Light Award, surrounded by friends from the Woman's Club of Laurel (from left to right): Lorraine Kelly, Laurel City Council Member Christine Johnson, Tracy Maclaren, Cheryl Poulos, Laurel Cross, Diane Puls, and Amy Dunham. The award recognizes individuals, businesses, and organizations whose efforts make Laurel a better place. A final award will be issued this year (to be announced in our Fall edition) before a single annual award will be given starting in 2025. Email your nominations to laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com.

Cheryl Poulos is Newest Recipient of the Laurel Light Award

BY VOICES OF LAUREL STAFF

The staff of *Voices of Laurel* is pleased to announce that the second recipient of the Laurel Light Award is Cheryl Poulos. Cheryl was nominated by the Board of Directors of the Woman's Club of Laurel. In her nominating email, Theresa Pfister, President of the Woman's Club of Laurel, said:

"Cheryl Poulos is a very active member of our club and is also an active member of the Laurel Historical Society. As a member of the Woman's Club of Laurel, she manages two extremely important programs, our Weekend Tummy Tamers, a program that feeds food insecure children at Scotchtown Hills Elementary School every weekend, and our Birthday Books program that gifts

each child at Laurel Elementary School a new hardback book of their choice on their birthday. Cheryl maintains the food stock that we use for the weekly food bags, monitors that each packing team has all that is needed to pack the bags, and ensures that the bags are delivered to the school each week. She also manages the records of expenses and needs, and provides that vital information to the club members, who search for grants, and for the board members so that we can adequately fundraise to cover those expenses.

Cheryl also works with our liaison at Laurel Elementary School to make sure our bookshelf is stocked with appropriate books so that each child has a choice of

books from which to choose on their birthday. A majority of the students at Laurel Elementary are reading below grade level and this program provides a fun opportunity to get the children to read and to share their reading with their families and friends.

Cheryl always steps up to help with whatever philanthropic project the club is doing, including taking and managing reservations for our Milk and Cookies with Santa event—not a small task. She is a true gift to our club and to the Laurel community."

Voices of Laurel congratulates Cheryl and thanks her for serving as a true beacon of light for the Laurel community.



COMMUNITY

Goodbye, Carl

BY VOICES OF LAUREL STAFF

The Laurel History Boys are saddened by the resignation of Laurel City Councilman Carl DeWalt, who also served on our Board of Directors. DeWalt has retired and moved out of state to spend more time with his family. He's been planning the move since last Fall and the timing was right this month to do it. Anyone who has coordinated selling a house and buying a new one will understand this. Leaving the town he loves was not an easy decision.

Contrary to rumors being spread by those who opposed him during his tenure on the council, DeWalt's health is fine. He asked *Voices of Laurel* to thank everyone who texted or emailed good wishes since his announcement. He expressed much appreciation for his constituents who supported his many initiatives on the council.

His one regret, he told us, was that he left before he saw the Mayor's office and City Council evolve into the nonpartisan legislative body that it could be, with the city's progress its priority, not personal gain.

DeWalt was a three-term Laurel City Councilman since retiring from the Laurel Police Department after 28 years. He is a member of the Laurel Lions Club, Laurel Board of Trade, Laurel Historical Society, and American Legion Post #60, and a past president of Laurel FOP Lodge #11. He is a 30-year supporter of Maryland Special Olympics.

But more than that, he deeply cared about Laurel and its people. DeWalt seemed to be everywhere, always lending a hand to any community project, whether it was city-sponsored or not. He provided his personal cell phone number to anyone who asked. People in need of assistance or advice often would knock on his door or approach him in his front yard.

He said that his proudest achievement was being a three-time recipient of the Lelia McCeney Memorial award for unselfish devotion to others. He fondly remembered the award's namesake, who frequently made baked goods for the city's public servants, and said that he feels honored to be mentioned in the same breath as her. After retiring from the police, DeWalt says, he wanted to live up to the McCeney honor by continuing to give back to Laurel.

Three issues stand out among his priorities on the City Council:

- Along with former Councilman Martin Mitchell, DeWalt championed a city-wide rent stabilization act. He felt that having a rent-stabilization law specifically for the city would enhance protection of its tenant residents, "especially our most vulnerable seniors and individuals with disabilities," regardless of what actions are taken at the county level.
- DeWalt was also a strong supporter of the on-going unionization efforts by the City's Department



Laurel City Councilman Carl DeWalt (second from left) and The Laurel History Boys' Richard Friend, Kevin Leonard, and Pete Lewnes at the October 2023 dedication of the Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center. DeWalt has retired and moved out of state to spend more time with his family.

of Public Works employees. He said that the city's police are "doing very well with collective bargaining, and I strongly believe that anyone who works for the city should be able to be unionized if they want to be."

- He also worked to reinvigorate the Hometown Heroes program, which he sponsored as a way to honor local military veterans and heroes through banners placed throughout the city. He wanted to flank Main Street with the banners, starting at American Legion Post 60 and continuing throughout the downtown.

He's been a good friend to The Laurel History Boys and always encouraged our efforts to educate the community about local history and report the news truthfully. We wish him well. He will be missed.

VOICES OF LAUREL

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

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From the Office of Council Member Tom Dernoga



BY TOM DERNOGA | PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBER

In May 2024, the County Council approved a balanced budget of \$5.46 billion for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. Like many jurisdictions across the country, we faced a significant budget shortfall due to less tax revenue, the end of pandemic relief funds, and inflation. While we had to close a projected \$171 million shortfall that left little room for budget adjustments, we did not compromise environmental concerns, public safety, or education.

I want to thank those who participated in the budget adoption process, from the County Executive's proposal to the County Council's public hearings. Your experiences are crucial to shaping our spending plan and positively enhanced our discussions and negotiations with the County Executive.

Here are the highlights:

- This budget funds the Prince George's County Public Schools at \$2.83 billion, representing 62% of the County Budget General Fund and an increase of \$29.3 million over last year's budget.
- The Department of Permitting Inspections and Enforcement received \$32.3 million, an increase of \$1.4 million or 4.7% over the FY24 approved budget. This includes \$4.2 million to continue the rollout of the new e-permit system for homeowners and small businesses, and \$2.7 million for the Clean Lots program in collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT).
- The DPWT budget was relatively the same as FY24, totaling \$54.9 million for FY25. While I had hoped to increase funding for more sidewalks and to redesign more urban streets, that was not possible in this year's budget. Highlights for DPWT include \$1.7 million to support a new street sweeping initiative (purchase of more street sweepers and more frequent street sweeping), as well as funds for sidewalk trip hazard mitigation and sidewalk network survey and analysis.
- The Fire/EMS Department was approved for \$279.6 million in FY25, an increase of \$18.6 million or 7.1% over the FY24 budget. This includes funding to increase staffing by 50 new positions and support for 100 new recruits (between fire and police).
- The Prince George's County Police Department was approved for \$410.2 million, an increase of \$9.1 million or 2.3% over the FY24 approved budget. This includes \$200,000 to fund signing bonuses for 100 new police officer recruits and two new crime scene investigator positions.
- The Climate Action Plan, led by the Department of Environment, will count on \$55.1 million in FY25 for climate action plan investments such as electric buses, bike share expansion, tree planting, technical assistance, and more. Additionally, there is \$174.8 million for the Stormwater Management Fund.
- The Department of the Environment's Animal Services Division received a \$100,000 increase. Employees, activists, and advocates expressed clear concerns about the division's functions, specifically its shelter. While this increase will not address every problem, we have heard the public's concern. We will continue to work towards improving animal services to benefit our animals, the environment, and the community.
- We have approved \$5 million in non-departmental grants to support our nonprofits.

We have successfully closed out another budget season with collaboration and compromise. As we move into this next fiscal year, the Council will continue to work with stakeholders and community members to improve our economic development, strategize toward our climate and development goals, and, most importantly, prioritize the needs of our constituents.



COURTESY OF TOM DERNOGA

Council Member Tom Dernoga (right) and his Chief of Staff, Ms. Michelle García (left) at a districtwide community conversation.

Flood Preparedness

As we are in hurricane season, severe weather conditions can cause flooding, threaten lives, and damage property. The Prince George's County Department of the Environment (DoE) wants to help County residents and business owners protect their homes, buildings, and personal belongings if flooding occurs and to be flood-ready, flood-smart, and flood-safe. Visit DoE's Flood Management page at (<https://bit.ly/PGCFloodManagement>) or contact PGC311 for more information.

The best time to make a flood plan is now. DoE offers flood prevention tips and information, as well as a Flood Awareness poster that provides information on what causes flooding and how to prevent and protect homes and businesses in the case of a flood.

Flood management resources are available on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website to help residents prepare and provide guidance on making a flood plan. The website also includes information on flood insurance premiums, which County residents can save up to 25 percent on. Another resource, Alert Prince George's, is a text message notification service that advises subscribers in the event of significant flooding (<https://bit.ly/AlertPG>).

Having flood insurance is one way to prepare for flooding, as coverage helps pay for damage to your home's structure and/or contents. For insurance rates and tips, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Risks and Costs webpage (<https://bit.ly/FEMAFloodInfo>).

The County also participates in FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) Program. CRS stresses the importance of informing residents of flood hazards and reducing flood risks. The County recently updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan, which FEMA approved in November 2023. This plan covers the Prince George's County and the City of Laurel jurisdictions and provides current flood risk information and measures to mitigate the risk.

Stay in Touch

Join our biweekly District 1 eNewsletter here: <https://bit.ly/D1eNewsletterOptIn>, and our monthly District 1 Senior Living eNewsletter. Don't miss out on resources, local activities, and events for seniors: <https://bit.ly/D1SeniorNewsletterOptIn>. You can also contact our office by emailing us at councildistrict1@co.pg.md.us or calling 301-952-3887. Se habla español. On parle français. Follow us on Facebook, X, Threads, and Instagram @TomDernogaD1.

HISTORY

The Donut Corporation of America



BY MARK J. STOUT, Ph.D.

MARYLAND CENTER FOR HISTORY AND CULTURE



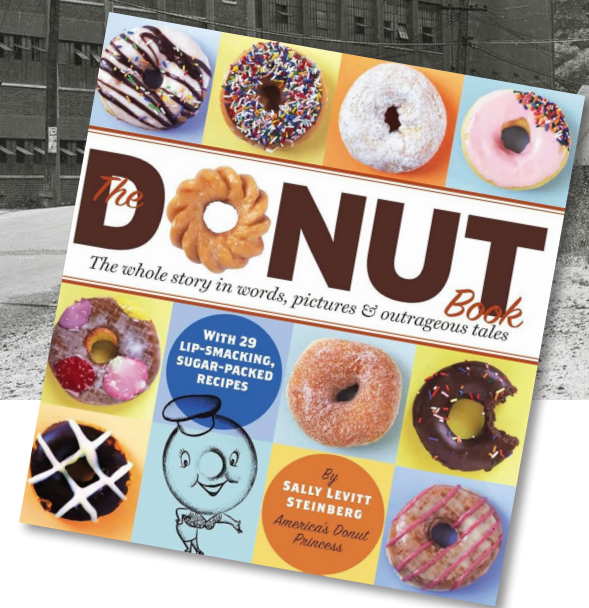
The iconic mill structure just across the river from Ellicott City was the last operating commercial flour mill in America. Last owned by Wilkins-Rogers, Inc., there have been mills on this site since 1774. While Wilkins-Rogers operated a flour mill from the early 1970s until 2020, this factory was home to the Donut (originally “Doughnut”) Corporation of America from 1920 until 1970.

Founded after World War I by Adolph Levitt, it produced the Downyflake flour used in the making of donuts. Levitt himself was an interesting character. An immigrant from Russia, he was inspired by the stories from the First World War of soldiers eating freshly made donuts in the trenches delivered by Red Cross “Donut Dollies.” In 1920, he developed one of the first donut-making machines, which he demonstrated to the public at his Mayflower Coffee shop in Harlem, New York City, beginning in 1931. Putting the machine at the front of the store behind glass allowed patrons to watch the process of

making donuts—much like Krispy Creme today. He was the Willy Wonka of the donut world!

The Donut Corporation not only sold the patented Downyflake flour to make the donuts, they sold the machines. All were produced at the factory, parts of which were located in Oella and in Ellicott City. By the time of the early 1930s, donuts had become a national obsession. They appeared in movies, musicals, and popular songs.

The Donut Corporation actually started a “dunking contest” (albeit without NBA stars), created the National Dunking Association, sponsored displays at the World’s Fair, and added photos of famous people eating doughnuts in newspapers and magazines. The company even introduced National Doughnut Week in the 1930s. In *The Donut Book*, Levitt’s granddaughter Sally Levitt Steinberg called Adolph “the Donut King,” an apt reference to the man whose creative marketing helped make the donut an American treasure.



Some older residents in the area worked at the factory until it closed and have fond memories of their time there. We have an extensive collection at our archives for those seeking more information. The building still stands, but is slated for development into condominiums, restaurants, and shopping.



Mark J. Stout is the Executive Director of the Howard County Historical Society. He spent the previous 33 years in the Howard County Public School System in a variety of roles.

Busy 2024 for LARS

Locally sourced farm fresh produce and recent property acquisition



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI



PART 1 OF 2

Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services, Inc. (LARS) is rolling out several new programs and taking advantage of grant-supported partnerships to continue to meet the needs of more Laurelites in more ways than ever before, including additions to enhance its food pantry access and offerings, an expanded physical footprint, and adding housing units.

The first delivery of “LARS on the Go” took place on April 25. This is a new mobile food pantry and case management program to support seniors living in low-income senior housing in the area. The program started with the Park View at Laurel community.

This effort supports seniors in need who are unable to travel to the LARS food pantry. The initial delivery supported about 25 clients, according to Director of Client Services Mark Huffman, who anticipates the number will rise to 100 seniors being served by the mobile pantry.

Huffman noted that LARS is looking at the fourth Thursday of every month for the deliveries. Between deliveries, case managers will visit the senior communities to enroll additional

interested seniors. The program will include both the Park View at Laurel and Park View at Emerson communities initially and may expand further in the future, according to Huffman.

This growing season, the LARS food pantry will again receive farm fresh produce from Freetown Farm in Columbia. This partnership developed when LARS, seeking to expand its locally sourced food options, learned about the Community Ecology Institute/Freetown Farm in 2022 when both organizations received a \$25,000 Planet Aid Capacity and Environmental (PACE) grant.

According to the Planet Aid website, LARS Executive Director Shannon Mouton commented about the grant, saying, “LARS is thrilled to be part of the inaugural cohort of PACE grant awardees. Planet Aid does amazing work around the world, and to be a recipient of this grant is exciting and humbling.”

LARS is on the front line of managing resources for those in need. Mouton said, “These funds will help us launch a sustainable food program that sources locally grown fruits, vegetables, and dairy products—putting money back into our community while putting food on the

tables of our neighbors.”

For its part, the Community Ecology Institute oversees programs that link community to nature and nature-based environmental, agricultural, health, and well-being opportunities at Freetown Farm in Columbia. CEI bought the farm in 2019, according to its website, to create “a place where people can learn through hands-on experiences about how to lead happier, healthier, more connected and sustainable lives.”

Freetown Farm Manager Justin Chen manages not only the farm, which he described as “the demonstration space” where CEI’s seven core programs take place, but the nonprofit Agroecology in Action.

The purpose of that program, according to Chen is, “bringing together all the activities that we do here at Freetown Farm to grow food, distribute that food to our food assistance program partners, and then to teach people how to grow food in their own spaces.”

Regarding the term “agroecology,” Chen said, “the definition of it is to incorporate ecological principles into agriculture.” He further noted that, “we want to emphasize that they are on equal playing fields with us.”

He characterizes the contributions to LARS, among other partners, as the action piece, noting that, “because we became the stewards of this farm, our organization really felt that it’s our responsibility with this growing space to grow food for the community, because that’s a huge part of community well-being, community health, public health, all those things.”

Chen said, “Last year we did 30 weeks of delivery,” and that “[t]his year we hope to do more...The clients really seemed to love the produce. We got a lot of great feedback.”

Huffman called the weekly deliveries from the farm, “wonderful deliveries” of “beautiful” and fresh, healthy produce that is “great for our clients, as far as [being] much more nutritious.”

Huffman credited receiving a second Planet Aid PACE grant last year for being able to purchase an additional energy efficient refrigerator and freezer. The refrigerator has a clear glass door, so the produce is easily visible, which helps ensure it is given out as quickly as possible.

When not receiving the freshly harvested produce from Freetown Farm, LARS purchases a variety of food from a local grocery store and from the Catholic Charities SHARE Program, which provides a monthly delivery of meat

and produce. LARS also receives many donations of non-perishable food from the Laurel community.

LARS gives out a three-day supply of food to clients once a month, according to Huffman, who said that last year LARS helped 1000 families. Most, if not all, were likely also getting food assistance, which is open to anyone. He notes that LARS is the biggest food pantry in Laurel, but not the only one.

Another new initiative under way at LARS is Project Grow. This program was created to address food insecurity. It offers clients the opportunity to grow their own balcony garden. Participants in this program receive the supplies needed for their garden project and learn how to garden from workshops led by certified Master Gardeners from Prince George’s County.

LARS Expands Physical Footprint and Number of Housing Units

In March, LARS acquired a second property adjacent to its 311 Laurel Avenue location. While details about the specific uses for the new property are still being finalized, the addition will allow LARS to increase capacity and service offerings to the community, according to a statement on the LARS website.

Huffman was optimistic about the addition and the green spaces in both the front and backyard of the property highlighting the potential for raised garden beds and flowers. He noted that, “we envision expanding the food pantry” into the new space, as well as being able to potentially offer space for recovery groups to meet.

Starting this fall, LARS will begin managing transitional housing at the Craig Moe Multi-Service Center, where LARS will have 19 dormitory-style units. Huffman said of this new program that LARS hopes to pair the housing units to a self-sufficiency program. The tentative date for the start of this program is the first Monday after Labor Day and is contingent upon the completion of the service center renovations.



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.

PROFILES

South Laurel's King of Crime Fiction



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

Every day, from his home in the Laurel neighborhood of Montpelier, Dana King sits at his computer, looks out at the wooded lot behind him, and then delves into grittier worlds: the dark underbelly of urban crime, filled with murder, drugs, and corrupt public servants. An accomplished crime fiction novelist, King recently released his 15th book and has no plans to stop producing his action-packed stories anytime soon.

King has accumulated a devoted following of readers caught up in his two main book series: the Nick Forte detective books set in Chicago, and the Penns River series, a police procedural set in a fictitious suburb of Pittsburgh and centering on second-generation police detective Ben “Doc” Dougherty. *Off the Books*, released in April, is the sixth Nick Forte installation, and King has already started on the seventh. He had focused on the Penns River books for a few years, but says that it feels good to be back in Chicago with Nick Forte. “I missed him,” he laughs.

The settings King writes about are familiar to him. He grew up in Lower Burrell, PA, about 20 miles north of Pittsburgh, and based the town of Penns River on that general area. This first-hand familiarity results in richly detailed descriptions of the area, its people, their lifestyles, and the issues they face. King adds similar depth to the Nick Forte series by drawing on his experiences while living in Chicago for a few years. But fans would be surprised to learn that King, who has been lauded as one of the best police procedural writers in the business, has no personal experience in law enforcement. While he researches Pennsylvania and Illinois state laws to ensure accuracy, he doesn’t have relatives or connections on the force. “I’ve had cops tell me that I really get it right, which feels good. They’re always surprised to hear that I never even went on a ride-along,” King says that being a lifelong fan of crime stories—both fictional and real—rubbed off on him in terms of being able to accurately describe procedures and to use “police language.” He specifically cites the late author Evan Hunter, who wrote crime fiction under the pen name of Ed McBain, as a big influence on his approach. McBain’s “87th Precinct” novels were set in Isola, a fictionalized version of New York City. “I try to follow his example of having my plots stay outside of politics, and just focus on the policing aspects,” King notes.

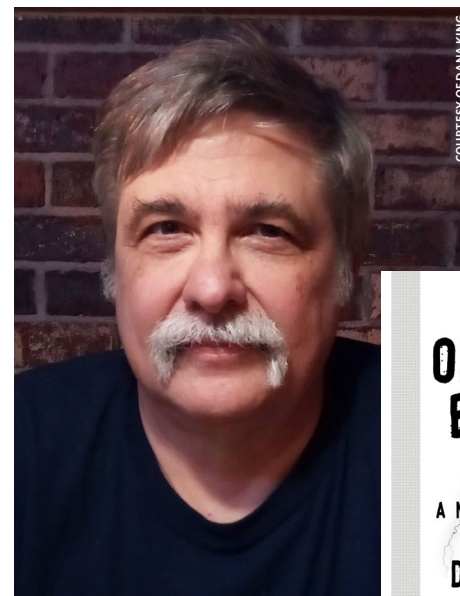
But King’s novels are about more than just crime and justice. His characters are three-dimensional and relatable, resulting in sub-plots and side stories that are just as riveting as the central investigation. “The cops I write about are working-class people,” he says. “They take a practical approach to their job: they look at a task, break it down, and take care of it. They have lives outside their job, and sometimes family life and police

life overlap. That’s how I approach my characters, by writing them as people who happen to be cops.” Over the course of both the Penns River and Nick Forte series, readers come to know the protagonists’ family members and coworkers pretty well, with many recurring characters and callbacks to events in previous books. “My goal is that anyone can pick up any book in a series and not be lost as to what’s happening,” King says, “but I also like to throw in some ‘Easter eggs’ for longtime readers.”

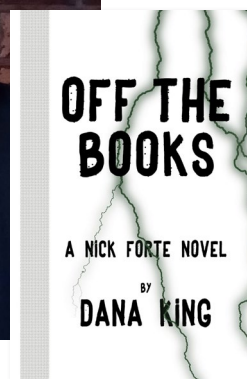
King didn’t originally set out to be a writer; he calls writing his “third career.” He majored in Music Education at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, taught music for a year, and then joined the U.S. Army, playing trumpet in one of its bands. He enjoyed going on tour with the band, playing in many U.S. cities and the Virgin Islands. He got married, went to graduate school, worked as a freelance musician, and then took a music director position at Northwestern High School in Hyattsville. Following a divorce, he moved to Chicago for a while. It was there that a friend encouraged him to turn a hypothetical “what if” scenario they were discussing into a short story about a rigged trumpet audition. While that story did not get published, King used the premise in one of the Nick Forte novels—the character of Forte has a music background, which sometimes relates to a plot point and gives insight into his personality.

Life brought King back to the East Coast in 1997, when he moved to Virginia and took on his second career, in Information Technology. He moved to Maryland in 2003, met his wife, Corky, in 2004, and they married in 2009. Corky is his biggest fan and he refers to her as “The Beloved Spouse” in his social media posts. He kept writing, mostly short stories, during his 15-year career as a government contractor but wasn’t able to devote fully to being an author until he retired in 2021. Now, he is all-in on his “third career” of being a full-time crime fiction author: he writes daily, does book readings and book signings, attends book festivals and conferences, and often participates in author panels. Those events are outside his comfort zone, as a self-identified introvert who “gets exhausted from being sociable.” Two of King’s Nick Forte books were nominated for the Private Eye Writers of America’s annual Shamus Awards, and his shorter works have appeared in numerous anthologies and web-based publications. Although he writes for his readers and for his peers, not seeking awards, King says that, nonetheless, receiving praise from fellow authors is validating. “Acceptance makes me feel good.”

King writes daily, taking a systematic approach to his trade—probably not surprising, given his music and computer backgrounds. He sets specific, consistent



COURTESY OF DANA KING



word-count goals for each writing or editing session. He starts with an opening scene of a crime being discovered, and a general sense of the story arc, but he says that he “is not a slave to the outline method.” Working chapter by chapter, he lets the storyline and characters unfold as they see fit. He will do some rewrites as he goes along, but after finishing a draft he “lets it marinate” for a short time before switching to full-on edit mode, for which he takes an unusual approach. “I actually have [Microsoft] Word read my draft to me,” he says, explaining that he is more likely to discover little things that need to be tweaked from listening to, rather than reading, the draft.

His next book will be somewhat of a departure for King, as it’s a Western. He currently is putting finishing touches on the draft and hopes to publish it later this year. He also would like to try his hand at writing a comedic novel, in the style of Donald Westlake or Carl Hiaasen, although he recognizes the challenges within that genre. “Being funny in small bits is easy. Being continuously funny throughout a novel is hard.”

As for the future of his two main characters, King says he has a few more installments planned for both of his primary series. “I think there will be at least two more Fortes, and I have a three-book arc in mind to conclude the Penns River series,” he reveals. Handling the end of these series with care is important to him, as he has grown close to both the hard-nosed, cynical Nick Forte and the more laid-back, family-oriented Doc Dougherty. Citing a quote from prolific crime writer James Elroy, King notes that “Nick is the person I’m afraid of becoming, while Doc is the person I’d like to be.”

Dana King’s books can be purchased on Amazon. A listing of his works, and his writer’s blog, can be found at danakingauthor.com



Raul Midón

North Laurel's Grammy-Nominated Multitalented Musician



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres.

The well-known Spanish saying literally means “tell me with whom you walk, and I’ll tell you who you are.”

There is no better way to begin to describe the talent and career of North Laurel resident Raul Midón. Midón is a gifted musician whose phenomenal talent has led to performances on stage, in recording studios, or on popular television talk shows, both solo and with jazz, R&B, or pop music legends.

His back-to-back Grammy-nominated albums *Bad Ass and Blind* in 2017 and *If You Really Want* in 2018, were recorded in his home studio, right here in North Laurel. The highly regarded singer, songwriter, music producer, and multi-instrumentalist’s career has connected him to not only top music industry legends, but

to a growing multi-generational audience, including Jason Mraz fans.

He is currently on tour promoting his 13th album *Lost & Found*, which dropped in April. Midón performed in Switzerland and has shows lined up for the next six to twelve months. In addition to working on his current album, Midón was a guest on *The Jennifer Hudson Show* in December and performed at the Kennedy Center for the tribute to Joni Mitchell with the National Symphony Orchestra called “Love: A Joni Mitchell Songbook.”

Growing Up

Born in New Mexico in 1966 to his Argentine father, who was a dancer and performer, and Black mother, an artist from New York City, his early childhood was unique. A twin, he was born premature but was blinded as a newborn

due to an incubator issue, for which the musician harbors no ill will.

He observed that he was gifted with musical talent and noted that “being blind was a way for me to excel at something that the blindness wasn’t as much of a hindrance [to].” He joked, “You know, I’m not going to beat anybody at basketball.” He continued, “and so [music] was something that I could do that made me feel valuable.”

His mother died when he was four years old. Shortly after, his father gave him a guitar and started him in lessons with classical and flamenco guitar teachers. He attended boarding schools for the blind and then for students who wanted to attend college. He eventually ended up at the University of Miami, graduating from the prestigious Jazz Studio program in 1991.

A Latin Music Start in Miami

Following graduation, Midón was working with people that he had gone to school with, in what he described as, “a pretty active scene in Miami at the time.” He was performing background vocals and playing guitar for Latin artists as part “of a group that did hundreds and hundreds of albums. It was a great job, compared to playing in a bar.”

His first big break was an invitation to join Shakira’s touring band. It came about because of a friend who knew Midón and his wife, Kathleen, and who worked with Shakira, who was signed with Emilio Estefan. The friend recommended Midón when there was an opening in the band.

Midón noted that they toured all over Latin America, had appearances on *Saturday Night Live*, *The Rosie O’Donnell Show*, and *The Jay Leno Show*, among others.

He recalled that the challenges of travel as a blind musician without an assistant led to quite a bit of stress. It also led to his first brush with fame. According to Midón, Shakira was not yet as famous in the United States as she was in Latin America, and touring with her “was glamorous in the sense that you’re on these big buses and you’re playing the stadiums and you’re playing to 30,000 screaming fans.”

During the year or so that he spent traveling with Shakira’s band, he said “I was playing guitar, often times ending shows in a duet with her, I was singing background, and I was doing percussion in the band.” Midón also continued to work on his own material.

“I wanted to start doing my own thing on a higher level. We decided that we wanted to move to New York—to leave Miami.” Midón was very well-regarded in Latin music circles but moving to New York allowed him to focus on his original music almost exclusively. The move was possible thanks to Midón’s first publishing deal—a “development deal” that required him to participate in showcases for record companies. He left Shakira’s tour due to scheduling conflicts.

Music and Opportunity in New York City

Midón hired a manager upon arrival in New York. The first gig she got for him was at a dive bar four nights a week. He worked from midnight to 4:00 am during the breaks of another band and word began to spread about him. It was suggested he get a gig at Joe’s Pub, named after Joseph Papp, who produced *Hair* and *A Chorus Line*, among other theater productions. It was the place to play for new talent.

“I was working at Joe’s Pub, which is the Public Theater in New York. One of the producers of a show called *The Movie Music of Spike Lee* said, ‘how would you like to play at Carnegie Hall?’” Midón replied, “Yeah, sometime, I would like to.” The producer said, “How about next month?” Midón observed, “This is the kind of stuff that happens when you live in New York.”

“He got me [on] as a guest on this show called *The Movie Music of Spike Lee*,” where Midón was, as he put it, “the no name of the show at that point.”

According to Midón, it was the first version of the movie musical Spike Lee had done. There was an orchestra playing music over film clips of Spike Lee’s movies and special guests were singing the tunes from the movie, such as Cassandra Wilson, Bruce Hornsby, and Angie Stone.

Midón recalled, “everybody was rustling their program, silent. And it got a little tedious. Then I come out and start doing the [vocal] trumpet acapella.” The audience was mesmerized and wondering who is this guy? Midón’s vocal trumpet was embraced, and in future shows, the audience was treated to the two trading trumpet solos. After the show, Lee asked Midón for his card and *The New York Times* wrote a review saying “Raul Midón stole the show.” Midón credits that Carnegie Hall performance and the review as part of the big break he got in New York. But it was only the beginning.

Unquestionably, the biggest break in Midón’s growing career was being signed by legendary, and highly acclaimed music producer Arif Mardin. As Midón told it, “Arif had outgrown Atlantic Records and retired to join Blue Note [Records].” At Blue Note he took on a new artist named Norah Jones.

Both Jones and Mardin won multiple Grammy Awards with his production of her first album. Following that success with Jones, Mardin discovered and signed Midón to Blue Note, where he produced his albums *State of Mind* in 2005 and, with his son, Joe, *A World within a World* in 2007.

Mardin’s family-style management approach meant that Midón was included in a number of gigs with top talent. For example, he played on Queen Latifa’s Dana Owens album and was invited to go on several promotional events, like *The Today Show*.

In the fast moving and interconnected music-verse, Midón was invited to work with Herbie Hancock. Midón’s agent at the time, who secured the Hancock gig, was also the agent for Jason Mraz. Midón had also worked with Mraz, which contributed to how he became known to a younger audience.

Hancock was collaborating with a number of artists to create an album he called *Possibilities*. It also became a documentary. For this project, Midón was asked to sing and play guitar for Hancock’s arrangement of Stevie Wonder’s hit song “I Just Called to Say I Love You.” He participated from a New York studio, while Hancock and musician Greg Phillinganes were in a studio in Los Angeles. A look into Midón’s recording session can be seen in Hancock’s documentary and the full track heard on the album *Possibilities*.

Lovely Friendship

The industry veteran recalled a professional encounter that led to

a friendship and an unexpected collaboration. “I got to know Bill Withers. I met him at the Roxy Theater in Hollywood when I played there. I ended up having this friendship with him, we would call and talk on the phone. Whenever I was in LA, I would go to his house. I mean, it was really [special]. At one point, he called me up and said, I want to write with you, which he didn’t write with anybody.”

Withers, who had retired, told Midón that he wanted to write with him in Spanish. “Mi Amigo Cubano” was the result of that collaboration.

From New York City to Laurel, Maryland

In a business that is based largely on big breaks and successive successes, Midón has flourished. However, according to Midón, “[t]he thing about the music business is that we have done so much, and yet you never feel like you’re completely settled. It’s kind of this never-ending treadmill, really.”

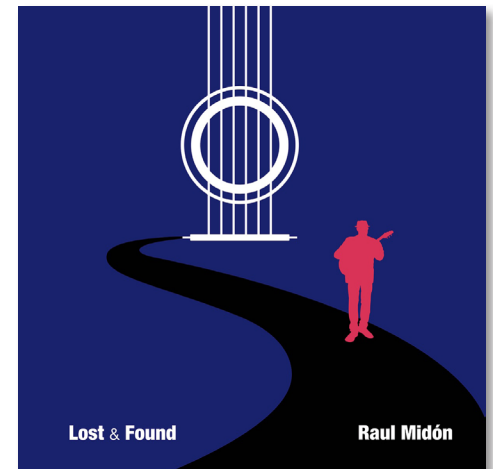
Midón and his wife had been in New York for seven years. They were living in what they described as a beautiful midtown Manhattan apartment near the United Nations when the desire to be homeowners struck. Home ownership seemed to be a sign of success in the music business. It was that lure of home ownership coupled with Laurel’s favorable location—with three airports and a train to allow Midón to get to New York—that brought them to their home in North Laurel.

Despite their initial uncertainty about the move, the suburban lifestyle seems to appeal to Midón. He is thrilled to have his own recording studio. He writes every day and can play and record his music any time he pleases. “I was always fascinated with recording. One of the great benefits of having moved here is that I learned how to record, how to engineer, how to make my own records, and I have the space to do it.”

Being a homeowner also affords Midón the opportunity to enjoy his hobby as an amateur ham radio operator. He said that he has “a big old tower in my yard.” In an interview for the National Association for Amateur Radio’s *QST Magazine*, Midón, call sign AE3RM, was said to combine his passions for music and ham radio by including Morse code in some of his songs, including “Sitting in the Middle” and “Peace on Earth.”

Reflections

Reflecting on the dizzying number of gigs and venues, Midón cites Carnegie Hall as a favorite and personally



Raul Midón (opposite) is currently on tour promoting his 13th album, *Lost & Found*.

impactful venue for his career “because it was early [in my career] and I went there from working in these tiny bars.”

“I loved working at the Kennedy Center recently with a tribute to Joni Mitchell with the National Symphony. That was an amazing [project, working with] Renée Fleming, Lalah Hathaway, and Vince Mendoza. The National Symphony is amazing. I’ve worked with a lot of musicians. That’s an amazing orchestra that people should [hear].”

He noted that the Fitzgerald Theater in Minneapolis always stands out with him because, “it’s just a really, really good sounding room.”

He also loved playing at Merriweather Post Pavilion. He played there for several Capital Jazz Fests and the George Benson and Al Jarreau concert, while he was still living in New York City.

As for whether he prefers playing solo or with a band, Midón loves to play solo because, he noted, “it allows me to do what I do differently from anybody else in the world as far as, the way I play guitar and playing bongos and guitar at the same time.” But he also observed that “I love collaborating, I love playing in a band with good musicians, too.”

Midón will be playing with a band at his upcoming gig at Creative Alliance in Baltimore on August 17 at 8:00 pm. For ticket information and to catch Midón live on his Lost and Found Tour, visit raulmidon.com/live.

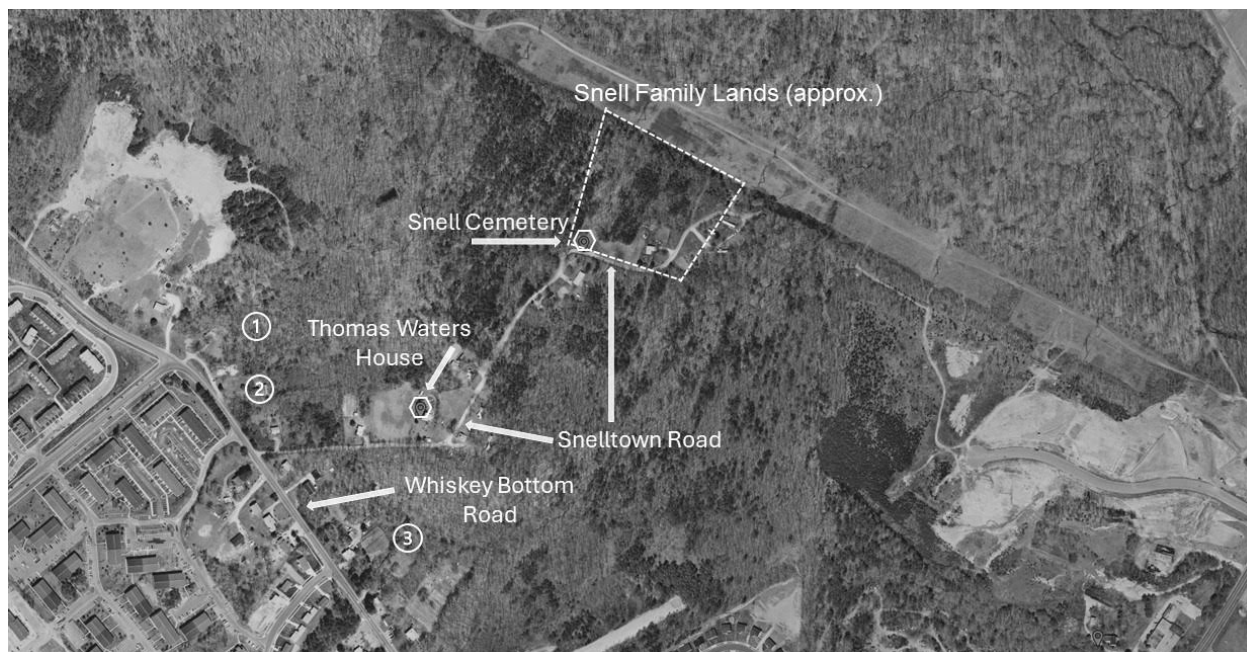
Angie Latham Kozlowski is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for the Laurel History Boys. In addition to her investigative reporting, her articles frequently spotlight Howard County.

Hidden History of North Laurel

Snelltown



BY WAYNE DAVIS



Map of Snelltown with 1977 background imagery with locations for Snell cemetery and Thomas Waters house from HoCo GIS. Other residents based on 1878 Hopkins Atlas: 1) M Worthington, 2) Dennis Moore, 3) Henry America.

There is a historic Black cemetery at Snelltown off Whiskey Bottom Road. The small, well-maintained cemetery is in the middle of a development, but very little information is known about it other than it was the cemetery of the Snell family. The closest site listed in the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was 1,000 feet away and the form submitted for it speculated that the area was “a small enclave for freedmen” but it also wondered if it could have been “an attempt to segregate blacks from whites.”

Was this area an enclave for freedmen and/or a segregated community? Where did the name Snelltown come from and what are the origins and status of the cemetery? Does Snelltown still exist?

What is Snelltown?

Snelltown is still shown on a Google Map between Whiskey Bottom Road and Hammond Branch, along what is now Harmony Lane. After a little digging, I learned that there was a small but notable Snell family settlement from the 1800s that occupied this North Laurel land for over 150 years. The only property left of their descendants is the family cemetery.

One of the streets near the cemetery is Earl Levy Drive. There were two oral history interviews with Mr. Levy done in the 1980s, and Mr. Levy was asked about his great-grandfather, who had once been enslaved. He said

his name was Dennis but knew little of him except a few stories told by his grandmother. I was able to locate some records of his great-grandfather’s enslavement to the Sappington family along with some odd developments.

The Sappingtons

Polly Ridgely, daughter of Major Henry Ridgely, married Thomas Sappington, who died in 1783 leaving Polly with their three daughters. Polly owned several properties, including Sappington’s Sweep, which had about 300 acres. Daughter Anne survived her siblings and eventually inherited the property.

Perhaps the Snell enslavement began with Thomas Sappington, so his records were worth looking into. Mr. Sappington’s 1783 estate inventory indicated he had only enslaved five children: Hannah (15), Nancy (9), Jacob (8), Lucy (7), and Sarah (7). There were no adults listed in the inventory, so I wondered if his wife, Polly, had enslaved people from her inheritance from her father, Major Henry Ridgely. However, he mortgaged those he enslaved. In the 1790 U.S. Census Polly Sappington was listed as having enslaved eight people.

Upon her own death in 1823, Polly Sappington had desired that most of the enslaved were to be set free when they turned 35 years old. Three of those enslaved, including Dennis, listed as 17 in the estate inventory, were left to her daughter, Anne Louise, and the remaining

enslaved were to be divided among Anne and her other daughter, Frances. Among the enslaved going to the two daughters was a 49-year-old woman named Luce (perhaps the 7-year-old Lucy from Thomas Sappington in 1783) and a 19-year-old man named Charles.

Freedom for the Snells

A certificate of freedom is a document certifying the holder of it is a free person, whether they were born free or manumitted, and vouched for by a white man. Dennis, Charles, and Samuel Snell all received their manumissions because of Polly Sappington’s will. Dennis was about 36 years old, and Charles was about 37 when their manumission was recorded on Feb 1, 1842, both recorded as having a light complexion. Samuel Snell was 35 years old when he was recorded as manumitted on Feb 12, 1844.

The names Dennis Snell and Charles Snell, each appeared as heads of families and free Blacks in the 1840 census. Along with Dennis Snell were six free children (two White and four Black), and two free Black women, for a total of 11 people in his household. In the Charles Snell household, he was listed with five free Black female children. The census was taken from the same area in which they were enslaved. Could this possibly have been two enslaved men that showed up as free Black men in the 1840 census? There were no other Snell family members by that name in the area.

Until the Snells received their freedom, they were enslaved by Anne Sappington, who had married Zedekiah Moore in 1825. Moore became one of three County Commissioners for the newly established Howard District in April 1840, shortly before the U.S. Census. It is possible that his personal knowledge of the Snell family, their light complexion, and the need for more population for representation and receiving federal taxes, could have prompted the listing of the Snell families as free, rather than enslaved. They could have been considered and treated as free by Anne and Zedekiah Moore before 1840. We just don’t know for sure.

Snell’s Land Ownership

In March 1850, prior to that year’s census, Zedekiah and Anne Louisa Moore sold over 6 acres of land to Dennis Snell. The man and his family they formerly enslaved and would now be close neighbors. Although Dennis was a Black man, there was no indication of race for his family or many others on that census page except for one family that was Mulatto and Black. Perhaps this was due to Dennis’ light complexion.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

HISTORY

History Crumbs



BY KEVIN LEONARD

These short bits of history tend to pile up as I do more research on various topics. Unless otherwise credited, all quotes are from the *Laurel Leader*.

1885

Laurel became the largest town in Prince George's County.

1897

In September, the *Laurel Leader* published its first issue. The masthead contained two phrases: "If You Don't Get THE LEADER You Don't Get The News" and "If You See It In THE LEADER It Is So."

1903

In April, seven-term mayor Edward Phelps was defeated in his bid for an eighth term by Gustavus Timanus by four votes. The *Leader* declared Phelps' loss as "a real blow to the advancement of Laurel."

1913

In February, the Army of the Hudson, a group of suffragettes who marched from New York City to Washington, DC to promote the cause of women's right to vote, paused in Laurel overnight and were joined in the march by a group of local African American women. The Colored Women's Suffrage Club joined the suffragettes, led by "General" Rosalie Jones. While in Laurel, General Jones sent ahead a yellow "Votes for Women" flag and the following letter to President-elect Woodrow Wilson:

*Suffrage Headquarters
Laurel, Md Feb. 26, 1913
President-elect Woodrow Wilson:*

*We send and beg of you to accept this
votes for women flag as a memento of
our pilgrimage through New York and
New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.
Yours very truly,*

ROSALIE GARDNER JONES



1916

In January, the Post Office in Savage was robbed in the middle of the night. Since the thieves blew open the safe with dynamite, "it is thought that the yeggmen were part of the gang which has been operating throughout the State, for the work was that of professionals." William Reely, who lived across the street and was awakened by the explosion, hurried to the scene with his handgun but "he was fired upon by the robbers," who "made their escape in an automobile which was not far off." The thieves made off with \$250 in money, money orders, and stamps. No one was hurt.

1929

In July, city-wide gas service became available.

1931

In August, the following notice appeared in the *Leader*: "WANTED—A WIFE. Single white man, true and honest, wants a wife. Will live anywhere. Write to H.C. Ebert, Patterson Station, Baltimore, Md."

1942

In August, Laurel resident Harry R. Hubbard, 48, was sentenced to four years in a Federal penitentiary for posing as an Army officer, falsely wearing Army insignia and medals, and obtaining money by false pretenses. Hubbard, who had been a sergeant in the Army during World War I, posed as an Army colonel and fooled the whole town. When returning to Laurel from his day job as a carpenter on War Department projects, he would slip in his back door and then walk through town in an Army colonel uniform. In court, prosecutors told his story. After the bombing at Pearl Harbor, Hubbard disappeared for a few weeks and, upon returning to Laurel, told people he had been sent to Hawaii to investigate. Hubbard's pretense so completely fooled the town that Laurel Police Chief Edward Brown had a police siren installed on his car, which, somehow, sported Army license plates. Dr. Edwin Bernstein gave Hubbard \$45 while he posed as a colonel. Future Mayor Harry Hardingham, then the owner of a gas station in Laurel, told the court "He seemed like a regular army man. He never bragged about what he had done, though he always had a ready answer to questions." His story aroused suspicion when he claimed he was flying Army bombers to and from Fort Meade. After his sentencing, Hubbard told the court he "always wanted to be somebody."

1952

In April, Laurel Police received complaints about a resident who was "practicing hypnotism on children." Police urged parents "to caution their children against allowing this man to hypnotize them."

1962

In June, a letter to President John F. Kennedy described an encounter with a UFO in Laurel. The letter is contained in the Air Force's Project Blue Book files at the National Archives, which contain reports and analysis of UFO sightings around the world from 1952 to 1970. The letter writer's identity is redacted but she

is described as an "elderly lady" from Portland, Oregon. In her letter to JFK, she said she "was visiting her family in Laurel, Maryland on First Street." She claimed to hear "a soft humming noise" and saw "a very large object, shaped like a cartwheel with lights all around the rim. It was coming from the direction of Baltimore, coming over Laurel to Washington. There is a gully along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad track at that point and I lost sight of it through the trees." On a Project Blue Book form attached to the letter, the Air Force typed "attributed to psychological causes."



1970

In April, "Laurel's First Boutique Rocks Staid Main Street," according to the *Leader*. The article described "Laurel's first clothing boutique and latest addition to Main Street" as having "rock music and flashing colored lights" providing the shopping atmosphere. The store, called Akcentrik, offered clothing for the young and hip, such as "bellbottoms, pantsuits, dresses from India, ponchos, and fringed and tapestry vests." The owner chose Main Street in Laurel because "it reminds me so much of Georgetown."



More Than a Neighborhood



BY RICHARD FRIEND

I frequently reminisce with my mom, who will be turning 80 this September, about my childhood in Laurel in the 1970s and 80s. And until recently, she would often lament the fact that we lived in apartments until she and my dad bought their first home in 1987. In her mind, life would've somehow been better for me (for *all* of us, of course; but like all great parents, my mom and dad have always had the habit of putting me first) if they'd somehow been able to afford a nice single family home somewhere with a big yard when I was younger. She's always been especially fond of those split-level houses with carports, so many of which dotted the landscapes of Montpelier and West Laurel. It's taken many conversations over the course of many years, but I think she finally understands that I'm telling the truth when I say that I wouldn't have changed a thing about my childhood.

Steward Manor Apartments was, to a kid like me, an absolute wonderland. I literally don't have the space here to list the countless activities my friends and I had at our disposal on any given day. It was like a small city within

itself, as each street had a character and aura all its own. Not only did we have an Olympic-sized pool, we had a basketball court, a football field, three unique playgrounds, a small creek, railroad tracks, and we were just a moment's walk from 7-Eleven, Dart Drug, and Laurel Centre Mall.

Then there were the buildings themselves, most of which are actually connected via their basements. On particularly hot or cold days, we would often opt to play cops and robbers in there—hiding and chasing one another throughout the labyrinth. Those basement mazes were also tremendously convenient when being chased by the occasional angry Route 197 motorist whose car may or may not have gotten pelted by snowballs, but I digress.

If we found an unlocked basement storage room, it was an opportunity for our little group to tell ghost stories in the pitch black—and the threat of accidentally getting locked in the windowless room only added to the thrill.

When I was a kid, BMX bikes were the thing. And kids in Steward Manor had the whole neighborhood under our wheels. Speed bumps only enhanced the ride, and cruising

around the streets and sidewalks never got old. If you didn't know where your friends were at any given time, all you had to do was ride around looking for the collection of bikes parked outside a particular building.

By the time I was attending Eisenhower Middle School, I was fortunate to make friends from practically every neighborhood in the school district. But that's also when I remember first noticing how some of the kids whose parents *did* own those nice single family homes in Montpelier had a way of looking down their noses at those of us who lived in apartments. Certainly not all of them, mind you—some were among the nicest kids I'd ever met. But there were a few. They never came right out and said anything, but the air of superiority was unmistakably there. It wasn't just me and my Steward Manor friends—I saw it directed at the kids who came from Laurel Pines, Milestone Manor, Kimberly Gardens, Pumpkin Hill, and other apartment communities, too. If Eisenhower had been the *Titanic*, those Montpelier kids seemed to think they were first class passengers, while we were from steerage.

But even then—and even more so now, as an adult—I have no doubt that if anyone was missing out on an incredible childhood, it certainly wasn't a kid from Steward Manor Apartments. In fact, the older I get, the more I appreciate the childhood I was so fortunate to enjoy there.

Learning and Sharing the History

Steward Manor was and remains a unique mid-century apartment complex that offers what I've always felt was a magical little ecosystem to grow up within. Built in three phases between 1958 and 1960, the streets and buildings throughout the complex each have their own subtle differences—almost like little neighborhoods in their own right.

My parents and I moved away from Steward Manor when I was 14 years old and had just finished my freshman year at Laurel High. I'd lived there since the first grade, and leaving that neighborhood was, in hindsight, a watershed moment for me. It literally was like leaving my childhood behind. Soon, I began working part time at the Laurel Library, and before I knew it I'd graduated from Meade Senior High and later from the Corcoran School of Art.

It was only about a decade later, in 1998, when I first began to reflect on how much I'd enjoyed growing up there. My Steward Manor days seemed much more distant than just ten years. Living in Northern Virginia by that time, I drove through the old neighborhood and took photos to document what had changed, and what had stayed the same. The basketball court was gone, sadly. But the rest was remarkably the same as it had always been, and full of memories.

I started toying around with the idea of writing and designing a little book—just for my immediate circle of Steward Manor friends—a magazine of sorts that I could print and assemble that included stories of the times we'd shared growing up there. Life has a way of interfering, though, and having just started a busy career in graphic design didn't exactly afford me the time I wanted to devote to that project. And so the years continued to pass, and pass quickly. In fact, *another* full decade flew by before I had a chance to finally dig into this passion project in earnest. What was originally going to be a publication became a blog I named *Steward Manor Days*—a recollection of growing up at this special place.

A Rental Office Reunion

In 2010, I had the idea to reach out to Southern Management, the company that owns Steward Manor and several other residential properties, to see if they might have any old photos of the neighborhood they'd be willing to share. They recommended I contact the Steward Manor rental office, and when I did, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Mrs. Jutta Heidelberger was still working there—she had been the manager when I was growing up. She invited me to stop by to take a look at several photo albums they did indeed have in storage, and I spent a wonderful afternoon with her and Paul Blair—a maintenance man who'd also been there since I was a child—reminiscing over photos they hadn't seen in decades.

Within the albums were faces from the past of both employees and residents alike. We saw pictures of familiar vehicles, including the various maintenance vans that Paul and his colleagues once drove around the neighborhood. He enjoyed a good laugh when I told him that I remember



even painting a couple of my Hot Wheels cars as a kid to look like their maintenance vans.

In addition to the blog, I'd started a *Steward Manor Days* Facebook group, and the growing number of members came up with a fun idea: hosting an actual reunion of former and current residents. We planned a potluck gathering at the picnic area by the swimming pool, and a nostalgic walking tour throughout the complex. The first one was such a hit that it became an annual event drawing dozens of people each year, including many who hadn't seen each other in decades. It also sparked new friendships, with former residents traveling from as far away as Florida and California to attend. Some who'd only lived at the complex for a very short period were there; and some whose Steward Manor days were in the early 1960s were just as eager to share their fond remembrances as those of us who were there in the 1980s. There were even some whose families had moved from Steward Manor to single family home communities like Belair at Bowie. Still, something about this apartment complex drew them back, and a cosmic bond was forged that connects us as neighbors for all time.

The Steward Manor Reunion became an annual event, and the year that Mrs. Heidelberger retired, she surprised us by actually having platters of gourmet sandwich wraps, cheese, crackers, and veggies delivered to our picnic. It was a wonderful gesture, and really confirmed how special this community is. Think about it—most people consider apartment living to be a transient period. In fact, many can't wait to get out of their apartment and into that nice single family home with the big yard. I can't imagine that there are many—if any—other apartment complexes in the country that have spawned what is essentially a proud alumni group like we've become.

We enjoyed ten consecutive reunions before the pandemic interrupted things in 2020. Walking through the neighborhood and visiting the buildings that we once lived in is always an emotional experience. I often think of a quote from the movie, *Field of Dreams*, where James Earl Jones says, "This field, this game: it's a part of our past. It reminds us of all that once was good and it could be again."

Steward Manor is that field for me—that inexplicable place where, as soon as I set foot on the grounds of the complex, I'm 12 years old again and surrounded by the best friends I've ever had.

After this four year hiatus, I think it's time that we get the reunion going again this September. As that *Field of Dreams* monologue continues, "Oh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come."



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



(Top): Former Steward Manor residents at the 2016 reunion enjoyed an afternoon of reminiscence that included a walking tour of their old stomping grounds to see what's changed and what's remained the same. Eric Hasert (back row holding a photo of himself as a child in front of his former building on Woodland Court) traveled from Florida. Jim Smart (to the right of Hasert, wearing the red shirt) flew in from Los Angeles.

(Above): My mom, Carol Friend (left) and Tina Pressley at the first reunion in 2010. My parents moved to Steward Manor in 1978, just before I started first grade. We moved into the Pressley's building, where Tina's twin sons, Rodney and Ronald, became my best friends.



(Left): Laurel High School graduates (left to right) Jim Clash, Bobby Jeschelnik, and Ricky Norris of Tram band with former Maryland Congressman Larry Hogan, November 1972. (Top right): Jim Clash, 2024. (Bottom right): Ricky Norris, 2024.

The Adventures of Multi-Decade High School Class Reunions



BY JIM CLASH

My late father once told me something about class reunions: For the 5-, 10- and even 20-year get-togethers, everyone will be bragging about their accomplishments and titles post-high school. But, by the 50th, he said, you'll just be glad to see those classmates who are still with us.

I didn't understand what he meant at the time, being young, brash, and never thinking about advancing age. 50 years, really? Didn't Roger Daltrey of The Who in "My Generation" sing, "Hope I die before I get old?"

But at my own Laurel High School 50th reunion last fall, I understood. Fifty-five members of our class of '73 had passed, a sobering reminder to seize these reunion opportunities to meet with old friends while we still can.

Some of the deceased had been good personal friends. They had died of cancer, in car accidents, from heart attacks and COVID-19—even by their own hand. One fellow from my Boys Club pee-wee football team had been murdered by his teenage daughter and her boyfriend!

Overall, though, I was happy to have attended, albeit a bit reticent at first, as I'm sure many are. It's a bit of an adventure. What if I ran into "frenemies," or pompous sports jocks—or even jerks? But none of that materialized. We all got on despite past differences that, at the time, seemed big but now seemed like just kids squabbling in a sandbox.

My old high school band's (Tram) lead guitarist, Bobby Jeschelnik, was there. No long hair as in the past, just a shiny head, of which he was demonstrably proud. When we got together with bass player Ricky Norris (still lots of hair) to jam old songs like "Jumpin' Jack Flash" (Rolling Stones), "Sunshine Of Your Love" (Cream) and "Dear Mr. Fantasy" (Traffic), the old grooves clicked in pretty effortlessly once the rust had dissipated. It was my first time using electronic drums. Surprisingly, they sound as good as, or better than, the old Ludwig's I used in the 70s.

And when our class president, Lori Grimes Horton, and her husband, Mark, both

of whom I hadn't seen for decades, and I chatted together, it was as if no years had passed in the half century that had. Both were retired, he from NSA, she from a long-time career with the phone company.

An important part of any multi-decade high school reunion is the nametag. Yes, we've all aged, and sometimes it's hard to recognize immediately who comes up to greet you with a smile and warm handshake. But once you put the names to the faces, it's pretty easy to identify them—and so much fun to compare life notes.

A few months ago, I was in Laurel again for a signing of my classic rock book, "Amplified," as part of a bigger reunion event at Oliver's, a local restaurant, sponsored by The Laurel History Boys. Many folks from different graduating classes attended. And, the night before, at the same restaurant, was a party for Sharon Sweet, a woman from the class of '75 who had traveled all the way from Scotland with her husband to be present.

What amazed me is that there is no longer any distinction between what class you may have graduated from. The years '71, '72, '73, '74, '75, whatever, all blend together into one melting pot. Someone suggested that, for the next reunions in five or 10 years, maybe the various committees representing each class should get together and collectively decide upon one date where graduates from all of the 50-year-plus classes can attend.

Not a bad idea—and a great way to keep a critical mass going as it continues to wane.

==

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.

We wrote the book
on Laurel history.

Literally.

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CELEBRATE OUR HISTORY
ANTICIPATE OUR FUTURE

150 YEARS OF LAUREL, MARYLAND HISTORY



BY KEVIN LEONARD & RICHARD FRIEND
WITH PETER LEWNES



Mark Opsasnick's incredibly researched book, *Rock the Potomac*, is chock-full of stories and biographies of the people and groups who were part of the history of rock 'n roll and country music in the DMV. "Rock the Patuxent"—which will be a regular feature in *Voices of Laurel*—makes its debut here with excerpts from the book that highlight the greater Laurel area.

A Laurel Legend: Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps



BY MARK OPSASNICK

Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps emerged from Laurel, Maryland in the fall of 1956 and became known for their popular single release "The Bug," a song written about a frenetic style of dance displayed by teens at the Fort Meade Teen Club. Years after its initial release, the song unexpectedly turned up in the John Waters comedy movie *Hairspray* (New Line Cinema, 1988) sparking renewed interest in Dallman and his band among the followers of 1950s rock and roll music. When "The Bug" was initially released in December 1958 it was never properly marketed or distributed, thus dashing any chances the band had for national stardom. Still, they soldiered on and established themselves as one of the most popular teen rock and roll bands of the time in the Washington, D.C. area.

Jerry Dallman, the leader of the band, was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Laurel, where as a youth in the early 1950s he taught himself to sing and play guitar. He formed the Knightcaps in the fall of 1956 at the start of his senior year at Laurel High School. Originally a trio, the group was rounded out by pianist Bert Gosnell and guitarist Robert McKenzie, two classmates of his at Laurel High whom he'd met while they were in a classroom practicing the Elvis Presley song "Don't Be Cruel" for a school musical. The band took on the name Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps and debuted on Saturday, November 17, 1956, in a talent contest at the grand opening of the Laurel Shopping Center. Also performing that day were country music acts such as Jimmy Dean and the Texas Wildcats (featuring guitarist Billy Grammer) and singer-guitarist George Hamilton IV. Dean later joined the boys for a late lunch that day at the White Coffee Pot restaurant and complimented them on their first-place prize.

Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps then began playing dances at teen clubs and schools throughout suburban Maryland. From 1956 to 1958 they were regulars at the Odenton Teen Club, the Laurel Teen Club, the Fort Meade Teen Club, the Laurel Fire Department, and the Knights of Pythias Hall in Annapolis. Schools that booked them for dances included Waterloo Junior High School (Elkridge), Arundel High School (Gambrells), DeMatha Catholic High School (Hyattsville), St. Mary's High School (Annapolis), and



(Opposite page): Jerry Dallman's debut at the 1956 grand opening of Laurel Shopping Center.

(Left): Dallman (center) performs his hit "The Bug" on *The Milt Grant Show*.

(Right): Late in life, Dallman sported long hair and a moustache.

Laurel High School. They also were a popular attraction at officers' clubs at a number of local military bases including Fort Meade and Bolling Air Force Base. The band specialized in songs by Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, and the Crickets (featuring singer-guitarist Buddy Holly).

In June 1957 the Knightcaps added Gary Edenfield on drums, a Laurel native who was attending Arundel High School at the time. Edenfield told Dallman about an unusual dance being performed at the Fort Meade Teen Club by teens that, when the right type of rhythm was being played, would stand in a circle and frantically pass around an imaginary insect. Later that year, using this particular dance exhibition as inspiration, Dallman penned "The Bug" in a single 30-minute session.

Edenfield's stepfather sold concessions at Uline Arena and in January 1958 a customer of his named Joe Drew introduced the band to music producer Ben Adelman. That month, Adelman had Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps record a demo of "The Bug" at his studio, Empire Records and Recording Studios, in the Takoma neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Drew then took the primitive recording to local television personality Milt Grant in an effort to get the band booked on his popular music-oriented television show.

Milt Grant loved "The Bug" and had the band re-record the tune that summer at the newly opened Edgewood Recording Studio (1129 Vermont Avenue NW, Room 101, Washington, D.C.). The end result of the Edgewood session was the 45rpm single record "The Bug," backed with "Honey Bee" (Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps; Punch Records, 1958), with writing credits for both songs going to "Dallman-Davis-Cooper." ("Davis" was Cindy Davis, a pseudonym Kay Adelman, and "Cooper" was Fred Cooper, a pseudonym for Milt Grant, neither of whom had anything to do with writing the song.)

"The Bug" gained Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps instant local fame and the band came very close to landing a major record label contract. The single was released in December 1958 and sold extremely well in the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore regions and was praised in such national publications as *Billboard* and *Cash Box*.

Under the direction of Baltimore-based road manager Stan Hoffman, Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps embarked on an abbreviated tour of several Northeast states in support of the song, and made appearances on both *The Milt Grant Show* and *The Buddy Deane Show* in Baltimore. Unfortunately, Milt Grant allegedly rebuffed leasing offers from several national labels, including Epic Records, thus dashing the group's hopes of national

stardom. The single remained the only 45rpm record ever issued by Punch Records, which in reality was an independent label created by Grant. It seems that Grant basically had the band record the song, pressed a limited number of copies on his own fly-by-night record label, and inexplicably did nothing further with the product after the stock had been depleted.

Jerry Dallman and the Knightcaps pressed on throughout the late 1950s and into the early 1960s and played numerous dances at the Laurel and Fort Meade Teen Clubs. They also performed at rock and roll record hops for both Milt Grant and Don Dillard at the Hyattsville Armory, where they played on some amazing bills headlined by the likes of Link Wray and His Ray Men, singer-guitarist Bo Diddley, and pop singer Annette Funicello. Another incredible gig for the band was the "Rock 'N Roll Spectacular" at the University of Maryland's Ritchie Coliseum on Saturday, December 27, 1958, where they were part of a bill that was headlined by Bill Haley and His Comets and included Terry and the Pirates, rockabilly singer-guitarist Vernon Taylor, and others.

In the spring of 1959, Ben Adelman again brought the Knightcaps, minus founder Jerry Dallman, (who, during his final 18 months with the band, was frequently absent from the group's rehearsals and performances) into his Empire Records and Recording Studios. There, he matched the band with pop singer Jack Donovan to record a single that featured a song he felt had potential to appear as the theme song in a major science fiction movie that was in the works. The movie was entitled *Time Machine* (Galax Films, Inc., 1960) and its musical arranger was Russell Garcia, whom Adelman was well acquainted with. When Adelman was told by Knightcaps guitarist Robert McKenzie of a song of the same title written by Gary Edenfield, he felt he could profit by arranging a deal through Garcia with Galax Films, Inc. to lease the single to the studio, as well as issuing it on one of his own independent record labels.

The recording session for this project included Robert McKenzie on guitar, Bert Gosnell on piano, Gary Edenfield on drums, an individual from the Phil Flowers camp known only as "Whiskey" on bass, and Jack Donovan handling lead vocals. The resulting single was "Time Machine," backed with "I Wanna Cry" (Jack Donovan and the Knight Caps; Empire Records, 1959). The song "Time Machine" was credited to "Drew-Davis-Edenfield," with "Drew" being the aforementioned Joe Drew, and "Davis" again being Cindy Davis, a pseudonym for Kay Adelman. These credits ensured profits for her husband

Ben Adelman, with Knightcaps drummer Gary Edenfield receiving one-third of the credit for the song he wrote entirely by himself. The flipside of "I Wanna Cry" listed writing credits for "Blocker-Davis," with the true identity of "Blocker" remaining a mystery to the present day.

The "Time Machine" single was given a rush release in June 1959, but failed to make an impact on the national scene and was ultimately turned down by Garcia for inclusion in the film. The movie *Time Machine* was released in August of 1960 and garnered large viewing audiences and favorable reviews.

The Knightcaps soldiered on, though changes were on the horizon. They played their first nightclub engagement at the California Inn in Laurel on Saturday, November 26, 1960 and, after an appearance at the Fort Meade Teen Club on Saturday, February 18, 1961, Dallman departed from the group. Bert Gosnell and Robert McKenzie also left the band at that time and Gary Edenfield went about reorganizing the outfit. He moved himself from drums to vocals and rhythm guitar, and welcomed to the band lead guitarist Joe Ecker (from Howard County), and bassist Bob Mitchell and drummer Bobby Kuykendahl (both from Montgomery County). This quartet continued to perform as the Knightcaps at local night clubs in the Laurel area such as the Turf Club, the South Seas, the California Inn, and Nuzback's Bar. The group ultimately disbanded in 1963.

An interesting side note to the Knightcaps saga is that in the early 1960s Gary Edenfield often performed on long-necked banjo with guitarist Bart Johnson as Gary and Bart at the now-legendary Washington, D.C. coffee house Coffee 'n' Confusion. The duo also made appearances at several other folk music night clubs in the city including the Cellar Door, the Brickseller, and Bohemian Caverns. Edenfield also performed during the middle and late 1960s in Laurel-based rock and roll bands called the Windjammers and the Streetwalkers—groups that included several of his former Knightcaps bandmates. Jerry Dallman, meanwhile, remained a legendary figure on the local music scene because of his involvement with "The Bug," though he rarely played in public after leaving the Knightcaps. In his later years he lived a quiet life in his hometown of Laurel and passed away from heart disease on March 28, 2006, at the age of 66.

Rock the Potomac is available at booklocker.com/books/10190.html.



Mark Opsasnick was born in Washington, D.C. and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Maryland. To date he has authored nine books and innumerable articles on popular culture, rock and roll music, and unexplained phenomena. He resides in Prince George's County and gives talks and presentations on local music history, in addition to emceeing and hosting live music shows throughout the Delmarva region.



“We had a guy...”

Tales From the Laurel Police Department



BY RICK MCGILL

This continuing series is an uncomplicated string of personal war stories from my time at a small municipal police department between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., told without a lot of extravagant details; just the facts, ma'am. Other cops will appreciate the bare-bones setups of my individual anecdotes. But I do try to explain some of the procedures for the general public who has little understanding of why we do some of the things we do.

The men and women I worked with are the finest you will find in any police agency anywhere. Some have since retired or moved on to other agencies, and some are still there fighting the good fight. Hopefully, this bit of sucking up will make up for any inconsistencies in my memory of the events in which some of these great guys made an appearance. They will no doubt recognize their own first names and possibly the fictitious names of some of our less-than-law-abiding customers.

So grab yourself a cup of java or crack open a beer and get comfortable. You're in a room full of cops talking shop. And the attitudes, sometimes smart-ass, sometimes despairing, that go with it. In our town, on my shift, this was policing in the last decades of the 20th century.

Back before “diversity” was a thing, we knew we had a variety of ethnic groups represented in the town. That's not a bad thing at all in my mind but around dinner time in some of the apartment projects the cooking smells could either make your mouth water or your eyes water. I had a “gas leak” call once that turned out to be curry. HAZMAT is in the eye, er nose, of the beholder.

This one has no “guy” to speak of but it's a good example of ethnic diversity. One day I was poking around behind the Safeway on Bowie Road along the B&O Railroad tracks and came upon an interesting find. Now, to give you the broader picture, on the far side of the train tracks is Steward Manor apartments, a frequent source of all manner of cooking odors. The tracks were within walking distance of both the apartment project and ran along the back of the Safeway store. The narrow space between the store

and railroad embankment was only about 12-15 feet wide and a couple hundred feet along the back of the building. There are no doors or windows on the back wall and no reason for anyone to go back there so anyone with some creativity could put the space to some kind of use with no one knowing, least of all the management of Safeway.

So for some reason, I was snooping along the tracks and discovered a rice and water plant garden the whole length of the building. The topography there was slightly downhill toward Bowie Road and the garden was beautifully terraced and separated into different flooded levels for each crop. There was rice, watercress, I think water chestnuts, and things I didn't recognize, all fed by a steady trickle of water tapped into a pipe on the back of the Safeway building. I'm sure Safeway uses a lot of water anyway, but their bill must have been enormous as each terrace overflowed into the next. It was actually an amazing little water farm.

I told the store manager and I don't know what they did about it but a few months later I checked on it and the garden was gone. All dried up and overgrown. You have to admire the ingenuity.

There are always routine make-busy details that we have to perform with a smile. This is the greatest job in the world so it's worth a groan once in a while. The day shift had a few downsides that I've described in the past and one of them is during business hours. Each bank in the city had a little clipboard in certain locations where the beat officer would stop by and record daily “bank checks.” You'd call out on the radio, “Charlie-3, I'll be 10-6 (busy) on bank checks.” You don't say which bank you're at: anyone with a scanner could hear us and know that bank won't see another cruiser for a while. So, you stop at each bank and walk right in and sign the log.

The problem is, luck works both ways and you could be lucky 99.999% of the time. Then the odds go against you, and you walk right in on a bank robbery. Oh sure, your response time on the call is zero—perfect stats. But the bad guy(s) are already jumpy and have guns drawn and we've all seen the movie. And, oh sure, it could happen anywhere, not just banks, but why add risk to an already risky job? I had a friend on Metro PD

DC, Officer Bob, who walked into a sandwich shop for lunch and got shot in the face. He survived but just by luck. Super guy, bad odds. LVFD guy, too. You know who I mean.

So, the department brass finally wised up and discontinued bank checks. Maybe there came to be too many banks in town to offer the PR time to all of them. Maybe the decision was made by a chief who came up through the ranks and had done too many bank checks. Progress is good. I'd rather respond to a bank robbery than walk in on one.

False alarms are a fact of police life. I could probably count on one hand the number of burglar alarms where I arrived to find an actual burglary. Maybe two hands. But you have to go on every one because there's always that chance. So, it's the middle of the night and I get an alarm call at Arundel Furniture Warehouse at 608 Lafayette Ave. It's a big building but only a few entrances so I figure it'll be a quick walk-around, shake the doors, and clear.

Nope. I yank on a single exit door on the south side and it comes right open. Nothing wakes you up faster than pulling a door at night that's supposed to be locked and it opens up to pitch blackness inside. I forget who my backup was but we go in and split up so we can clear the building quicker. We need to be quick because the interior siren is an ear-splitting, brain-damaging piercing wail that actually hurts.

So, we're walking through the open warehouse area and there is 4-tiered shelving in about four or five rows of stored goods of all kinds. Most of it is wrapped or boxed and there's no telling what it is. But as I come down the aisle there's one item recessed in its storage space that wakes me up even more.

There's a life-size, full color, dinosaur of some kind about 10 feet long, just standing in this floor-level shelf. Not a T-Rex but something on all fours. I missed Dino ID in the academy. Teeth bared, green scales, glassy eyes, totally realistic. Yes-sir. Wide awake.

They say hearing loss is cumulative. I grew up with rock and roll in the 60s and 70s so there's that. But I can still hear that alarm siren. And I don't like dinosaurs anymore.



Enforcing traffic laws is probably the most visible image of police work. I've talked about stats before and there are as many levels of interest in traffic enforcement as there are officers on the department. At one end of the spectrum are guys who view it as their #1 reason to breathe. From the time they go 10-8 (in service) on the radio to the time they end their shift they have their traffic detector on high sensitivity. Calls for service, robberies, burglaries, domestics, are things that just get in the way of that next ticket.

I know of one guy who would open his traffic law book, the Maryland Transportation Article, close his eyes and open it to a random page and point his finger. Whatever section he landed on would be his quarry for the night. Good idea but some of them are real hard to find.

Then there are guys who would probably have to get rammed by another vehicle to get riled enough to open the book and write a ticket. I'm more in the middle somewhere: I did get rammed but someone else wrote the ticket. Black Friday, 2000. Northbound Rt. 1 and Laurel Ave. But that's not the point of this one.

The department brass once put out a challenge to have the squads compete for seatbelt enforcement statistics. Whoever wrote the most tickets or written warnings for seatbelt violations won the coveted Participation Trophy and eternal thanks of the Patrol Division lieutenant. The onus was on the squad sergeants to motivate their people to produce paper and, given the spectrum of interest in traffic enforcement described above, that could be tough.

But my Screamin' E-Men rose to the occasion. I like life outside-the-box, so I suggested to my guys that since warning tickets counted equally with citations, if we all got creative, we'd walk away with this. Now, a written warning is similar to the Maryland State Traffic Citation and Summons in that it holds nearly the same fields of information but without actual charging language. It doesn't even require the driver's signature. The warning is valid with even the most basic information: a vehicle make, color, and tag number plus the date, time, and location, as well as a shorthand notation of the violation.

I told my squad to pick a spot in their beat, any 4-way stop sign will do, park nearby and stand near the intersection to watch people coming to a stop, which of course they will with a policeman standing right there. Then you can see if they're wearing their seatbelt and if not, motion to them to put it on. Wave and have a nice day. Keep a scratch paper log of the "basic warning info" and fill out the written warnings later and turn them in at the end-of-shift.

Easiest stats we ever produced. The traffic guys were in heaven. The traffic-as-a-nuisance guys got it out of the way to get back to "real police work." My spot was 4th & Montgomery. "Hey, put your seatbelt on." I'd make a cross-chest motion simulating the belt. They'd understand and click-click. We were turning in whole books of warnings. Won the contest, too.



We had a guy one day, tractor-trailer truck driver, who made the turn from Gorman Avenue onto Washington Blvd and, I guess, cut it too sharply and ripped open one of the saddle tanks on his rig. We got the call as a fuel spill and, wow, that was an understatement. When we got there, he was laying under the tank trying to stuff rags into the gash in the tank but without success. Fuel was running out in the street and mostly down the gutter toward Crow's Branch creek. Public Works came and put sand on the road to prevent accidents and the fire department came as a HAZMAT call and put absorbents down. It was a real mess. Eventually it got cleaned up, but the road was down to one or two lanes for a while.

The guy was in poor shape, too, by then. He had been working on it for a while before we got the call and he was totally soaked in fuel. We took him to the police station and gave him a pair of coveralls to put on. His clothes were soaked with diesel fuel and had to be thrown away.

Diesel is very slippery on the road and other drivers probably thought it was just water. We were really lucky there were no accidents. Or flipped cigarettes, but at least it wasn't gasoline. There had been a lot of traffic rolling through the fuel judging by the amount tracked all the way down to the Bowie Road intersection. When you pick up that radio mic you just never know what's coming.



Not every police report ends with the initial description of the basic events. When there's a probability of additional supplementary reports the typical closing line of the report narrative is, "Investigation to continue." I hope these anecdotes haven't offended too many readers of this venture from The Laurel History Boys. And hopefully there will be more to come. Thanks for your time.

Investigation to continue...



Rick McGill grew up in Laurel and worked at the Laurel Police Department from 1977 to 2001. He authored two history books: Brass Buttons & Gun Leather, A History of the Laurel Police Department (soon to be in its 4th printing), and History of the North Tract, An Anne Arundel Time Capsule. In 2001 he retired to Montana and worked as a military security contractor for Blackwater Worldwide making 12 deployments to Iraq and Pakistan from 2004 to 2010. He is now a Reserve Deputy Sheriff in Montana.

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VOICES OF LAUREL
A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

Laurel Parkaeology



BY PETE LEWNES

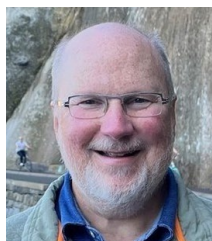
Laurel Park—at other times known as Laurel Race Course, or known to longtime locals simply as “The Race Track”—has been a core element of our city’s identity for over a century. Martha and I have collected pieces representing every era of the track’s history, from ticket stubs and programs to pins, winner’s circle photos, and even trophies. With the recent news that Laurel Park will be hosting the Preakness in 2026 while Pimlico undergoes renovations—and then likely closing its doors forever—*Voices of Laurel* is taking the opportunity to showcase pieces of this storied track’s history.

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



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.

Eric Collins, 62

Dr. Eric David Collins was born in Garden Grove, California, on April 18, 1962, and passed in Greenwich, Connecticut, on May 28, 2024, surrounded by his family.

Born to Helene and John Collins, Eric spent most of his youth in Laurel, Maryland, and graduated as Valedictorian of Laurel High School in 1980, before continuing his education at Yale University. At Yale, he explored his passion for singing and co-founded Mixed Company, an aptly named mixed gender a cappella group that continues its performances today. After graduating from Yale with a degree in Economics, he spent two years teaching physics and chemistry at Tabor Academy in Massachusetts before attending the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, where he discovered his passion for Psychiatry.

He graduated from medical school AOA in 1990 and continued his residency and fellowship training at Columbia, completing dual fellowships in addiction and consultation-liaison psychiatry. Throughout his career, he held the positions of Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Medical Director of Addiction Services at Columbia University, Physician-in-Chief of Silver Hill Hospital, and Medical Director of the New York Center for Living. His passion for patient care changed the lives of many.

Despite his love for psychiatry and the betterment of his patients, he valued his family above all. He raised his children in Darien, Connecticut, instilling intellectual curiosity and emphasizing the importance of education in them. He was an avid fan of the Dallas Cowboys (to the great dismay of his fellow New Yorkers), New York Yankees, and New York Rangers. He loved collecting hockey cards, most recently ecstatic over opening a Connor Bedard rookie card with his sons. His quick wit, broad smile, unmatched wisdom, and endearing quirks will be forever remembered by those who were lucky enough to know him.

Robert Joseph Gaulin, 93

Robert Joseph (Bob) Gaulin, loving father, grandfather, great-grandfather, uncle and friend, passed away peacefully in Manassas, Virginia on November 23.

Bob was born in Mexico, Maine on April 29, 1930 to Bertha and Joseph Gaulin. He joined the Navy in November 1951 and was honorably discharged with the rank of second-class petty officer in November 1955. He married the mother of his two daughters, Rita Jean Hickernell (who pre-deceased him) in February 1954. He was also pre-deceased by his second wife, Whitely V. Gaulin.

After graduating from Capitol College in 1958, he worked the rest of his career as a software engineer at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory. Bob devoted nearly 30 years of volunteer service to the Laurel Boys and Girls Club by coaching softball, basketball, bowling, and golf. He served on the Board of Directors of that organization, became the club president and first the executive director. He operated the club's Monday night bingo for 20+ years.

Bob is survived by his daughters Deborah Levis and her husband Wilson of Newhall, CA and Karen Beyer and Gary Lange of Manassas, Virginia, six grandchildren, Patrick Levis, Amanda Smith, Joseph Levis, Caitlin Wade, Kelly Hoffman, Dana Beyer and 15 great-grandchildren.

Bob moved to Manassas nine years ago to be closer to his daughter and family. He quickly became loved by many. He loved playing bingo and dominoes with friends, and enjoyed many breakfasts at the Yorkshire Restaurant where he was loved like family.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that those wishing to express sympathy to consider making a donation to Park Valley Church benevolence fund, in memory of Bob Gaulin. The family would appreciate a comment in the memory tab if you made a donation to Park Valley benevolence fund, so we may express our gratitude.

Daniel Messina, 82

Daniel Joseph Messina, age 82, passed away on April 29. He was born in Washington, D.C. on March 16, 1942 to Joseph Robert Messina and Helen Lucille

Kushner Messina.

He married Ann Jacobsen Messina in 1968 and they were married for 56 years.

After graduating from the Capitol Radio Engineering Institute in 1983, he worked for General Electric and a number of contractor companies and eventually worked as a computer programmer for the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs until his retirement in 2013.

He is survived by his wife; daughters Sandra Lynne Messina, Karen Elaine Messina Hovey and Julie Elizabeth Messina; and grandchildren Bailey Anderson Messina Dicus, Zepher Messina, Christopher Jason Messina Dicus, Delaney Sinclair Hovey and Sloane Mackenzie Hovey.

His hobbies over the years included ham radio, photography, model railroading, computers, anything related to Disney and woodworking. He built everything from wooden puzzles to kitchen cabinets, bedroom furniture, and numerous bookcases.

Memorial contributions may be made to First United Methodist Church of Laurel, American Heart Association, or American Diabetes Association.

David James Patterson, Sr., 81

David James Patterson, Sr. passed away on April 19, 2024 at the age of 81. Born September 5th, 1942 in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, Dave was the son of James and Hazel

Patterson. Shortly after high school, Dave enlisted in the Army and was part of the 82nd airborne division.

Upon returning home, Dave started a job with the US Postal Service in 1968, until his retirement in 1992. His career with the Postal Service included Human Resources, a job his family found very fitting for him, as he loved people, especially conversing with and getting

to know those around him and working with him.

Dave was also an EMT with the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad and a member of the American Legion. One of his greatest joys was taking his 1972 show truck to car shows with his wife, Marilynn.

Dave is survived by his wife, Marilynn Patterson; children Lisa Ann Stevens, and David James Patterson, Jr. "DJ" (Dawn); grandchildren Cinder Hurst (Jacob), Samantha Hall (Dillon), half-brothers Donald Huffman (Rhonda), Joseph Patterson (Michelle), and half-sister Susan Michalicek (David); sister-in-Law Donna Freeman; great grandsons Hunter Hall and Asher Hurst; great granddaughter Briar Snow, in addition to aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and many dear friends.

Dave was predeceased by former spouse, Karen Patterson, and half-brother Thomas Huffman.

Please consider donating in the memory of Dave to the American Cancer Society or any form of donation that can better assist our veterans, such as the Wounded Warrior Project, Disabled American Veterans, or any other preferred option.

Frank Persico, 71

Frank G. Persico was born in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, November 27, 1952, to the late Frank J. and Margaret G. Persico. He died suddenly on

May 14, 2024, at his summer home in Ocean City, New Jersey. Frank is survived by his wife, Stephanie, of 48 years; his daughter, Lauren McCarthy (Tim) of Alexandria, Virginia, their four children, Logan, Brendan, Margaret, and Devin; his son, Robert (Maranda), Agoura Hills, California; his sister, Sister Mary Persico, IHM, of Scranton, Pennsylvania; and his brother Attorney Joseph (Patrice) and their children and grandchildren, of Shavertown, Pennsylvania.

For more than four decades of his life, Frank served in multiple administrative capacities at The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC., including the most recent, Vice President for University Relations and Chief-of-Staff. Before that, he served as Assistant to the President and General Secretary, Associate Dean for External and Student Affairs, Executive Director of Student Affairs (Columbus

School of Law), Executive Director of Alumni Relations, among others. His service to the University was far-reaching and comprehensive, and touched the lives of the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, and students in memorable ways. Before his service at the University, Mr. Persico earned his BA in Speech and Drama, his MA in Higher Education Administration, and ABD doctoral education at The Catholic University of America.

As part of his roles at the University, Frank took part in planning the visits of three Popes to Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America, and to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, starting with Saint John Paul II in 1979. He later planned, organized, and flawlessly implemented the visits of Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 and Pope Francis in 2015. The visits of these Popes were a source of pride for the people of the United States and, in particular, to the people of our nation's capital. For his role in these Papal visits, Frank has been awarded the Benemerenti Medal by Pope Benedict XVI and the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Medal by Pope Francis.

Frank served in other capacities as well. As a consultant after his retirement from Catholic University, he shared his expertise in best practices of non-profit governing boards, as well as his well-grounded experience in today's educational and fiduciary environments. He worked with many universities and other educational institutions during this time. He was an inveterate trustee, mentor, emcee, and friend to all who engaged his skills and larger-than-life personality.

He had the reputation of never being able to say NO. Therefore, it wasn't unusual to find him volunteering as auctioneer, swim-meet referee and announcer, speaker, selling Christmas trees for the Lions Club, or serving on the City Council in Laurel, Maryland. A hallmark of all he did was his sense of humor, perfectly timed.

In addition to his educational endeavors, to which he dedicated most of his life's passion, Frank enjoyed sailing on the Chesapeake Bay as a member of the Chesapeake Yacht Club, traveling literally around the world with his wife and family, attending Broadway and Kennedy Center Theatre productions, cheering for the Washington professional sports teams, and enjoying life near the ocean.

Nancy Maria Stevens, 93



Nancy Maria (Fiori) Stevens, 93, of Laurel MD, passed away peacefully on Friday, April 5, 2024.

Born on October 15, 1930 in Medway Massachusetts to

Eva (Currier) and Vincent Fiori (both deceased). She was the wife of John Stevens for 39 years until he passed in 1995. She is survived by John (Maryann Cusma) Stevens, son, and Terri Stevens, daughter, and her pride and joy, Collin Stevens, grandson. Also she is survived by her brother, Vincent (Linda) Fiori and her sister Virginia "Jeannie Fiori" (John) Glennon and 32 nieces and nephews, all of whom she loved as though they were her own children.

She was known to her work colleagues as Nancy, and to her family and friends as Maria. Maria was a remarkable person with an extraordinary career for a woman of her time. She attended NorthEastern University for accounting, in which at the time, less than 1% of the attending class were women. She worked full time her entire adult life, beginning in the retail industry first as a bookkeeper, then moving into sales and marketing in Boston until she married. After several years abroad with her husband John while he was stationed there, they moved to the Washington DC area in 1961. During the 1960s she worked as a residential manager in apartment complexes in Prince George's County. In the 1970s she moved into retail property management as General Manager of the Laurel Shopping Center, responsible for opening the new "enclosed shopping mall." In the 1980s, she transitioned to commercial property management with the Charles E Smith Company of Crystal City, VA where she became the Company's very first female Vice President. After 15 years, she joined and was with for almost 2 decades, the Horne Brothers at Meridian Management Company where she finished her illustrious career in 2012 at the age of 82 as head of North America properties. She was responsible for buildings such as Grand Central and Penn Stations in New York City, the Grand Ole Opry in Tennessee, all the Texas border crossings, and numerous other buildings across America. Also during her impressive career, she sat on various committees; as the Landlord Representative on the very first the LandLord Tenant Committee of Prince George's County MD, and

various Boards including the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM) and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), writing many of the codes and regulations for the state of Maryland and across the country that still exist today. Additionally, she was a close trusted advisor to US Congresswoman Gladys Spellman of Maryland. Since moving to Maryland in 1961, she attended St Mary's Catholic Church in Laurel. Additionally, she was a member of the Soroptomist Club and was a long time loyal member of the Sons of Italy in Laurel.

When she wasn't working, Maria loved to travel the world. But Maria was happiest when surrounded by her family and friends. Maria was known to be kind and incredibly generous (extended family will remember epic Easter egg hunts with big prizes for all. And everyone knew there would be Christmas presents galore). She was the ultimate hostess and a legendary storyteller.

Kevin Wayne Wilkes Sr., 56



On June 20th, 2024, Kevin Wayne Wilkes Sr. passed away peacefully surrounded by his three cherished children. He is survived by his significant other and

best friend, Ann Deborah Williams. He was the beloved son of Gene Wilson Wilkes Sr. and Eula Carolene Wilkes; dear brother of Gene Wilson Wilkes Jr. and Lisa Michelle Badstibner; devoted father of Kevin Wayne Wilkes Jr., Katelyn Michelle Fallon, and Andrew Joseph Wilkes; and loving grandfather of William Matthew Fallon and Luke Wayne Fallon.

On August 19th, 1967, Kevin was born and then raised in Montgomery County, Maryland. He graduated from Seneca Valley High School in 1985 where he was an all-around superstar athlete before attending Shepherd University where he continued playing football. He worked as a loan officer for several years and then managed the Laurel Tastee Diner, his family's business. Kevin was an avid Commanders fan and his greatest joys in life were being surrounded by the people he loved most. He will be deeply missed and his family will continue to honor his legacy by living their lives to the fullest.

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Cover Story

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

list is “White Privilege.” During the search at Crawford’s home, investigators located a letter from his wife, Mary Crawford, to Howard County Circuit Court Judge Lenore Gelfman, explaining that Mary Crawford took offense to the term “white privilege” used during a training session Mrs. Crawford attended at Voices for Children, a nonprofit organization in Ellicott City. In the letter, Mrs. Crawford addresses her frustration with the program and its views as compared to hers. She discussed in her letter whether she should continue with the program, ultimately deciding that she would continue.

Prior to the next session Erica Bryne contacted Mrs. Crawford and told her that she was not welcome back to the program. Ms. Bryne is the Executive Director for Voices for Children, and she recalled Mrs. Crawford not agreeing with and voicing her displeasure with the “white privilege” concept taught at a volunteer program.

Investigators found searches of Ms. Bryne’s address in Crawford’s computer. Investigators believe this incident is representative of “White Privilege” from his concealed target list.

For all his crimes in Howard County, Crawford was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences plus 75 years in prison.

Arson #4 – Russ & Veronica Antico, ElkrIDGE, Howard County

Target name on Crawford’s phone: “Chiro”

June 23, 2017 – 4:19 a.m.

Howard County Police and Fire Department responded to a single-family dwelling with a fire in the attached garage area. The Antico family (three adults and two children) were sleeping at the time of the fire. They escaped the home fire without injury. Fire investigators ultimately concluded the cause of the fire to be arson.

Russell and Veronica Antico are chiropractors at Howard County Chiropractic and Sports. Their practice treated Crawford on approximately 19 separate occasions. Computer searches on Crawford’s computer revealed Google Map searches of the Anticos’ home six days prior to the fire, a Spokeo search for Russell Antico, and several Facebook searches for the Anticos the day after the fire.

For all his crimes in Howard County, Crawford was convicted and sentenced to

two life sentences plus 75 years in prison.

Arson #5 – Justin Scherstrom, Clarksburg, Montgomery County

Target name on Crawford’s phone: “Justin(3)”

Sept. 29, 2017 – 3:10 a.m.

One year after his home was set on fire, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Units again responded to the Scherstrom’s property. They found a self-extinguished fire, which had burned unnoticed, along the base of the garage door. While on scene, investigators secured video footage. Like the previous fire, the video picked up the sound of liquid being poured from a vessel and then two or three clicks, consistent with a grill style lighter. The video then showed the ensuing flames and the suspect running from the scene. Samples taken from the scene and provided to the Maryland State Police Laboratory for testing were found to contain gasoline.

After this fire, it became clear to investigators that the same suspect was responsible for both fires at the Scherstrom home. Prior to this fire, the manner and specific details pertaining to the first Scherstrom fire were not disclosed to the Scherstrom’s or the public. Investigators noted that the specific details relative to the ignition sequence of the fire in 2016 proved identical to the ignition sequence in the 2017 fire, indicating that both fires were set by the same suspect. Both fires were an exact duplication of the manner, application, and execution of one another, which is information only that suspect would have intimate knowledge of.

Crawford’s trial in Montgomery County is pending.

Arson #6 – Evelyn & Scott Henderson, Ellicott City, Howard County

Target name on Crawford’s phone: “Evelyn(2)”

Dec. 9, 2017 – 3:00 a.m.

Howard County Police and Fire Department responded to a house fire in Ellicott City. The victim and her family were home and asleep at the time of the fire but were able to escape the home without injury. Fire investigators determined the fire’s origin was in the area of the garage and ultimately concluded the cause of the fire to be arson.

Crawford lives less than a mile from Evelyn Henderson. Electronic evidence seized from Crawford’s residence showed Google Map searches of the Henderson’s

home prior to the fire.

Crawford contacted Henderson’s neighbors inquiring about surveillance video and circumstances surrounding the causes of the fire. After the Henderson’s house fire, Crawford shared photos of the damage with the public in the NextDoor app.

School redistricting in Howard County Public Schools resulted in a very controversial topic within the Howard County community. Mrs. Henderson was initially leading the Redistricting Organization Committee (ROC). She told police that Crawford took the lead role in the group on his own accord without any formal assignment. Mrs. Henderson believes Crawford didn’t want her to have a lead role in the group. In one instance, Mrs. Henderson recalled that she had made some changes to a PowerPoint presentation created by Crawford relating to the school redistricting. Mrs. Henderson told investigators that Crawford didn’t like the changes and eventually “demoted” Henderson within the hierarchy of the ROC.

Crawford’s phone calendar includes an entry for “Dunloggin Fire” to begin December 8, 2017 and conclude December 9, 2017. The Hendersons—and the Crawfords—live in the Dunloggin neighborhood.

For all his crimes in Howard County, Crawford was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences plus 75 years in prison.

Arson #7 – Bud Price, Jefferson, Frederick County

Target name on Crawford’s phone: “Price”

April 3, 2018 – 3:41 a.m.

The homeowner, Clark “Bud” Price, is a retired Prince George’s County Police Department Deputy Chief.

A Montgomery County Fire & Explosives investigator was contacted by the Frederick County Fire Marshal’s Office about a house fire they were investigating. Firefighters found a fire along the entire base of three garage doors.

Firefighters initially believed that the fire was likely caused by faulty low-voltage wiring attached to the garage door sensors and they did not call for fire investigators to respond. The homeowner, Price, believed that something wasn’t right about the cause of the fire and contacted the Frederick County Fire Marshal’s Office

directly to request their response.

Samples from the scene were taken as evidence and sent to the Maryland State Police Laboratory for analysis. The results showed that the samples were found to contain gasoline. Fire investigators ultimately determined the cause of the fire to be arson.

The fire damage was contained to the attached garage. The victim and his wife were home and asleep at the time of the fire.

Later in the day after the fire, Crawford messaged Price on Facebook and asked him for photographs of the fire damage from his garage. Found on Crawford’s computer were Internet searches conducted shortly before the fire, looking up the victim’s home address.

During Crawford’s career in Prince Georges County, he often worked for then-Deputy Chief Clark “Bud” Price, the victim of this fire. According to Price, in 2000, as he was preparing for retirement, the current Chief of Police asked Price for a recommendation to fill his position.

Rather than nominating Crawford to succeed him, Price nominated another officer instead. Later, Price told investigators that during Crawford’s tenure as Laurel Police Chief, they saw each other at a funeral in Laurel. Price believed there were no ill feelings between him and Crawford but was told by another person present that Crawford was saying that Price should have been fired from the Prince George’s County Police Department.

Price recalled that when Crawford was being considered for the Chief of Police in Laurel, Price received a call from a background investigator. Price recalled the only thing he said negatively about Crawford was that Crawford lacked loyalty since he was going around telling everyone that Price should have been fired years before his retirement. Price wondered if Crawford was able to obtain that report once he was hired at Laurel.

Investigators believe the reference to “Price” found on the suspect’s target list is representative of Clark “Bud” Price, the victim of this crime.

Crawford entered an Alford plea in Frederick County. Under an Alford plea, a defendant does not admit guilt but concedes that the State has sufficient evidence to convict. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Arson #8 – Evelyn & Scott Henderson, Ellicott City, Howard County
Target name on Crawford's phone:
"Evelyn(2)"

Aug. 17, 2018 – overnight hours

Sometime during the overnight hours, Crawford used an ignitable liquid to burn the front lawn and shrubs at the Henderson's home. The burned area was discovered by contractors the next day who were working on the home, which Crawford had previously burned. The burn pattern in the yard was an irregular shape. A stick with an attached burnt piece of cloth was located near the immediate area. This was very similar in nature to the stick with the cloth material used by the suspect at the scene of the 2011 fire at Marty Flemion's home in Laurel. Fire investigators ultimately determined the cause of the fire to be arson.

Mrs. Henderson told investigators that she received a phone call from Crawford immediately after the house fire on Dec. 9, 2017. She thought it was odd because Crawford was questioning the cause of the fire and the identity of their insurance company. Mrs. Henderson became upset by Crawford's questions and hung up. Mrs. Henderson also recalled that Crawford made disparaging comments about their yard looking bad during the time the home was under repairs from the first fire.

Contractors working on the home between the first and second fire indicated that Crawford came into the home one day and was looking around before being told to leave by contractors.

For all his crimes in Howard County, Crawford was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences plus 75 years in prison.

Arson #9 – Evelyn & Scott Henderson, Ellicott City, Howard County
Target name on Crawford's phone:
"Evelyn(2)"

Sept. 22, 2018 – 3:17 a.m.

Howard County Police and Fire Department again responded to a house fire in Ellicott City at the home of the Hendersons. The home was unoccupied, and renovations were almost completed from the previous fire. Samples were collected from the scene and tested positive for gasoline. Fire investigators determined the cause of the fire to be arson. The fire originated along the front of the house and spread to a majority of the rest of the house.

Once again, Crawford contacted

Henderson's neighbors inquiring about surveillance video and circumstances surrounding the causes of the fires.

Crawford's calendar includes a calendar entry titled "Henderson Fire," to begin September 21, 2018 and conclude on September 22, 2018. One of Crawford's electronic devices includes a Spokeo search for "Who Lives at [the Henderson's address]."

Mrs. Henderson stated she was told by neighbors that Crawford was contacting her surrounding neighbors inquiring about surveillance video and circumstances surrounding the cause of the fires as if he was conducting his own investigation.

Investigators believe these incidents are representative of "Evelyn (2)" from the suspect's concealed target list, as there were two dwelling fires at the home of Evelyn Henderson.

For all his crimes in Howard County, Crawford was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences plus 75 years in prison.

Arson #10 – Alphonso Hawkins, Waldorf, Charles County
Target name on Crawford's phone:
"Hawkins"

March 3, 2019 – 3:54 a.m.

Fire units in Charles County responded to the report of a vehicle on fire, extending to the nearby home. The fire damaged the garage area of the home and the truck parked in front of the residence. Fire investigators ultimately determined the cause of the fire to be arson.

During the search of the electronic items belonging to Crawford, it was discovered that he was conducting Spokeo computer searches for the name "Alphonso Hawkins" prior to the date of fire. Alphonso Hawkins, Sr. was a prior Interim Chief of Police for Prince George's County Police. The victim of this fire and owner of the vehicle is Alphonso Hawkins II, the son of the former Interim Chief. The victim and his family were home and asleep at the time of the fire.

Hawkins, Sr. doesn't live at this address but in another county. Investigators spoke with Hawkins, Sr. about the fire, assuming he was the intended victim. Also found on Crawford's computer were searches for "Charles County Volunteer Fire Department" and a Southern Maryland NewsNet article for the fire. Crawford also did Internet searches using the Maryland State Department of Assessments and

Taxation website, which is a website that can be utilized for researching names and addresses.

When Crawford worked at the Prince George's County Police Department, he worked various assignments. He would have worked for both Deputy Chiefs Price and Hawkins, Sr. When both Price and Hawkins retired, on two separate occasions the suspect was not promoted to a Deputy Chief position.

Investigators believe the reference to "Hawkins" found on Crawford's target list is representative of Alphonso Hawkins, the father of Alphonso Hawkins, II, the mistaken victim of this crime.

Crawford is a suspect in this case. No charges have been filed in Charles County of this writing. The Maryland State Fire Marshal is leading this investigation.

Arson #11 – Rich McLaughlin, Laurel, Prince George's County
Target name on Crawford's phone:
"McLaughlin"

March 16, 2019 – 3:58 a.m.

Fire and EMS units arrived to find a detached garage, two vehicles parked in the driveway, and the adjacent occupied dwelling on fire. Video surveillance showed a suspect carrying two plastic containers. The suspect walked down the driveway, in between the two cars, and poured both jugs of gasoline between the cars and then poured a "trailer" between the cars to the middle of the driveway. After the fire was lit, the flame moved between the cars to the detached garage. The fire extended from the origin to the nearby cars and then to the occupied home of the victim.

Investigators obtained video footage from a neighbor's home that showed the suspect drove a silver vehicle, consistent with the same body style and shape as a 2005 Toyota Camry. The suspect was then seen walking from the vehicle with a large bag in hand, toward the victim's house. Several minutes later there was an obvious fire and the suspect was seen running back to the previously parked silver vehicle.

Fire investigators ultimately determined the cause of the fire to be arson. The victim and his family were asleep.

Crawford's electronics contained numerous items of interest. One item was a PowerPoint file concerning the victim, Richard McLaughlin. The file included screenshots using the Internet to

research the address, telephone number, family members of the victim, aerial views of the victim's home, tax records indicating the victim's address, and other personal information. Crawford made a calendar entry on his phone titled "McLaughlin Fire" on the date of the incident. Crawford's phone indicates that he downloaded a "Police/Fire/Rescue Scanner App" at 4:30 am, just after the fire. Internet searches on the suspect's computer were found prior to the fire, indicating the suspect was also searching for information about the victim on the internet.

During Crawford's tenure as Laurel Police Chief, his Deputy Chief was McLaughlin, the victim of this fire. McLaughlin told investigators that there was definite animosity between Crawford and McLaughlin. In late 2010, Crawford was asked to retire from his position as Chief and McLaughlin was promoted to succeed him.

Investigators believe the reference to "McLaughlin" found on Crawford's target list is representative of Richard McLaughlin, the victim of this crime.

Crawford's trial in Prince George's County is pending.

Arson #12 – Scott Crawford, Brooklyn, Anne Arundel County
Target name on Crawford's phone:
"Scott"

July 27, 2019 – 3:30 a.m.

Anne Arundel County Fire & Rescue responded to a fire in Brooklyn. The homeowners are Stephen "Scott" Crawford and Teresa Crawford. Their property has a detached pool house and an above ground pool. The platform surrounding the pool and the side of the pool were on fire upon arrival. Responders detected the strong odor of gasoline coming from the area where the platform once stood.

Scott Crawford is David Crawford's nephew. The parties had a falling out around the time Scott Crawford was hosting a pool party on July 27, 2019, and Crawford was not invited.

Investigators believe the reference to "Scott" found on Crawford's target list is representative of Scott Crawford, the victim of this crime.

Crawford has not been formally charged in Anne Arundel County.

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Cover Story

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Arson #13 – Justin Scherstrom, Clarksburg, Montgomery County
Target name on Crawford’s phone: “Justin(3)”

Nov. 17, 2020 – 3:13 a.m.

Montgomery County Emergency Communications received a call from a neighbor reporting a fire. Upon arrival, a fire was observed in a detached garage. Video from a neighbor’s home picked up a loud explosion at 3:12 am. Investigators found “PulsePoint,” an application that monitors Fire and EMS calls, on Crawford’s phone. A warrant for that application showed that Crawford used his cell phone to search that PulsePoint app for “Montgomery County” and “Damascus” within the 7:00 a.m. hour on the morning of the fire. On November 20, 2020, Crawford conducted an Internet search for the fire’s address.

Investigators also determined that Crawford had been searching for the location of the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department at 7:00 am on the morning of the fire. Crawford’s phone revealed that he was on the Scherstrom’s street, several houses down, two days before the fire, at approximately 5:30 am.

Investigators learned that over the years, there were numerous heated arguments between Scherstrom and Crawford. Several of the arguments appear to have occurred shortly before the fires at the Scherstrom’s homes.

Investigators believe the reference to “Justin(3)” found on Crawford’s target list is representative of Justin Scherstrom, the victim of this crime. This was the third of three fires that occurred at the home of Justin Scherstrom.

Crawford’s trial in Montgomery County is pending.

“Part 2 — But Why?” will examine Crawford’s motives, his trials, and the status of the case. Look for it in the Fall issue of Voices of Laurel, available by October 15.



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.

DPW

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MCGEO’s John Barry later commented that, while the DPW signatories were disappointed over the wages issue, they are nonetheless “relieved” to be part of UFCW 1994 moving forward and hope for more favorable outcomes in the next contract.

“We Stand With DPW” Group Pledges Continued Support

As word spread through Laurel about how the bargaining sessions had transpired, a citizens’ DPW advocacy group formed. Longtime Laurel resident Georgena Ifill organized an initial meeting in early May at the Laurel Boys and Girls Club. Two UFCW 1994 representatives were present as guests. An official from the Service Employees International Union also was present and took part in the discussion, as did a few people personally familiar with the city’s handling of the situation. (Note: The names of most attendees have been suppressed at their request, for fear of retribution.)

Addressing the group, Ifill noted that since an agreement had already been reached, the group should focus on offering continued support for DPW workers. “My goal is to make sure they’re treated more fairly next time around,” she said. Dubbing themselves “We Stand with DPW,” the group brainstormed ideas for signs and t-shirts, settling on the slogan “Stop Talking Trash: Support DPW Workers” to reflect their beliefs that city officials are not being honest about the negotiating process. The group later treated DPW workers to ice cream during DPW Appreciation Week in late May.

At the meeting, attendees heard the union’s perspective on the negotiations, with added insight from participants familiar with the city’s side. Attendees expressed dismay upon hearing union assertions that typical back-and-forth negotiations had not occurred, and that the city had offered no serious counterproposals. Some pointed out that the impasse could have been mediated cost-free by using resources available at the county or federal levels.

An attendee with direct knowledge of the FOP contract questioned why the city had agreed to the FOP’s demands for a 23% raise over 3 years “with no issue and without any [outside] law firm being involved.” Another person noted that, even with the “appeasement raise” given to DPW in FY2024, most DPW salaries still do not qualify as a living wage, based on both county and national definitions. Multiple attendees wondered how much the city paid Jackson Lewis for representation and how it was funded. One person had researched the firm and speculated that costs could have already surpassed \$100,000. Ifill noted that she was submitting a Freedom of Information Act request pertaining to the city’s legal expenses.

Sparks Fly at Council Meetings, But Resolution and Contract Become Official

At both the May 28 and June 10 City Council meetings, We Stand with DPW members spoke before the Council. Some simply expressed their support for DPW and thanked those who helped achieve a contract. Resident Cynthia Cronan Wood expressed her admiration for DPW workers amid the conditions they put up with, telling the Council, “these men do your dirty work.” She criticized the city for not engaging in actual bargaining and asked, “Which one of you would do their job fulltime for what you pay them?”

Former Councilman Martin Mitchell called the bargaining process “not fair to the employees,” noting that DPW workers who signed the contract had done so at an

overall pay cut, since higher wages were not granted and they will now also pay monthly union fees. At both sessions, Ifill criticized the money being spent on outside legal assistance, asked if any other firms had been considered, and remarked that the Mayor’s praise for the recently approved “fiscally responsible 2025 budget” came about “by denying DPW.”

MCGEO’s John Barry pledged “unwavering support” to ensure the contract is upheld and to reach an even better outcome for the next contract. He cited living wage, retirement benefits, and healthcare coverage as topics for future bargaining sessions. Barry said, “We’re gonna follow the contract and we expect you to follow the contract. This is just the beginning and we’re going to make sure it’s a real beginning.”

UFCW Local 1994 President Geno Renne congratulated both the city and DPW for reaching their first labor agreement. He then characterized the negotiations as “a little testy” and expressed hope that future ones would not be as adversarial. “It amazed me that there was so much resistance to bargaining in good faith; that’s my professional opinion after having done this for 40-some years. We’re looking forward to a good partnership with this city administration. But the nature of that relationship is totally up to you.”

Both Mayor Keith Sydnor and City Administrator Christian Pulley echoed a commitment to adhere to the contract and move forward in the best interests of DPW workers and Laurel’s citizens. Mayor Sydnor closed out the June 10 session with the following statement, portions of which he repeated to WUSA Channel 9 during an interview immediately following the meeting:

“A lot of things have been said tonight, a lot of things that [aren’t] true, but we can’t control what people say when they come up here and speak for their three minutes. We do know a contract was negotiated between the city and the DPW UFCW, and the workers ratified that contract. That’s how it is in America, when you negotiate things and the union [ratifies] the contract. I’m looking forward to a relationship, that we can continue to work together. Our job is to protect the people of the city and also the workers of the city as well. The city is in no way trying to harm the DPW workers; we’d never do anything like that, that’s not our motto. I want to move forward. Let’s work together on any disputes. My door is open all the time. I ask that the citizens just give us some air and let us do our jobs; we are going to protect the city and the workers.”

Voices of Laurel reached out twice to the Mayor’s office seeking their account of the CBA negotiations. Just before press time, Mayor Sydnor responded with the following statement:

“I am please[d] to announce the City Council passed Resolution No. 3- 2024. A Resolution of the Mayor and City Council of Laurel, Maryland for the purpose of approving an agreement between the City of Laurel and United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 1994 on June 10, 2024, and I concurred. We are looking forward to working with UFCW Local 1994. The collective bargaining agreement goes into effect from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2027.”



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.

Snelltown

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The next family visited in the 1850 census was James Snell (75) and Lucy Snell (73), along with four children with the last name of Hawkins—all of whom were not listed as Black or Mulatto. It is possible that Lucy was one of the girls that Thomas and Polly Sappington enslaved and was about seven in 1783 and given to their daughters upon Polly's death in 1823, when Lucy was reported to be about 49. It makes me wonder if Lucy, and perhaps James, were Dennis Snell's parents or other family members.

In 1881, Dennis Snell and his wife Annie Snell, sold about one of their six acres of land to their daughter, Mary Snell. By 1889 Dennis had died. The lands remained with descendants of Dennis and Annie Snell until the 1970s when BG&E claimed slivers of the land for their transmission right-of way and, in 1991, when the last remaining descendent of Dennis Snell, Frank Curry Sr., sold the remaining lands, excluding the cemetery, for the development centered around Harmony Lane, which used to be recognized by the county government as Snelltown Road.

Rev. James Nicols and Snelltown Neighbors

Rev. Nicols and his wife sold land in the 1870s to four Black families along what is now Whiskey Bottom Road adjacent to the Snell family area. Those families were Thomas Waters, Rachel and Henry America, William Cager, and Dennis Moore, adding to the extended Snell family and others.

The Thomas Waters house was near the Snell family cemetery, per the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) MIHP form for this property. While MHT speculated that "it would appear Nicols was creating a small enclave for freedmen" by selling a tract of land to a Black man named Thomas Waters, Rev. Nicols sold to white people in the area as well. There is no indication at all that he attempted "to segregate blacks from whites" and the effect seemed to be the opposite.

While listed as a very wealthy farmer in both the 1860 and 1870 census, he was listed as a minster in the 1880 census at 41 years old. Newspapers report that Rev. Nicols was active in the Presbytery of the Chesapeake, but by 1877 the Maryland Presbytery in 1879 identified him with Laurel. Later newspapers identify him as the minister of the Laurel Presbyterian Church. Rev. Nicols was also a trustee for public school number 5 located west of All Saints Church on Old Annapolis Road (now Whiskey Bottom).

Snell Cemetery

Very few mentions are made to the place "Snelltown" in the historical records. One gravestone was engraved with the name "Ada Green" but only unmarked "field stones" remained marking some of the depressions in the ground.

Ada Green was born March 13, 1890, and died June 13, 1981. Her parents were Benjamin Curry and Henrietta Snell. Benjmain Curry first purchased land in the area in 1885 and his descendants still reside very close to it. They had a child in about 1888 and Henrietta Snell's age was estimated in the 1910 census at 47, putting her birth around 1871.

One of the sons of Dennis Snell, James, was



unaccounted for in the 1880 census but resided in the area based on the 1884 voter registration poll. James' wife was named Henrietta, and perhaps they named their daughter the same, but no records exist for them for the 1880 census and no records exist at all for the 1890 census. James died in 1907, a widower, at 51 years of age.

Dennis Snell's sons James and Henson both died in 1907 and while James's death certificate listed Colesville, Henson's certificate listed Snelltown, which was the first mention of that term we found. In 1912, a local worker, Benjamin S. Powell, died in Colesville, and the place of burial was listed as Snell's Homestead. It makes sense that James and Henson were also buried on their family homestead cemetery along with many of their ancestors.

There is no doubt that this cemetery, in the Snell family since at least 1850, and still owned and managed by the Curry family, descendants of Dennis and Annie Snell, is a historic Black cemetery deserving of protection and acknowledgement.

Earl Levy

During the interviews with Mr. Levy in the 1980s, he said his great-grandfather's name was Dennis, who had been enslaved at some point in time. We haven't been able to adequately trace back his lineage, but we have no reason to doubt his statement. He lived in Snelltown from at least 1950 until his death in 1990. His mother's name was Carrie Davis and in the 1950 census Carrie was a widow with the last name of Hall. We would love to fill in the gaps if anyone has additional information.



(Top): The only legible headstone from the Snell cemetery. Ada (Curry) Green, whose mother was Henrietta Snell.

(Above): Snelltown families (circle in white) along Old Annapolis Road/Whiskey Bottom Road in the 1878 Hopkins Atlas.

Questions Remain

As with Early Levy's ancestors, there are still many lingering questions. Who are the parents of Henrietta Snell and is there any primary documentation for the other folks buried in the cemetery? Why were Dennis and Charles Snell listed as free Black men in the census before they officially got manumitted, or had they already lived as free men? Did Charles move to Elkrige and start the Snell family there? The history of Rev. James Nichols needs exploring, as well as how Colesville got its name. So many rabbit holes to go down but so many stories, as imperfect as they may be, that needed telling.



Read *Hidden History of Howard County* by Nathan Davis and Wayne Davis, published by The History Press, for more forgotten and hidden stories about Howard County.



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