

VOICES OF LAUREL



FREE

SPRING 2022
VOL. 2, NO. 2

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

Laurel, Minus Pasta Plus

Losing Another Longtime Favorite Restaurant

PAGE 10



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Voices of Laurel is published quarterly by The Laurel History Boys, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization utilizing archival preservation, photography, oral history, and presentations to convey the historical experiences of Laurel, Maryland. *Voices of Laurel* is designed to bring together a diverse group of contributors whose common interest is Laurel—whether it be through history, current events, culture, or nostalgia. Contributors are Laurel residents past and present from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. All submissions are voluntary. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the views or opinions of The Laurel History Boys, Inc.

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LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys

BY KEVIN LEONARD AND RICHARD FRIEND



The Laurel History Boys—Pete Lewnes, Kevin Leonard, and Richard Friend—during a regular meeting at Oliver's Old Towne Tavern. PHOTO BY COUNCILMAN MARTIN MITCHELL

We Met Some Interesting Folks with Stories

People tell us stories and share historical artifacts and photos that many times become the subject of an article in *Voices of Laurel* or on our website, or a post on social media. Here are a few recent examples:

- We met with Beth Lammers and Ruth Barton, sisters and descendants of the Hance family, who have roots in Laurel going back to the mid-1800s. The family owned one of the first general stores in Laurel. Their story will help us with our forthcoming book on the retail history of the area and we are preparing the photos they shared to be presented as a History Contributor page on our web site. Beth and Ruth also talked about Fairy Springs School (see page 16 in this issue), which generations of their family attended.
- Frequent contributor Fran Fliss and her friends Jill and Marty Goozman met with us to discuss the history of the Jewish community in Laurel, which will be a future “Laurel Chronicles” article and History Contributor page on our web site.
- One of our more unusual chats was with the investigators of Dead of Night Paranormal, who requested our assistance with information about some of the creepier history in Laurel. They are working with the proprietors of Laurel's House of Horror and are preparing to offer paranormal walking tours in Laurel. They have agreed to tell their story in a future issue of *Voices of Laurel*.

Presentations

Some of our recent and upcoming presentations:

- Howard County Historical Society: “Laurel Jazz & Pop Festivals”
- Fort Meade, 200th Military Police Command: “Fort Meade POWs in WWII”
- Rotary Club of Columbia/Patuxent: “Carol Replane Cold Case”

Upcoming:

- April 19: St. Paul's Lutheran Church Senior Fellowship: “Failed Mega-Projects”

Check our website (laurelhistory.com) for a complete list of presentation topics and the venues that have hosted us. All of our presentations are free of charge. As pandemic restrictions continue to ease, we look forward to more in-person events.

Website Updates

If you haven't visited in a while, you'll notice that laurelhistory.com has quite a design makeover! In addition to pages featuring our individual columns and content, we've expanded the site to highlight many of our projects and initiatives, including:

- A dedicated *Voices of Laurel* sub-site, where you can download complete digital issues as free PDFs
- A History Contributors section, where we feature vintage Laurel photos and artifacts shared by a diverse range of local collaborators
- The Elementary School Photo Project, which

- includes a growing number of vintage class photos
- An online shop, where you can purchase our books

Voices of Laurel Newspaper

Now into its second year of publishing, *Voices of Laurel* continues to grow—and we're still seeking anyone interested in contributing! If you have an idea for a story, let us know.

After learning that our newspapers were hard to find at the Laurel Library, (they're hidden in a side corridor) we offered to place an indoor newspaper rack in the lobby, but were denied. See Rich's editorial about this experience from his perspective as a former library employee on page 8. It includes a history of the library.

The free print edition will be available in newspaper boxes! You'll find them at the B&O Railroad Station commuter lot and in front of the Post Office on Main Street. Copies are also still available at the Laurel and Maryland City libraries, and at locally-owned small businesses that display our *Voices of Laurel* sticker in their windows, including More Than Java Cafe, Oliver's Old Towne Tavern, and Toucan Taco.



South Laurel

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



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE | SOUTHLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM

Spring is finally getting here! I don't know about you, but I'm quite ready to see some vibrant colors after months of brown grass, bare trees, and gray skies. Spring also is the time of year when community events and festivals start peppering our calendars. Let me know of any coming up in the South Laurel area and I'll give your group a shout-out.

Inspiring Uhuru Quilt Display to Return to Montpelier in July

Throughout the month of February and in honor of Black History Month, the Montpelier House Museum hosted a breathtaking exhibit of quilts crafted by members of the Uhuru Quilters Guild. Headquartered in Clinton, MD. The UQG promotes the work and accomplishments of African American quilters. The group was formed in 1994 and takes its name, Uhuru, from the Swahili word for "freedom."

The February display featured more than 50 quilts of varying sizes, patterns, and techniques. Some of the quilts fused traditional American quilting patterns, such as the "log cabin" or "flying geese" patterns, with colorful African fabrics similar to Kente cloth from Ghana, known for its brilliant colors and intricate designs.

Other quilters paid homage to famous African Americans, including Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., Aretha Franklin, Muhammad Ali, and Barack Obama, among others. Some quilts provided more personal glimpses by incorporating portraits of the quilter's own family members or showing their family tree. Varying techniques were used for the portrait squares, ranging from digitally scanned images printed on fabric, to piecework sewing, to hand embroidery.

One of the most riveting pieces on display was the "Say My Name" quilt created by Sandra M. Ealy. Featuring the hand-painted likenesses of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and George Floyd, the quilt has evolved, sadly, into a memorial wall as Ms. Ealy has added several more hand-stitched names over time, including Freddie Gray and Breonna Taylor.

Much as in an art museum, a card accompanied each quilt to give the title of the piece, the quilting artist's name, and some insight to the artist's inspiration for the piece. By the end of their walk through the exhibit, which stretched through every room of the mansion house's main floor, visitors were left with not only an admiration for the stunning pieces of art and the skills of their artists, but also a sense of the emotions and the sense of cultural unity, expressed through the needle.

If you missed the exhibit in February, no need to experience Fear Of Missing Out: the Uhuru Quilters Guild will hold another exhibit at Montpelier Mansion for the *entire month of July*. More info can be found at history.pg parks.com or by emailing montpeliermansion@pgparks.com.

Bingo Makes Post-Covid Return to Laurel Senior Friendship Club

For many Laurel seniors, March 1st was a day to celebrate the return of a long-time favorite social activity: weekly bingo at the Laurel-Beltsville Senior Activity Center (LBSAC). Sponsored by the Laurel Senior Friendship Club, the bingo was halted for two years because of Covid-19 shutdowns, but is now back up and running every Tuesday starting at noon; doors open at 11 am and the bingo usually lasts about three hours.

According to Gail Johnson, a leader from the Laurel Senior Friendship Club, the bingo serves as an important fundraiser for the club, which is in its 56th year. Players pay for strips of 3, 6, 9, or 12 cards; one cover-all game and 25 regular bingo games are on each week's program, as well as a 50/50 raffle and pull-tabs. No refreshments are sold, but players can bring their own pre-packaged snacks and drinks (no alcohol).

The Laurel Senior Friendship Club is open to Laurel residents 50 and older. Access to other LBSAC events is for those 60 and older who have a PG County Parks Direct card, available at the LBSAC and also online. Membership is free to PG and Montgomery County residents; residents of other counties can pay for a non-resident pass.



Rasta's Rule by Tametha C. Morrow, from the Uhuru Quilters Guild exhibit. DIANE MEZZANOTTE

Upcoming Events

Speaking of the Laurel Senior Friendship Club, they are sponsoring an Indoor Yard Sale on Saturday, May 14, from 9 to 1 at the LBSAC. Tables are available for \$25 for those wishing to sell items; no other fee is collected from sellers. The event will also feature a bake sale with items like cookies, brownies, soda, and water available for purchase. This is not a craft sale or a vendor showcase: it's a true "white elephant"-style yard sale, so do your spring cleanout and turn that neglected lamp, decorative pillow, or toy into money! Admission is free. Contact Barbara Dorney before May 7th to rent a table at 301-776-4046 or beedor7@gmail.com.

Two weeks prior to that, the Montpelier Festival of Herbs, Tea & the Arts will take place on Saturday, April 30, from 10 to 4 at Montpelier House Museum. Sample herbal teas, listen to guest speakers, and purchase tea and tea-related accessories from vendors. Admission is free. For more information, call 301-377-7817; TTY 301-699-2544; or email montpeliermansion@pgparks.com.

Diane Mezzanotte has lived in Laurel since 1987. A graduate of Penn State's School of Journalism, she is happy to return to writing "people stories" after retiring from a 34-year career with the Defense Department.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Russett/Maryland City

Local news covering the Russett and Maryland City areas



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



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

(Above left): Oxbow Nature Preserve. (Above right): the home of Mary Elizabeth Henson in Bacontown.

If You Lived in Russett You'd Know....

The Oxbow Nature Preserve is in the heart of the community, and Laurel Oxbow Lake is the largest naturally occurring body of fresh water in Maryland!

Oxbow is a hiker's paradise, with hiking trails nestled in natural wetlands, uplands, and lowland wooded swamps. Home to a specific aquatic ecosystem, naturalists have identified more than 150 species of birds here, including the bald eagle, little blue heron, egrets, ducks, and geese, along with coopers and red-shouldered hawks. Visitors to Oxbow might hear the high piping whistle of the northern spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), found in brushy second growth near ponds or wetlands.

Three turtle species make their home here: the eastern painted turtle, red-bellied slider, and the giant snapping turtle. More than 100 native vascular plant species have been identified at the preserve, including rare species such as the water-shield (*Brasenia schreberi*) and dodder (*Cuscuta polygonorum*). It is also home to the popular wildflower, blue-flag iris, and cardinal flowers.

The hours of operation are dawn to dusk, and the cost is free. Oxbow is located in a residential neighborhood, so please be on your best behavior and avoid disturbing the residents.

If you decide to visit, take a companion, bring a spotting scope, use tick protection, wear sturdy waterproof hiking boots, and consider bringing a hiking stick for muddy and steep slopes. There are no restrooms.

For more information, visit: www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/preserve-visitors-guide-oxbow-nature-preserve.pdf.

Maryland City is Home to Historic Bacontown

Bacontown is a small mid-nineteenth-century African American community located east of Laurel, named after former slave Maria Bacon. Bacon was deeded 30 acres of land along Whiskey Bottom Road by Achsah Dorsey after being freed from slavery in 1860. It is believed that Bacon already lived in a house on the property shared with her three children; other manumitted Dorsey slaves joined her later. Her home became the heart of

the tiny hamlet that would grow into the community of Bacontown.

Designated as "direct byproducts of the African American experience in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Anne Arundel County," Bacontown was listed as a historical landmark by the Maryland Historical Trust in the early 1990s.

The historic location constitutes a small two-story board and batten dwelling constructed circa 1870, which belonged to Mary Elizabeth Henson, daughter of Maria Bacon. The Mt. Zion Church was built in 1913 to replace an earlier log church and St. Jacob's Lodge, Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham. Each holds historical significance as a representation of African American communities in Anne Arundel County. Bacontown is one of a handful of free-Black communities that have survived and maintained their identity.

Annual Community Wide Yard Sale at Russett Community Center

Sat., May 14 / 9 am-1 pm
3500 Russett Common
Come early for best bargains!

Spotlight on Russett Resident

Elizabeth Leight, a Russett resident, is well-known in the county and community. As a columnist for the *Capital Gazette*, she covered Jessup, Laurel, Maryland City, Odenton, and Russett. Her article "Russett at 30: Where Nature is Part of the Plan," in this issue of *Voices of Laurel* on page 26, chronicles the beginning of Russett. Elizabeth is currently writing a book based on her experiences as a volunteer in the community and as a neighborhood newspaper reporter and photographer.



Brenda Zeigler-Riley is a 15-year resident of Russett, 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.

West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM

Hello! Allow me to introduce myself. I am a native of Laurel and grew up in the section known as Laurel Hills (about 10 blocks up Montrose Ave from the old Laurel Shopping Center). My parents said they bought the house there because it was close to everything so we could walk. I walked to Margaret A. Edmonston Elementary School (where the auditorium is now located), Laurel Junior High (where the city offices are now located), and Laurel High School. The neighborhood was decent and safe (middle, middle-class), and there were sidewalks so there was no reason not to walk, right? A major form of “entertainment” was to walk to the shopping center, even if we did not buy anything. It was a reason to get out of the house. However, as a walker, there was no excuse for being late to school either. There was no bus to miss! We could also stay after school anytime we wanted because we would not need a ride home. I was in band and marching band in high school, so I could take my time leaving school if there was band business to attend to.

My family hosted exchange students through the American Field Service (AFS) while I was in school, so, naturally, I wanted to go abroad too. After I graduated from Laurel High School in 1975, I spent a year in Sweden—on a potato farm. (Ironically, in my high school yearbook I had written that I wanted to live on a farm someday.) It was very different from suburban life and took some adjustment, but it was an experience I would recommend to anyone. One thing I discovered about myself during this time was that I had an aptitude for learning languages, which I grew to love, along with my passion for writing. This eventually turned into a long career, combining the two skill sets. (When my youngest decided to study Russian in college, she said it was because that was a language her mother had not studied.)

I moved to Ellicott City in 1986, quite randomly because that was where my first husband and I found a house we could afford under a time crunch. I grew to love the area but kept my doctors

and church in Laurel, since my parents still lived there. My children were all raised in Howard County, which turned out to be a blessing because of the Special Education program there. My oldest daughter, Lydia, has a moderate-to-severe intellectual disability; through her I have learned things I never knew I would have to know and met people I never would have met. I stayed in Ellicott City until I took a job out of state in 2014—which was disastrous. After three years back in Maryland, my husband, Russ, and I bought a house in West Laurel in 2018—also quite randomly. I was excited because I had always envied the kids in school who lived out here. (The yards were larger, and there was more space between the houses.) We had been looking for a house with a layout that would be appropriate for Lydia, and this was where we found one. One of the beauties of the area is that it is quiet, but it is close to everything. I have several routes I could take to work, and I can take back roads when the main ones are congested, as long as I watch for deer.

I frequently tell my family stories about how things used to be in Laurel, when there was nothing but open space between Laurel and Beltsville. I also remember when George Wallace was shot in front of the bank my parents used; my biggest worry then was the fact that there was a carnival in town and I was not allowed to go because of the shooting. Back then, I had no interest in politics or anything else that was abstract to me, so the severity of the act did not register with me. However, I remember feeling relieved when I learned that the shooter had not been someone from Laurel. I remember shopping at Polan's on Main Street and at Kresge's and Woolworth's in the shopping center. Those were big stores you could get lost in when I was a kid!

I remember when the Supplee Lane picnic area opened, but I am sure it looks different now. I have only been to the boat ramp in recent years. We live a few



One West Laurel resident added a helpful instructional sign for drivers who find themselves lost on a dead end residential street. Can't find Supplee Lane? Google it.

PHOTOS BY RUSS GEIS



miles from Supplee Lane, but people drive down our dead-end street frequently looking for the reservoir and the picnic area. One resident has even put up a sign instructing people to “Google Supplee Lane”—we see cars drive down the street and then see them come back out. My husband usually chuckles about it, since there is a clear sign that says “Dead End.”

However, although the West Laurel column is supposed to be about the people, it is not intended to be all about me. The aim of this column is to talk about the community of the West Laurel/Bond Mill area of Laurel. (There are several neighborhoods with names usually tied to families who owned the land before it was developed.) This will include news about the neighborhoods, public service announcements, upcoming events, milestones, and anything else readers deem appropriate. I am also happy to re-print items from

the West Laurel Civic Association (WLCA) newsletter. The event can be a community-specific or something for a broader area, such as a reunion or other significant event, either before or afterward. Is there an unsung hero you want to spotlight?

The WLCA has tentatively scheduled an American Red Cross blood drive:

When: Tuesday, May 17, 2-7pm

Where: Howard Duckett Rec Center, 16601 Supplee Lane, Laurel, MD 20707.

Please check the WLCA Facebook page for updates on this event.

How 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.

COMMUNITY

Laurel Loves Eggnog

And Other Recipe Reflections from the Laurel Museum



BY ANN BENNETT

The Laurel Historical Society opened its new exhibit *What's Cookin', Laurel? Restaurants, Recipes, and Community* in February 2022, but we have been researching and designing the exhibit since last year. As part of that research process, we knew we wanted to compile a companion cookbook to the exhibit. Even before the exhibit opened, we put out the call for donations of old cookbooks and recipes with a story. And we were not disappointed by the response!

We have about 25 cookbooks in our permanent collection, but with new donations and items on loan, the total for our cookbook display reached almost 60 books, with another two dozen recipes submitted! (We're still on the lookout for recipes, so be sure to send yours in!) But one recipe in particular kept popping up: eggnog. Yes, Laurel loves its eggnog.

Eggnog appeared in two different recipes in the oldest cookbook in our permanent collection, the 1899 *Rural Cook Book and Housekeeper's Help* from the Ladies Aid Society at St. Philip's Episcopal Church. Both recipes are written in the older paragraph form, without ingredients listed separately; one recipe includes Madeira, a fortified wine popular in America before Prohibition. Eggnog skips an appearance in the 1944 edition of St. Philip's cookbook, but comes back in 1976 with a recipe from the Wysongs entitled "Eggnog—Couples Club Christmas Party at the Rectory." Does anyone remember those parties? We'd love to hear some stories!

The folks at St. Philip's weren't the only ones having fun with eggnog. Recipes appear in *Burnt Offerings* from the First Methodist Church and *Friendship Recipes* from St. Mary of the Mills Catholic Church. Although undated, both of these cookbooks are from the 1960s and both feature an unusual addition to the recipe: fruit juice!

Another item in our collection is a small flier advertising the Laurel Hotel that was located at 301 Main Street, and features a recipe for "Good Old Fashioned Egg-Nog" with a fifth each of brandy and rum. Two recipes previously submitted to us are from the Wellford and Martin families. Juanita Wellford's recipe indicated that whiskey or rum were optional, while the Martin recipe is attributed to Brick Martin, general manager at the Laurel Race Track, and includes bourbon, rum, and brandy.

Three more recipes

appear in cookbooks from the 1960s through the 1990s, including "Eggnog, Maryland," an old recipe from the Snowden family of Montpelier that appeared in both *Mother Had a Way with Food* (1968) and *Montpelier Mansion: A Taste of Hospitality* (1983), featuring rum and brandy. In 1974, "Westmoreland Club Eggnog" appeared in the American Field Service cookbook *What's Cooking in Laurel*. This recipe's journey to Laurel is interesting because the Westmoreland Club was a gentleman's club founded in 1877 in Richmond, Virginia, which merged with another club in 1937 during the Great Depression. And in 1994, the Laurel Senior Friendship Club cookbook featured two recipes for eggnog, both reflecting modern tastes and conveniences such as artificial sweetener in the place of sugar, and ice cream to replace much of the heavy cream.

But perhaps the most legendary eggnog story of Laurel belongs to the Chapman-Scagliarini family. Their "Aged Eggnog" recipe has been around since the 1930s, when Kathryn Meehan Chapman, mother of Virginia Chapman Scagliarini, shared the drink with residents, business owners, and even the nuns at St. Mildred's Academy. Kathryn's original recipe called for 6 dozen eggs and fifths of brandy, rye, and rum. The ingredients were put in a 5-gallon stoneware crock and started aging at Thanksgiving for enjoyment over the Christmas holiday—the longer the mixture sat, the stronger it got! Over the years, ice cream was added in place of some of the milk and cream and different proportions of liquor were used. When you stop by the Laurel Museum to view the exhibit, you'll see the Chapman-Scagliarini crock and original recipe on display, courtesy of Tracy Scagliarini and her dedication to preserving the story of this unique eggnog recipe.

Looking through old cookbooks and recipes is a great way to understand changing tastes over time, as new ingredients, equipment, and technology influences what we eat. In these community cookbooks, you'll find both trendy and tried-and-true recipes, with a large focus on convenience and tradition. One recipe in particular stood out: "Nena's Cold Oven Pound Cake" from *God's Great Gallery Vacation Bible School Cookbook* from St. Mark's United Methodist Church (2002). It comes from Mrs. Mildred Awkward, whose grandchildren and great-grandchildren affectionately call her Nena. At 97 years old, Mrs. Awkward just took part in our recent webinar on "Food and Faith at St. Mark's and The Grove" (it's on our YouTube channel—

LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

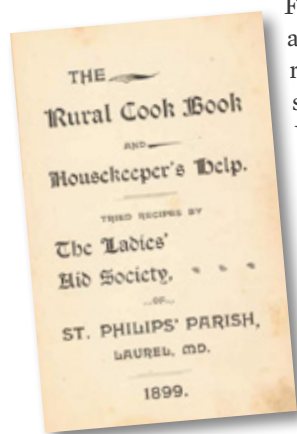


check it out!). Pound cakes are a classic Southern recipe, and recipes of this type date back to the early uses of gas ovens at the turn of the 20th century. Starting in a cold oven was not only a way to save gas, but along with beating the eggs slowly, and baking "low and slow" helped the cake to rise evenly and remain dense.

What's Cookin', Laurel? is open Friday-Saturday-Sunday, 12–4 pm, with free admission. Stop by for a healthy serving of nostalgia, recipe inspiration, and historical tidbits on your favorite foods and restaurants. And we're always looking for volunteers to help out at the front desk and are still collecting recipes, so please email me at director@laurelhistoricalsociety.org or call the Museum at 301-725-7975 if you want to help out!

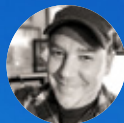
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Ann Bennett is an archaeologist, educator, and living historian who loves historic sewing, hearth cooking, kayaking, and crossword puzzles. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Laurel Historical Society and as a Director for the Laurel Board of Trade.



Dude, Where's My Library?

The Changing Character of the Laurel Branch



BY RICHARD FRIEND



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: RICHARD FRIEND

I have a bone to pick with the Laurel Library. It pains me to say that, because this library has always been a very special place for me, and frankly, it's the last place I thought I'd ever be disappointed in. But much like the *Laurel Leader*, which has become a shell of itself in the wake of a corporate takeover, the Prince George's County Memorial Library System seems to be allowing bureaucracy to strip its local branches of the very important community connection they'd enjoyed for decades.

Like many of you, I practically grew up at the library as a child of the 1980s—doing homework with the aid of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and other reference books in the years before any of us could even dream of something called “the internet.”

My fondness for this place only grew when I started my very first part time job there as a clerical aide at only 14 years old—a job I enjoyed so much, I ended up keeping it all through high school and college.

Years later, long after I'd gotten married and relocated to Northern Virginia, the library again became a valuable resource for me in creating my *Lost Laurel*

website and book. For weeks, I drove to Laurel each Saturday to spend a few hours researching the back issue *Laurel Leader* newspapers that the library had kept for decades in both hard copy and on microfilm.

It was while researching those old newspapers back in 2012 that I noticed a few changes since the last time I'd visited the library some fifteen years earlier. That was to be expected, I figured—change is inevitable. First, there was only one staff member remaining from my days as an employee. The rest had relocated, retired, or sadly passed away. The new librarians (new to me, at least) were very friendly and helpful, but what they conveyed was curious: they couldn't recall anyone else ever having come in to research those old newspapers, let alone use the microfilm machine. In fact, on several occasions, bewildered patrons noticed me going through the oversized bound newspapers and stopped to ask what they were, exactly. They thought I was extremely poor-sighted and that these were ridiculously large print books! We laughed, and then they were pleasantly surprised to learn that original *Laurel Leader* newspapers from the 1950s and earlier

were actually available to peruse at the library. They'd had no idea.

That priceless newspaper archive was thankfully transferred to the Laurel Museum when the library closed temporarily during construction of its new building in 2014, along with its vast vertical file collection, local school yearbooks, and anything else directly related to local history. At the time, I remember thinking it odd that the library would suddenly decide to part with those materials despite having kept them for so many years. I was relieved that they weren't throwing them away, but saddened to realize that without them, I probably wouldn't have any reason to visit the library anymore.

I did return for the grand opening of the new building in 2016, of course. But in hindsight, that was really a turning point. Like many who eagerly explored the beautiful new facility that day, the first thought I had was, “Wait... what happened to all the *books*?”

I'm getting a little ahead of myself here, though—you're probably wondering what my gripe with the library is all about. It actually has to do with this very

newspaper. If you've been following *Voices of Laurel* since our first quarterly issue in January 2020, you know that we chose locally-owned small businesses as places where you could pick up a free copy of the newspaper. Our idea was that this would help promote foot traffic to those businesses during the worst of the pandemic. As COVID's grip loosened somewhat with the growing number of vaccinations in the area, we planned to begin shifting more newspapers into a single, more accessible location—and the Laurel Library seemed like the natural solution.

After confirming that the branch would distribute the paper, I would routinely drop off a bundle personally with each new release and stop by in a few weeks to replenish the supply. However, it wasn't until our last issue that I finally inquired about where, exactly, the newspapers were being placed in the library—because unlike in the Maryland City and Savage libraries, I hadn't seen them anywhere, and others had expressed difficulty locating them. A circulation assistant took me out to the main lobby and into a small corridor that houses vending machines. Hidden there is a countertop that holds the library's "giveaways"—free newspapers and other publications. Here, she explained, is where they put "all this kind of stuff."

I left that day with the idea that a small, indoor wire newspaper rack would be ideal for the lobby or entrance vestibule, both of which are otherwise empty. I purchased a rack, and emailed a photo of it to Laurel Branch Area Assistant Karin Luoma, explaining that The Laurel History Boys would like to place it someplace near the front entrance where it would be unobtrusive, but still more readily visible and accessible to patrons looking for *Voices of Laurel*. I assured her that we would maintain it ourselves and make sure that the supply is replenished weekly.

She replied rather cryptically:

"I appreciate your request and offer of a storage holder for the Voices of Laurel newspaper. However, our customers are now able to find the Voices of Laurel newspaper so much that we often run out of copies before the next issue is received."

On the one hand, I was glad to hear that the newspapers were being taken, because even that information had been difficult to come by. Each time I'd dropped off additional copies, no one could definitively tell me whether we'd been giving them too many copies or too few. On the other hand, her response didn't answer my question of whether we could place the rack in the lobby, and she didn't respond to a follow up email.

When the new issue was printed in January, Kevin Leonard and I showed up at the library to deliver a supply, and brought the newspaper rack with us in hopes of using it to start promoting *Voices of Laurel* with a new, more prominent pickup point. We met Karin that day, and it quickly became apparent that we would *not* be placing the rack in the library after all. Despite several ideal locations, she explained that the library wouldn't allow anything that would "clutter" the space.

While I assumed it wasn't her decision to make, I found it disheartening that anyone in a managerial position at the Laurel Branch wouldn't do more to help

under the circumstances, especially with *Voices of Laurel* being an entirely volunteer effort produced by many within the Laurel community—and particularly in light of the *Laurel Leader's* demise as a community newspaper, now devoid of any local input.

On the drive home that evening, I realized that this actually wasn't the first time in recent years that I'd experienced this surprising lack of community awareness from those now running the Laurel Library. I recalled the bureaucratic hoops I had to jump through just to donate copies of my first book, *Lost Laurel*, to the branch. The lengthy process involved me mailing copies of the book to the PGCMLS administrative offices in Largo myself, and waiting to be notified if they chose to accept them. I felt that the Laurel Library itself should have advocated for something like that.

I finally saw my books on the shelf the day the new building opened in 2016, and enjoyed ceremonially re-shelving them as I had done so many years ago as a clerical aide in the old building. But the experience left me with the distinct feeling that this was not the same library that I had known and loved. This was more bureaucratic—a satellite office of a large corporation, rather than a community-run library branch that knew and related to its hometown patrons.

How did this happen?

When did it happen? To more closely examine the changing landscape of the Laurel Library, let's take a brief look back at its full history.

Library Origins

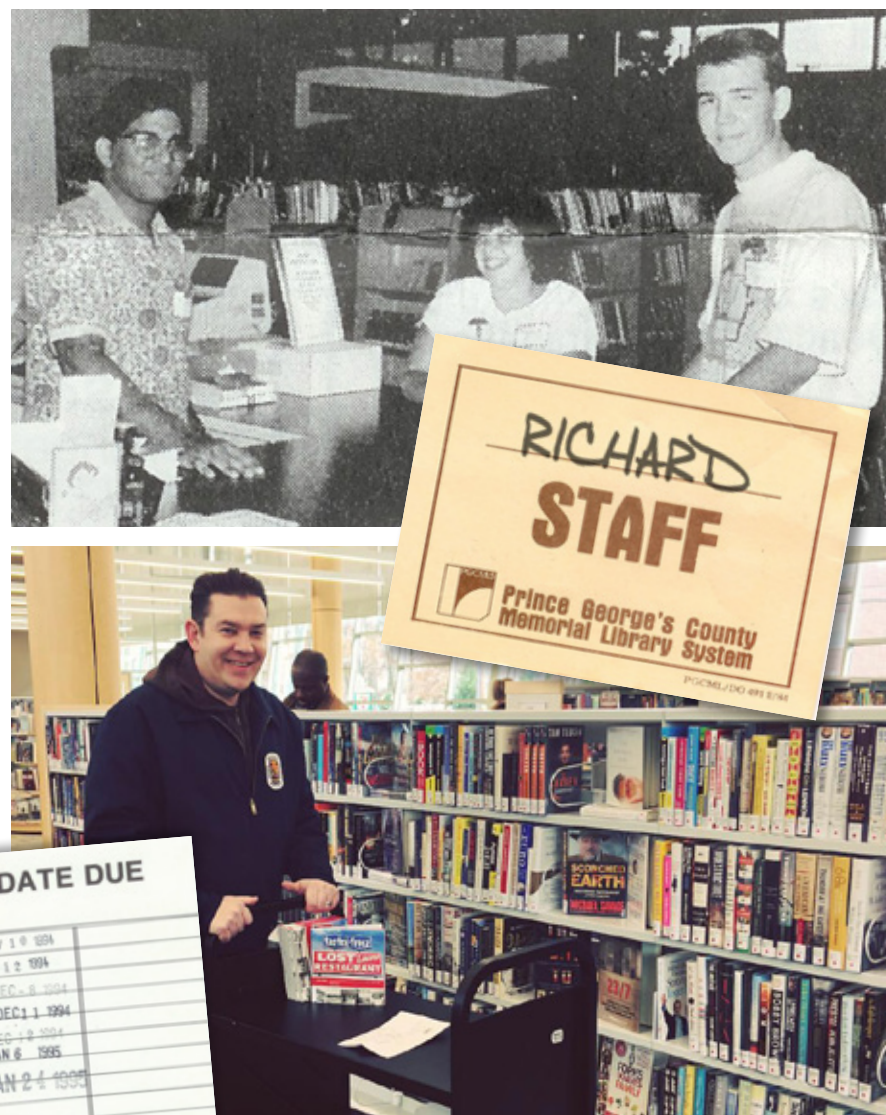
More than half a century before its original construction at the corner of Seventh Street and Talbott Avenue, the Laurel Free Public Library opened in 1916 in the Patuxent Bank building in two rooms on the floor above the Post Office. Maintained by the Laurel Library Association, members were charged \$1 per year. The library faced constant financial problems paying its rent until 1929, when it relocated to donated space at 384 Main Street—a two-room, one-story frame building less than a thousand feet in size that it shared with the Woman's Club of Laurel, which remains there today as the sole occupant. The Laurel Library became the first branch to join the Prince George's County Memorial Library System when it was organized in 1946.

Seventh and Talbott

The first library built at Seventh Street and Talbott Avenue, christened the Stanley Memorial Library after the land it sat upon was donated by the family of Charles H. Stanley, began construction in 1965 and was completed two years later by the Weiss Construction Company of Washington, DC for \$219,200. It was designed by a young architect named Charles D. Belinky, A.I.A., who tragically died just six years later at age 42. The dedication was held on May 7, 1967, and speakers in attendance included Gladys Spellman (a Laurel resident and then-chairwoman of the Prince George's County Commissioners, later to become a U.S. Congresswoman) and Mayor Merrill L. Harrison.

Local residents still recall the excitement of the modern new library and some of its innovative programs that went beyond just lending books. For a time, artwork—actual framed reproductions of paintings—could be checked out. Several folks who'd been kids in the late 1960s remember their parents coming home with a new painting to hang on the living room wall every couple of weeks, courtesy of the Laurel Library.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 32](#)



(Top): Clerical aides Sujith Vijayan, Nancy Iliff, and Richard Friend at the Laurel Library 1993 expansion dedication. (Bottom): Friend at the 2016 grand opening of the new library, where he placed donated copies of his first book, *Lost Laurel*, on the shelves.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RICHARD FRIEND



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAZZIOTTI FAMILY

Goodbye Pasta Plus



BY KEVIN LEONARD

From the bottom of our hearts—thank you to our customers, thank you to the City of Laurel, and thank you to the Pasta Plus team. You all have made our dream possible.

Ciao!

With those words on their website, brothers Max and Sabatino Mazzioti ended their remarkable 39-year run operating one of the premier Italian restaurants in the Baltimore/Washington area. Since opening in 1983, Pasta Plus has been a Laurel favorite, with diners lined up out the door and stretching down the sidewalk, wishing the restaurant took reservations.

Unlike so many other restaurants that didn't survive the pandemic, Max, 79, and Sabatino, 76, are going out on their own terms. As we sat recently in the empty restaurant and looked back on the years, the brothers made it clear that

they were ready for retirement. Their business not only survived the pandemic, but thrived by adapting to the times.

Terrifying Introduction to the U.S.

The original family business was making sweaters in a shop in Abruzzo, a region in Southern Italy that is due east of Rome. Their father, however, was a stonemason who talked frequently of emigrating to the United States, where he claimed workers could secure a “pension,” the brothers said, smiling. His dream came true in 1968 when the family moved to Washington, DC. Their timing was unfortunate since the move came just weeks before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. With a rudimentary command of the English language, understanding the political turmoil and rioting was a difficult introduction to their new country. Then, when Sabatino

was mugged and slashed, the brothers wondered why they had left Italy.

For the next five years, the brothers worked at various restaurants in Washington, DC, learning the business as well as the language. Sabatino became a chef and worked at the Madison and Shoreham hotels and the Pisces Club. Max started out waiting tables at Cantania d'Italia and worked his way up to dining room captain at Lion d'Or.

Striking Out on Their Own

The brothers started thinking about opening their own restaurant in the early 1980s. Their dream was to open a restaurant in Washington, DC, but the real estate prices made that prohibitive. As Max told writer Tony Glaros in *Ambassador* magazine, “I was reading *The Washington Post* one Sunday morning, [and] I saw where there was a

carryout for sale in a town called Laurel. I had never heard of the place, but Sabatino and I drove up there.”

The carryout for sale was the former Storm Inn in a small strip mall between the southbound and northbound Route 1 on Gorman Avenue, behind Arby's. After a one-week delay when a huge snowstorm paralyzed Laurel, Pasta Plus opened its doors in February 1983.

The restaurant was such a success that within a few years the Mazziotis were looking to expand beyond the confines of the old Storm Inn, but the rest of the strip mall was occupied. They found a new location in the Free State Mall in Bowie that fit their requirements and prepared to open a second restaurant. But, as Max tells the story, the day they signed the lease for the Bowie restaurant, the storefront next to Pasta Plus, which housed a bank, came up for lease.



Max and Sabatino Mazziotti pose inside their restaurant just a few weeks after closing. The brothers spent 39 years making Pasta Plus one of Laurel's most beloved restaurants of all time. PHOTO BY KEVIN LEONARD

"If we'd only waited one more day," Max said, his voice trailing off. They leased it anyway and expanded the dining room.

Their second restaurant, Mare e Monti, opened in Bowie in 1987. Chef Sabatino ran the Bowie location, while Max stayed and ran Pasta Plus in Laurel. Mare e Monti was a mild success but paled in comparison to the customers lining up at Pasta Plus nearly every night. The brothers closed the Bowie restaurant in 2002 and Sabatino returned to Laurel.

In 1997 the storefront on the other side came up for lease and the brothers used the space to open a market and carryout counter. It also allowed them to expand the kitchen.

All this success exposed a glaring problem at the small strip mall: a lack of parking. Even though Pasta Plus now occupied three of the seven storefronts in the strip mall, the other businesses and Arby's all shared the small parking lot with the restaurant. It got so bad that the brothers were considering moving to a larger location. But the solution arrived about 15 years ago, when the entire strip mall came up for sale. The Mazziottis crunched the numbers and decided the investment was worth it—they bought the entire strip mall and, through attrition, didn't lease the storefronts once the businesses vacated or went out of business. The only business that has shared the parking lot for years has been Arby's.

Dedicated Clientele

Pasta Plus enjoyed a sizable number

of dedicated customers, in large part because of the atmosphere created by the Mazziottis. For the past 20-some years, the brothers have organized tours of Italy and accompanied around 30 lucky customers each year. Max worked with the destination restaurants in advance to prepare menus for the tour, and the groups also toured Italian vineyards. They proudly showed off a collage of photos from their Italian tours in a large frame in the restaurant's vestibule.

The brothers talked about the various people from out of town who visited the restaurant whenever they were in Laurel—some from as far away as their hometown of Abruzzo. There were some notable dedicated customers as well: famed restaurateur Duke Ziebert was a frequent guest, as was former Washington Redskin Larry Brown. They smiled when they talked about Phyllis Diller stopping in after her show at Petrucci's Dinner Theater. Sabatino remembered Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's cousin frequently stopped for takeout to bring to the Justice.

Thriving in Hard Times

When the state issued its stay-at-home order in 2020 to combat the pandemic, Pasta Plus—and all other restaurants—closed for months. Max told Glaros that he "went home. To rest. To refresh. To finally have the time to enjoy long naps. Most importantly, to spend time with Rosa, my beloved wife."

But his respite didn't last long. When the restrictions allowed limited

Say It Ain't So!

By C. Philip Nichols

I am heartbroken but I do not look hungry thanks in large measure to the now shuttered Pasta Plus.

It was the place, Laurel's claim to regional epicurean delight. People spoke openly of its high standing in the way of restaurants around Washington. A place where everyone was made to feel comfortable by Max and Sabatino, the proprietors. A place when you would run into the parish priest, Father Anthony, or the late Judge Jacob S. Levin, a man who loved the law and really good Italian. A place where you could take your daughter, the definition of a finicky eater and she left full and satisfied. The ambiance and the food said it all. Where even basic spaghetti and meat sauce took on a taste of heaven. You were not just their customer, you were their friend and every now again a free desert came your way.

When they reopened after Covid and only did carryout, the line grew and the "Laurel PBS crowd" was there with 70ish men with pony tails walking in circles talking to themselves saying, "Where is my dinner? Where is my Pasta Plus!"

It was a place where you could fall in love with not just pasta.

Farewell Max, farewell Sabatino... we love you, your food, your kindness...we shall all miss you...especially at dinner time.

C. Philip Nichols, Jr., served as the 19th Chief Judge of the Seventh Judicial Circuit of Maryland and is a Laurel native.

seating and take-out service, dedicated customers made the curbside take-out at Pasta Plus an instant hit. Max continued the emphasis on customer service by delivering some orders himself to waiting cars. Sabatino described how the carryout and catering business during Covid outpaced the carryout kitchen on the market side.

The worker shortage that has been reported during the pandemic has hit Pasta Plus as well—but for a slightly different reason. Max and Sabatino have high standards there, as well. It was also a factor in their decision to close.

What's Next for Pasta Plus?

Max and Sabatino have been actively looking for a buyer, but, as Max said to me, "They have to be the right people,"

meaning someone who will continue to operate an Italian restaurant that lives up to the very high standards of Pasta Plus. Unfortunately, there is no one in the family's younger generation interested in carrying on the business.

I asked them if they had any parting message for their customers.

"We tried to do the best to please our customers," said Max. And Sabatino added, "Thanks, everybody, for supporting us."

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.

The Power of Hope

Thoughts for Discussion



BY LENDA DINCER

Never underestimate the power of hope, even if we have to start with the hope to have hope.

This determination speaks to the quiet part our strength. It may start with a promise that we make to someone or ourselves. It may even be a promise that we make to our higher power. In turn, this becomes the ultimate commitment. This is the part of our core that makes us resilient.

Sometimes, the only way to hold to something is by letting go. At first, it may seem like we're giving up.

We may get depressed and feel like a burden. We may believe we don't deserve to get help and consider or attempt suicide or turn to drugs and/or alcohol.

Even the people who love us the most can feel guilty and ashamed in getting angry with their loved one due to the demands of being the caregiver.

We may feel abandoned, betrayed, hurt, angry, and confused. The pain is overwhelming for everyone. Depending on the type of injuries and family dynamics, guilt, empathy, and compassion can be used as a bridge to help connect or re-connect people with a brain injury and their caregivers.

For anyone who's been affected by a brain injury, it's never an individual problem. It's a family problem. Having the right support for everyone is essential.

Building trust is necessary. It gives people the courage to believe in themselves and each other. They can get the help they need, join a support group, try new things, reconnect with people they love, and start new relationships.

Anything people give their time and attention to will grow stronger in their lives. Investing in recovery will help people feel more confident, start having peace, and begin to see happiness.

We all have a story. When we start sharing our personal lives, we're inviting you into our private world. Our journey to heal is underway.

When we write our narratives, it's helpful to ask ourselves:

- What was the turning point in my life that made me decide to get help?
- What do I have now that I didn't have

before?

- In what ways am I still the same?
- Where do I believe I did not receive the right support and why?
- Where do I believe I did receive the right support and why?
- What would I like to pass on to other people in my situation?
- What keeps me going?
- What would happen if I didn't keep going?
- As a sibling, how will I be prepared to be the primary caregiver?

The use of metaphors and mapping can be a helpful technique. The person with a brain injury and their family can act as their own reporter or detective. Since they know what they're going through, they would know what questions to ask. They are their own expert witness. However, this will depend on some factors such as: the type and degree of injury and level of depression.

Families can unite and challenge the brain injury. It's important to recognize that the brain injury is the problem, not the person. Calling it "the brain injury" shows separation. Taking a stand against "the brain injury," is a way to take control and responsibility for our actions.

Some questions they could ask are:

- How do I know when the injury is trying to control me?
- How do I negotiate with the brain injury?
- What will happen if I let the injury take control?
- What will happen if I take control?
- How do I know when I have taken control of myself?
- What did the injury not take away from me?
- What did the injury give me that I didn't have before?

Using integrative systems can help with treatment engagement and success such as having guest speakers, in-services, alumni or peer mentoring, support groups for everyone involved, cultural components, family ties, community involvement, recreation centers, religious or spiritual involvement, hobbies, employment, or



ILLUSTRATION BY MONICA STURDIVANT

volunteer work.

Also, when considering continuity of treatment, it's important to acknowledge whether there was any type of communication between sessions (phone, email, text) with providers or peers, and if there were breaks, the reason(s), and length of time. Also, it's important to ask how you spent your time, if you had support, thoughts about your future, your relationships, finding something meaningful like a hobby, project (individual, family or group project), connecting with your values, self-esteem, thoughts about engaging with a support system.

Implementing strategic measures through the media, legislation, schools, police departments, sports teams, and celebrity advocates can help heighten public awareness.

The use of art therapy can be a creative outlet in expressing ourselves. It allows us to tap into our psyche and help us to become more mindful and help increase our confidence. Some examples of art therapy: narratives and metaphors, poetry, storytelling, drama therapy (role playing and role reversal), play-back theatre, movement/yoga and dance therapy, videos, scrapbooking,

photography, drawing, painting with brief stories, captions, and/or positive affirmations. Using mirrors and video recorders can also be used as a method to practice working on self-awareness and social skills.

Practicing holistic healing can be a very valuable approach in our lives. Holistic health treats the "whole" person, not just symptoms and the disease. The underlying problems are assessed. There's collaboration from a multi-disciplinary treatment team who focuses on different areas for improvement.

This is a person and family centered model that's individually tailored to meet their needs, emotionally, cognitively, and socially. It's a journey towards independence while restoring balance and harmony in one's life.

We must always remember the resiliency of the human spirit.

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Laurel resident Lenda Dincer is a social worker with a background in mental health. She has published poems in Brainline Military Magazine about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and brain injuries.

COMMUNITY

Pallotti Graduate Illustrates Children's Book



BY RACHEL PODORSKI OROZCO

Ian Springer, Jr., from Pallotti's Class of 2016, made headlines this year when he announced his first published work as an illustrator for a children's book entitled *Jasmin Pictures Home*. He attended a career fair at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), where he is currently a senior pursuing an Illustration degree. It was at this career fair that he was recommended by his professor to apply for an interview with Shout Mouse Press, a publishing organization currently working on a series of children's books for marginalized youth.

After two rounds of interviews with Shout Mouse Press, Ian was offered a job as an illustrator for the company. The entire process of creating and illustrating the piece took about four months. Ian began with rough layouts for each page as well as designs for individual characters, researched different cultures featured in the book, and made the authors' vision come to life. Now that the project is complete, Ian reflects on his favorite aspect, saying that the visual research about all the cultures featured in the book was the best part for him. He learned a great deal on other countries and how to incorporate different visual elements to have his artwork be "as authentic as possible," stating that he "wanted kids to be able to relate to the main characters in some way."

Now a published illustrator, Ian has always had artistic career aspirations, finding his passion for design at a young age. He found that he wanted to pursue this career path when he learned of his ability to "promote positivity and creativity within" his work, finding inspiration from companies like Disney and Dreamworks, and support from his family to work towards his goals from a young age.

Having attended Pallotti, he took Graphic Designs and Arts Foundations classes, where he believes the foundation for his artistic aspirations was set. He says that he didn't know it while he was still a student at Pallotti, but much of what he learned helped to push him towards his goal of being an illustrator. A moment from high school he always carries is when his Art teacher at Pallotti, Mrs. Sharon Sefton, told his class, "draw what you see, not what you think you see." Ian says he has remembered this phrase all throughout his time in college. Of Mrs. Sefton, he says, "Those words helped me to grow as an artist and I think are very important when wanting to pursue art as a career. I definitely want to thank her for that!"

Now a student at MICA, Ian had transferred from Howard Community College, where he credits his professors there for their assistance in honing his skills and

building his confidence as a rising artist. Though still a student, Ian is officially a published illustrator, as well as a business owner, running Immaculate Studios, an ecommerce business where he creates commissioned artwork for clients. So far, he has done work for Clarins Skincare and Makeup, Displate, The American Diabetes Association, and even Pallotti. He's created many commissioned pieces for members of the Pallotti community, and offers his services on his website, is-studios.com.

With graduation and a degree on the horizon, Ian sees his goals as twofold: short-term and long-term. For short-term, he wants to continue with his book and novel illustration work, as well as storyboarding for shows and editorial illustrations. As for the long-term, he'd like to create his very own worldwide entertainment company that uses illustrations and motion graphics to entertain audiences and promote outreach.

As for upcoming projects, Ian is currently working on a children's trading card game where he's responsible for illustrating over 80 individual cards, along with packaging and promotional materials, with a goal to release in late 2022 or early 2023. We're looking forward to seeing more of Ian's work as the years come.

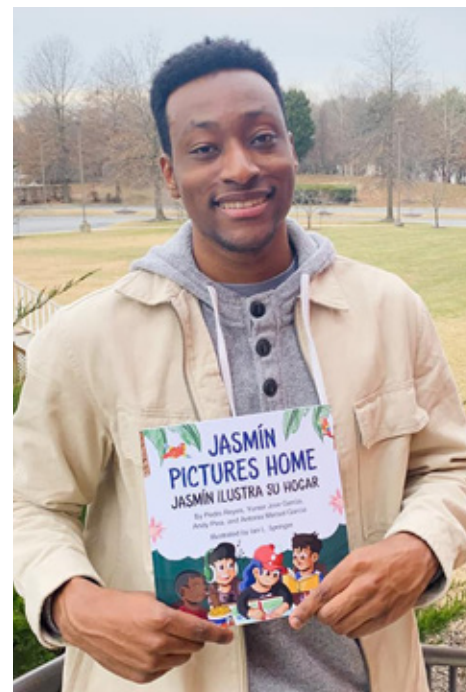


PHOTO COURTESY OF RACHEL PODORSKI OROZCO

Rachel Podorski Orozco, lifelong member of the Pallotti community, serves as the school's Assistant Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations.

Look to Laurel Patch for Local News

BY MADISON FESER | PROJECT MANAGER, PATCH



Welcome lovers of Laurel and local news! As you already know, The Laurel History Boys are dedicated to preserving and sharing the local history of Laurel with anyone who is interested—resident or tourist alike. What you might not know is that Patch is equally dedicated to reporting and sharing the modern history of Laurel, that is, its local news.

Before diving into how Patch does this, you might be wondering: "What is Patch"? Founded in 2007, Patch in its current form began in 2014 and has thrived ever since. Covering over 1,200 communities throughout the United States, our local reporters are passionate about making Patch the one-stop-shop for local news, events, classifieds, and neighborly discussions for our 2.7 million subscribers. Best part? Patch is completely free to use, both online and via our app—no paywalls or exclusive "members only" articles.

So you can imagine our excitement when the good folks behind The Laurel History Boys, who align perfectly with Patch's mission of strengthening communities through hyper-local news, conversations,

and connections, asked for an article. Thanks to a local freelance writer, Alexis, the "Laurel Daily" newsletter caught the attention of The Laurel History Boys. The Laurel Daily is an emailed newsletter personally curated and written by Alexis to keep Laurel residents in-the-know on the day's weather, top news, events, and other fun tidbits. With around 2,000 subscribers, more than a few of your neighbors are keeping up with Laurel through Patch. Interested? Sign up for the Laurel Daily at patch.com/maryland/laurel/subscribe for the free daily email, or check out a Laurel Daily from March 14th (patch.com/maryland/laurel/gov-hogan-calls-gas-tax-suspension-beltway-car-crash) to see what it's all about!

A Conversation With...

Mike Leszcz

Mike Leszcz retired from the Laurel City Council last November after serving a record 12 terms for 25 years. He became Mayor in October 2001 following the death of Mayor Frank Casula and served the final six months of Casula's term. Prior to being elected to the City Council, Leszcz served on the city's Planning Commission for 17 years. He is currently the chair of the Patuxent River Commission. This interview took place two weeks after last November's Laurel municipal election.



BY KEVIN LEONARD



Why so long on the Planning Commission before you took the leap?

I think they were looking for some stability on the Planning Commission. I truly believe that. I mean, I've been on the Historic District Commission now since I've been on the council.

But didn't the itch didn't hit you at some point before the 17 years?

No. Well, what happened was, I was chairman of the Planning Commission, and we did Laurel Lakes. A lot going on for the city. The Laurel Lakes is a good example. Frank Casula was in the county [council] at that time. He came to me, said you got to do something about Laurel Lakes, the Gude property. I said, "What do you mean, Frank?" He said it's all zoned for five story apartments. Very similar to what went on down on 197. I said, "But it's in the county." "Well, figure it out, Mike, figure it out." You know, Frank Casula was like that.

So that wasn't within the city limits at that point?

No. Frank had been at my wedding. I always tell people he danced at my wedding. So, I said, alright, we'll figure it out. Bob DiPietro was part and parcel of that with Mike Rose. Brought it into the city and we downzoned it. I know I get criticized that I'm in bed with the developers. I'm not. We annexed it and then we downzoned it. We did that as a PUD--planned unit development.

So, it was a mixture of single-family apartments, condos, commercial. And that allowed us some flexibility in the zoning. So that was one project. It was pretty significant. The racquetball club--that we just bought. It was Gary and Dennis Berman. But they owned all that property down there. Now we got Richard Hechinger. Before Home Depot was Hechinger's. I brought that in. I felt sorry for Hechinger. He was a victim of--. It's a shame that he wasn't able to survive.

Home Depot and Lowe's kind of took over everywhere.

They did, and then we brought Home Depot in. We were having weekly meetings with the Planning Commission because the water line for the racquetball club runs under the property where Home Depot is. And every time they ran a heavy piece of equipment, it wasn't deep enough and it broke the goddamn water line. But we got that resolved. Then the next thing we know is we've got Lowe's wants to go on over there. I did the analysis. I'm an analyst at heart. I said they can both exist in Laurel. And they have. Lowe's is successful. Home Depot is successful.

Do you think that either or both of those made Cook's close up? Was it just too much competition?

Yeah, but, you know, I was offered a job by Bobby Cook when I left in '72--no '74--when I left Floyd Lilly. I was running the Amoco station at the end of

Montgomery Street. That was the top producing Amoco station on the East Coast. We did two million in the first year I was there--two million gallons. And now it's a dump. It's not what it used to be--it was a showplace then. And I worked for Floyd Lilly because he didn't want to deal with customers. It was a part time job for me. And then he offered me to come be his general manager.

So, this is all before [you were working for the] IRS?

Well, I was working for IRS. We went to buy a home. We sat down with the loan officer, and he asked my wife if her tubes were tied because she didn't have a college degree.

What year is this?

1972.

Are you kidding me?

"Are your tubes tied?" They would not consider her income. Because she was of childbearing years, she didn't have a college degree, and that was a true statement. "Are your tubes tied?"

So you're staying [in Laurel] in retirement?

I can't leave. As my wife would say, you're going to have fun where you're going? I'm not vacating. I'm not white fleeing here. But more importantly, my wife is wedded to this street, and that's something to be said. And I tried to explain that. Still the people come behind

us because the city went from about five percent African American to 67 percent.

When was the five percent?

When I moved in. Then you have to ask the people that came after us. Why did you come? They came. It used to be education, but it's not education anymore. Safety, fiscal management, and then education. They've got a choice with education.

You were from Anne Arundel County, right?

Bad boy from Anne Arundel County. They wouldn't let me in Pallotti. They knew me. My sister went there, my wife went there, her mother went there. Our kids went there. They weren't going to let me in. Not a bad boy from Arundel High School. There were two types of kids who went to Arundel High School--military brats and farmers' kids, because that was basically an agricultural area. And we had some badass kids, but they had badass kids up here. They used the year that they built the new high school to desegregate. They segregated my class. The class that came in, we were all in the barracks at Fort Meade that built the new junior high school and then they desegregated. And I mean, my chemistry teacher was the only African American teacher in the school. Thelma Sparks, and eventually she became the head of math and science in Anne Arundel County. And we had like 15-20 African American students in our class, but they were all handicapped

and they were all going to Bowie at that time. They used to bus all those Black kids, African American kids, to Bowie to go to school, which wasn't fair. But see, I didn't know what segregation was. All right? An Air Force brat. And Air Force desegregated when they stood up after the Second World War.

Help our readers understand the relationship between the council and the city staff in the building. So, if you need support, how does that work?

Ask for it. I truly mean that. And again, it depends on how you treat that staff. If you're a council person, you can't dictate to them, but they're the ones that make the council look good if they're responsive. And they've always been responsive to me, but I'm not one to stir the pot. I'm one that'll raise the issue and ask the staff, "Can you respond to this problem?" And if you can't, then you hold your hand up and say, "Look, we can't respond to that right now." But again, they support the council, the council holds the purse strings. The mayor is the chief operating officer, essentially a chief executive officer. He spends the money. And to the extent possible, we've provided a great deal of latitude to the mayor and how he spends some money. But again, they support the council.

Is it part of their job description that they are supposed to support the council because I--

They support the mayor. But again, it is a relationship. It works when you understand as a council person, you can't dictate to them because they work for the mayor and the department heads. If the council doesn't like what the department head is doing, they can go to the mayor. I'm not joined at the hip with the mayor. I mean, we've had our discussions in his office at the door and scream at each other. But there is truly an understanding, I believe, on my part about what their role is. Their role is to satisfy the needs of the public. But the way you do that is how things get done.

How do you explain the continued low voter turnout in Laurel? Laurel has such a terrific tradition of community service. And there's a lot of pride, a lot of tradition around here. But why won't they come out and vote?

Because I believe if something isn't wrong, they're not going to, you know? My belief is if you're doing the right things, as a council, as a mayor, they're not going to throw you out on your ear.

Do you really think that it's at your feet for that or is there something else going on? Is it just laziness or apathy or I don't know?

It's not even apathy, it's satisfaction. I believe it's satisfaction with the way things are. Now, some people will try to stir the pot and say they're not happy about this, not happy about that. This kind of business on Main Street—go down and see how few empty storefronts there are. There aren't a whole bunch. Do I believe we can do better? Always. But again, making issues is not the answer. I truly mean that. I don't believe you should make the issues. The issues should come from the bottom. And address the issues, and we have. I wasn't at the meeting, but they had a meeting on the alleys again last night, understanding the issues with the alleys.

That's an interesting perspective that I hadn't considered because Laurel is no different really than the rest of the country when it comes to the percentage of voter turnout. You've got some worse, some better.

But if you look to where they have high voter turnout, it's because they raised an issue that the elected officials weren't providing an answer. The alleys are a good example. The alleys are a very complicated issue in the city of Laurel because some are dedicated, some aren't. Some people own to the middle of the alley. So, I don't think it's apathy. I think it's satisfaction. What's the level of satisfaction with what's going on? I'll give you an example. Raising the taxes. I proposed the largest tax increase we ever had in the city of Laurel after I got on the council. I did some analysis. I said, you cannot continue to run--

How long ago was this?

25 years. You cannot continue to run the city on the revenue stream. So, I proposed something, and it passed. Frank Casula was the mayor. He said, "They're going to throw you out on your ear, Mike." I said, "Well, throw me out on my ear because you cannot continue to provide services you're providing." And so, we passed it. I got two phone calls. Residents. One was from my treasurer. She was very upset because she owns some apartments. But hey, if we don't do it, we're going to be in deep stuff in a couple of years. And it had to be a two-step process because we could not propose a tax increase of 31 cents, which was what it should have been. So, it was 17 and then I think 14, a couple of years

later. And I didn't even propose that. I think the mayor proposed it because I think I convinced him we're in trouble, babe. And it wasn't just the operating budget. It was the pension plan. The pension plan was way underfunded. Funded to 73 or 74 percent. Now it's up to 84 because I convinced the mayor to put extra money, worked with the mayor to put extra money in every year. And we've done that every year. Now--we get to 90 percent. With this pension plan, we'll be able to pay some cost-of-living increases. We can't do it yet or we're going to have to have a new pension plan. And that's probably coming, and the mayor is putting me on the pension board tomorrow night. I've worked with pensions and IRAs, and pensions are a difficult issue. But again, I don't think it's apathy. I think it's satisfaction. I wish there was a way to measure satisfaction.

So, in all your years on the council, can you remember a relatively higher turnout? And was there an issue involved that you think caused it?

When the mayor comes up for reelection, you'll have a higher turnout.

So, you don't think it's a problem that there's such a low voter turnout?

No. If they're unhappy, they'll come out and vote. That's my feeling. Or somebody will raise the issue—hey that Mike Leszcz is not doing his job or so and so is not doing their job—let's throw them out. I mean, look, Valerie and I did not run because we thought we were not going to get reelected. She's got something else she wants to do, and I'm--twenty five years is long enough.

You've done your time.

Well, again, it's time for some new blood. I believe in that. I think it's a tough question, though.

What, if any, changes to the Office of Councilman would you like to see to make it more effective?

I'm not so sure we need any changes in the City of Laurel. It can be effective now. You can raise the issue at council meetings with the mayor, you can go in his office and raise the issues with him. And he'll react. And again, I'll come back to the alley issue. The chief of police is a good example. If you're not happy with what's going on, raise the issue with the mayor. And if he doesn't react the right way, then all you need is four votes. Throw that person out. We have not thrown a person out of a management job

in the city of Laurel that I can remember. And it came close. Let me tell you a story about the Greens of Patuxent. I was here on the Planning Commission when we approved the houses down there, the single families and the quads and the apartments.

To Ladue and Miller?

Yeah. And I went to Dani Duniho and I said, "Look, we've got a problem down there. They're not doing what they said they were going to do."

She was mayor at the time?

She was the mayor and I was chairman of the Planning Commission. I said, "You need to pull the bonds." She wouldn't do it. And I checked with our attorney. I can do it because I signed off on the plans. And I pulled the bonds. And the bad side of that, the poor side of that, was I put Tom Miller out of business, and Tom was a good builder. But Ron Ladue was a lyin' piece of crap. And the only mistake I made was we probably could have gone to the Home Improvement Commission and got his license pulled to build houses anywhere in Maryland. We only pulled them from Prince George's County. So, what do you do--go on up to Howard County. But she would not. That's the problem I had with Dani. You know, she didn't understand how much authority she had. So anyways, the attorney said, "Yeah, you can pull bonds. You signed the plans. He's not building according to the plans." They wouldn't add any sidewalks to the streets down there. Grades were all wrong. It was terrible what they were doing down there, but I pulled the bonds. Poor Tom Miller, Junior couldn't sign a check after that, you know. He was sad, very sad case because he was a good builder. Son was a good builder, too. But again, you got to work together. The mayor's got to work with council on some issues and the Planning Commission, in that case. And again, you've got to recognize what's not good for the community, what's good for the community. I know I've taken a lot of criticism for the Greens at Patuxent. I didn't approve them raising the elevation down there. That was done by the county. Allowed them to bring the elevation up six feet with dirt and then build on it. And that's the second place they've done that. And I know that Tom Denoga's upset about it. But Tom, if you don't like it, change the law in the county. We had to allow them to build on that, but what

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Class photo and interior of the one-room Fairy Springs School in the early 1900s. The building stood on what is now Route 197 near where Old Glory Harley-Davidson is located today.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BETH ELLIOTT



The Heart of the Farming Community: Fairy Springs School



BY KEVIN LEONARD

Education in the United States was founded in one-room schoolhouses, which were commonplace until the early 20th century. According to National Public Radio, in 1919 there were still 190,000 one-room schools scattered all around the American countryside. Now there are only a couple of hundred left in operation. Quite a few have been preserved and repurposed into museums.

In *Prince George's County: A Pictorial History*, author Alan Virta explains, “Maryland’s modern system of public education was created by the School Act of 1865; it mandated the establishment of public school systems in all of the counties.”

The Maryland State Department of Education’s website describes what happened next:

“In 1865, the first State Superintendent of Public Instruction proposed the establishment of free primary schools, grammar schools, one high school per county, a normal school [which trained future teachers], and a university, as well as separate schools for Negroes, the blind, deaf, handicapped, and the imprisoned. Attendance would be compulsory. The General Assembly adopted portions of his plan. In 1865, Maryland shifted from local control of schools to a highly centralized system whereby the State Board

with the State Superintendent selected textbooks, set the curriculum, certified teachers, approved school building designs, and distributed State funds. Appropriations to academies were continued just until county high schools could be established. Taxes assessed against Negroes were set aside for schools for Negroes under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education, although few, if any, were started. In 1865, Maryland began a formal system of segregated schooling that continued for ninety years.”

What it doesn’t say is that for generations that meant attending a one-room schoolhouse built and equipped by the county. There were a few in the Laurel area, but one in particular has been largely forgotten, even though it received much more publicity than others: Fairy Springs School.

Virta quotes from a 1927 Sunday Star article that points to a problem in funding schools throughout agricultural-based Prince George’s County: “The county wants to give the people who are moving into the Washington suburbs as good educational advantages as they would have in the national capital. But these people represent no taxable industry. The school levy must be entirely on real estate. Consequently, the burden is falling heavily on farm

property, and every cent must be conserved.”

That was certainly true for Fairy Springs, which “was located east of what is now the Baltimore Washington Parkway in the area near the current Harley Davidson dealership. The school was at the intersections of Laurel-Bowie, Muirkirk, and Snowden Roads. However, when the Baltimore Washington Parkway was created, the old Muirkirk Road became a dead-end, stopping at the Parkway, and was rerouted to where it is today near the Montpelier Shopping Center,” according to author Matthew Perry in the Friends of Patuxent newsletter.

The school was a small, non-descript square frame with lawns and gardens cultivated by students. It was built to serve a purpose, not be aesthetically pleasing, painted white with green trim. Other than a door and windows, the only other exterior feature was a cupola in the middle of the roof supporting a chimney for the pot-bellied stove underneath.

The students who attended Fairy Springs all came from farms along Laurel-Bowie Road. Records are scarce about the school so it’s unclear when it opened and when it closed. But twice Fairy Springs was described in detail in media stories—once in 1920 and again in 1931.

Conditions in 1920

In 1920, the *Baltimore Sun* profiled the school in flowery prose that was typical for newspapers at that time. The rural landscape of the area was “within an hour’s ride of either Baltimore or Washington. At the back doors of these two great city markets are square miles of land which no plow ever broke.”

The reporter’s travel to find Fairy Springs is similarly embellished. “In the heart of this section is the Fairy Springs school. The road that passes by it turns off of Baltimore-Washington Boulevard [Route 1] a mile south of Laurel and bounces over bumps and ruts on its way to Bowie. A short distance from the boulevard it is swallowed up by the wide-stretching woods with its deep shade and its thick-matted undergrowth. Without any apparent sense of direction it twists and turns past a few scattered houses and a few tilled fields that have been wrenched from the encroaching forests.”

He describes a dive bar that he passed. “By the side of this road, screened from prying eyes, still stands ‘The Pines’—a miserable wreck of a board shack which was once the oasis for scores of thirsty souls of Laurel and vicinity. Its faded beer signs still mark it for what it once was—the one wet spot in an otherwise dry community.”

Inside the schoolhouse the walls are, “so well decorated that you almost fail to observe the blackboard, which stretches across one side” and “in the center of the little room is the time-honored round-bellied stove in its shiny summer coat of black. In the rear is a piano and in one corner stands a sewing machine, on which are lying some children’s dresses which the girls of the school have made.”

The *Sun* lavished praise on the Fairy Springs teacher, Miss Edna Waring. Since 1920 was Miss Waring’s 16th year teaching there, according to the *Sun*, the school was open at least since 1904. There is no mention if Waring was the first teacher at Fairy Springs.

A few long-time families who owned farms in the area and sent their children to Fairy Springs are mentioned, such as Lammers, Hance, and Snowden.

The school had 25 pupils divided among seven grades, a common situation for one-room schoolhouses with one teacher. Even though the occasion of the reporter’s visit was to chronicle the school receiving an award, the only curriculum subject he refers to is “domestic science,” taught to the girls in a makeshift kitchen in a hallway.

Less than a year later, the Prince George’s County Commissioners pledged \$1,200 to remodel the Fairy Springs School. The money paid for a new roof and rearrangement of windows on the exterior, as well as interior improvements such as a new floor, new desks, and the addition of a cloakroom. It had an effect. Eight months later, Fairy Springs School was awarded a “Standard Certificate,” which was only bestowed upon 12 other schools in Maryland.

According to the *Prince George’s Enquirer and Southern Maryland Advertiser* in December 1921, the requirements to become a Standard School included “specifications regarding schoolhouse construction, equipment, teaching ability, and social and athletic activities. The school must be properly lighted and heated and must supply three sizes of standard desks for pupils.”

The *Advertiser* also praised Miss Waring, only this time mentioned her “18 years of service” at Fairy Springs, which pushes the opening back a year to at least 1903.

New Profile in 1931

Until the current U.S. Department of Education was formed in 1979, the federal department bounced around among different agencies. In the 1930s, it was under the Department of the Interior, and published a monthly magazine titled *School Life*. In the June 1931 issue, Fairy Springs School received an extensive profile with much more detail than the *Sun*’s article in 1920.

The most notable change since 1920 was that the teacher in 1931 was now Miss Rebeka Glading, 27, who attended the State Normal School for teachers in Towson for two years before attaining a B.A. from the University of Maryland in 1929. Presumably, she replaced Miss Waring in 1929 or 1930.

More students’ families are mentioned, such as Baldwin, Cornell, and Sadilek. The number of students in 1931 was down to “nearly 20.”

School Life explained how Miss Glading is able to instruct 20 students in different grades at the same time: the students themselves are responsible for many administrative and housekeeping tasks and the older ones help teach each other: “There is this big difference between the old and modern one-room school—in the old school the teacher taught from the front of the room; in Fairy Springs and in progressive schoolrooms generally the teacher guides the pupils’ self-teaching process from the rear of the room. She speaks as little as possible.”

The article described a typical day at Fairy Springs: “The three lower grades work on different subjects at the same time. Grades 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 form two groups working on the same studies. Courses repeated alternate years prevent duplication.” And later that day, “Two members of the third grade are sitting at the teacher’s desk, the brighter, by order, acting as ‘teacher’ (instructions in whisper only) to the other who is behind because of absences. Sixth and seventh are reading in *A History of the American People*, preparing for a lesson on the industrial revolution. Fourth and fifth are adding and subtracting 4-figure numbers in arithmetic, while third grade prepares for a Holland geography review.”

Miss Glading organized the teaching day “into 16 to 20 sectors,” including “geography, spelling, music, history, arithmetic, a constant succession of different subjects on different levels of approach.”



Fairy Springs School in 1908. LAUREL NEWS LEADER

Heart of the Farming Community

The school also served as a community center for the surrounding area families. Community meetings, banquets, and other functions were frequently held at the school. During World War II, the school hosted “Homecoming Parties” for men recently discharged from the services. Articles in the *Leader* claimed the parties were usually attended by “about 250 persons from Washington, Baltimore and vicinity,” which clearly means the parties were outside. Some of the local veterans feted at the school included Laurence Arnold, LeRoy Brown, Raymond Hance, William Janoske, Henry Long, Eddie Merkel, Harold Poole, Earl Welch, Stanley Whetzel, Joseph Lammers, Earl Long, Herman Mitchell, Melvin Hitafer, and Fred Haker.

The *School Life* article predicted the demise of Fairy Springs because of the 1930 paving of Laurel-Bowie Road: “There is nothing especially sinister in the appearance of the macadam strip that last summer rolled itself out 3 miles on the road from Laurel to Fairy Springs. It means that next September or some September in the near future Fairy Springs School will stand silent and abandoned. The children of the community will see it deserted and empty as they ride by in the autobus carrying them to the consolidated school in Laurel.”

Exactly when that happened is a mystery.

Beth Elliott and Ruth Barton contributed to this story.



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.



STEPHEN MANGULLI

Guilford Area History Re-Discovered in Howard County



BY WAYNE DAVIS

In 2001, the history of Guilford was brought to life by Clara Gouin, a now-retired planner with Howard County Rec & Parks, the agency that owned the old B&O Railroad bridge connecting the Guilford quarries to the railroad at Savage. Sixteen years later, two researchers (Jerry Uekermann and myself) became interested in this history and contacted Clara Gouin for more information. Jerry was researching the history of the mills and I was researching the history of the quarries. Clara connected us to begin an expanded re-discovery of Guilford's history.

The Guilford Industrial Historic District is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties managed by the Maryland Historical Trust, "a state agency dedicated to preserving and interpreting the legacy of Maryland's past." This designation is the

recognition of the Guilford mill and quarry as historic areas deserving of research, documentation, and preservation.

In March 2018, a Facebook group called "Friends of the Guilford Industrial Historic District" was formed to be an informational and educational resource for all of us working on understanding, documenting, and preserving this historic district. A common theme of the industrial activities in the Guilford and Savage areas was the Little Patuxent River that was connected by the Patuxent Branch of the B&O in 1902. On either end of this area were two iconic bridges that are on the National Inventory of Historic Places: the Guilford Quarry Pratt Through Truss Bridge upstream and the Bollman Truss Bridge downstream. This research and documentation effort then became known as "Between the Bridges."

Below is a quick recap of our activities since 2018. There is not enough space to include them all, but we do have a Facebook group and a website where you can learn more.

Guilford Quarry Cemetery

Jerry Uekermann discovered this hidden cemetery on a construction plat and, upon visits by a number of researchers and cemetery experts, it appears this is an old Polton/Carroll family cemetery expanded to include dozens of unmarked African American burials. We discovered 11 gravestones representing burials from 1829 to 1838, including Eliza Marlow, the older sister of Thomas Isaac who has a log cabin named for him in Ellicott City, and Thomas Lemuel Carroll, the son of the industrialist David Carroll of Baltimore.

Guilford Quarry Pratt Through Truss Bridge

This bridge was recommended in 2000 by the Maryland Historical Trust to be considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places but its owner, Howard County Rec & Parks, never submitted the paperwork. Working with the Maryland Historical Trust we completed the paperwork and in June 2021 the National Park Service listed the bridge on the National Register. We are hoping that the Howard County government will recognize our efforts and erect a marker commemorating the bridge.

Between the Bridges Historic Park

In 2021, we began a collaborative effort with Howard County government to establish a historic park along the former Patuxent Branch railroad Between the Bridges. Many historic sites are along this area including the old Guilford Mill Dam upstream of the Guilford quarries and truss bridge; the former house of Commodore Joshua Barney; quarry and stone crushing ruins along the Wincopin Green Trail; ruins of the abutments to the gabbro bridge crossing the Middle Patuxent River, which was a sister bridge to the one at Guilford; and ruins of the Savage Mill Dam down to the Bollman Bridge. Just another mile downstream of Savage is the site of the very first steel bridge used by the B&O in 1852 and first Bollman Bridge ever built.

Guilford Oral History Project

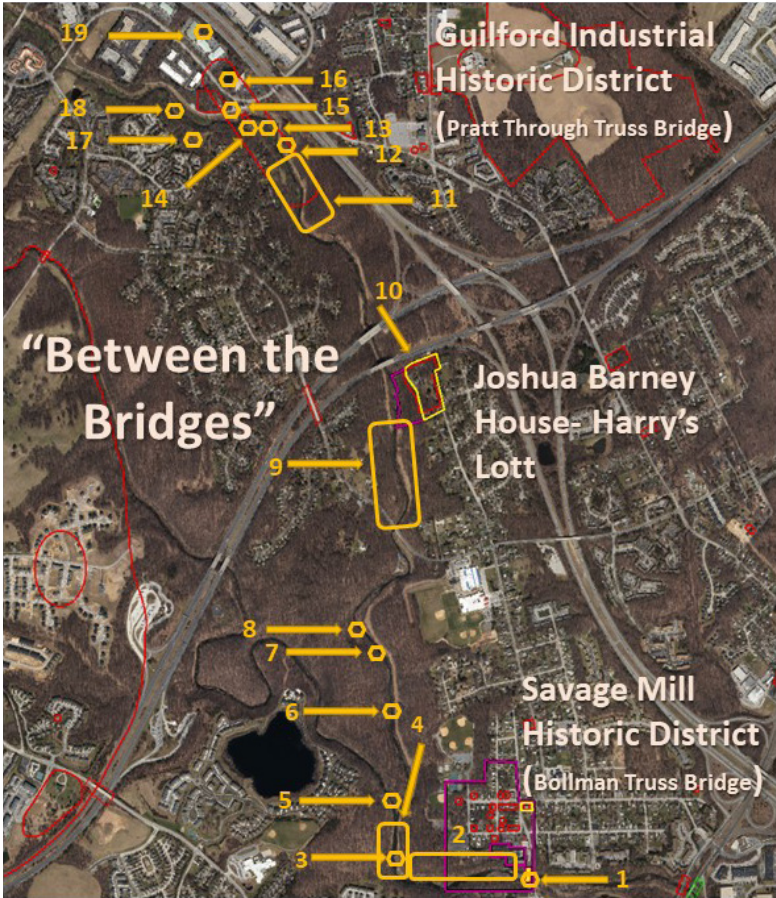
Guilford is a historically Black community founded in about 1901 by Willis J. Carter, a minister and skilled quarry worker who, with his wife Mary and others, founded the First Baptist Church of Guilford in 1903. The Carter family built housing for the quarry workers, provided the first public school for Black children in the community, and ran a farm giving employment to several people in the community. In February 2020, we collaborated with the First Baptist Church of Guilford and the Howard County Historical Society, led by Joan Carter-Smith, the great-great granddaughter of Willis Carter, to begin conducting oral histories from descendants of this African American community. To date we have conducted eight interviews, which can be viewed from a link on our website or Facebook group.

Savage—a Former Sundown Town

Dr. James Loewen, author of the best-selling book “Lies my Teacher Told Me,” was also compiling a list of Sundown Towns—towns and villages that restricted the presence of Black people by varying means. Before Dr. Loewen passed away last year, he encouraged me to prepare a paper documenting Savage’s history to be reviewed by his staff and determine if it would qualify as a Sundown Town. The documentation appears on his History & Social Justice website (justice.tougaloo.edu/sundowntown/savage-md/).

Freetown—Did Harriet Tubman Really Sleep There?

Our research continued to neighboring Freetown, an area established as a result of the 1845 last will and testament of Nicholas Worthington. Worthington enslaved over 50 people and, for 17 of them, he set aside 150 acres of land for life estates (it did not include ownership). By the 1880s this area became known as



Primary Historical sites “Between the Bridges”

1. Bollman Truss Bridge
2. Savage Mill Race
3. Savage Dam
4. Joshua Barney Mill Race
5. Pratt (Gabbro) Bridge
6. W.T. Manning Co. Stone Crusher
7. B.F. Pope Co. Quarry & Stone Crusher
8. Crib Dam
9. Mill Seat In Partnership
10. Joshua Barney House
11. Barney’s First Attempt
12. Guilford and Waltersville Quarry
13. Guilford Mill Wall
14. Pratt Through Truss Bridge
15. Luckadoo House site/Generator Wall
16. Maryland Granite Co. Quarry
17. Howard Granite Co. Quarry
18. Howard Granite Co. Quarry
19. Guilford Quarry Cemetery



Community volunteers helped clean up the Guilford Quarry Cemetery in April 2021. WAYNE DAVIS

Freetown and a family story was passed down that Harriet Tubman stayed at the Locust Church cemetery and guided escaped slaves to their freedom. Research shows this is not true, especially since Tubman’s well documented 13 trips did not include Howard County. Also, the land for Locust Church was not purchased until after the end of slavery.

Guilford history is interconnected with the history of the rest of Howard County, and we will continue to put forth fact-based history. Please learn more by joining us at facebook.com/groups/FriendsGuilfordHistory and

checking out our website site at sites.google.com/view/guilfordhistoryhoco/home.

Wayne Davis grew up in Chicago and has been living in Howard County since 1992. He is a retired environmental scientist for the USEPA and has a life-long interest in history. Wayne manages the Friends of the Guilford Industrial Historic District Facebook page and website and has been posting about local history since 2018.



A Professional Sports Team Calling Howard County Home?

It almost happened!



BY ANGELA LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

There were highly desired features James Rouse sought to bring to Howard County throughout Columbia's rise that never became a reality. Scouring Rouse's papers at the Columbia Archives, online articles, and rooting through newspapers from those early days, I discovered bold ideas and projects for Columbia that never came to fruition. One of the more stunning, sought-after acquisitions for his new city was a professional sports franchise. In fact, he was actively courting two team owners in the late 1960s.

By 1964, with financial backing for his new city secured and the revelation of his plan for the acres and acres of farmland in Howard County that he had quietly acquired out in the open, Rouse needed to draw attention to his unique venture to ensure its success.

Rouse desired to build a city, not just a better suburb. He needed people to make the city their home. Therefore, the Rouse Company placed significant importance on driving visitors to their novel urban project. This was evidenced by the Exhibit Center being the first public building completed.

Among several interesting ideas from July 1967, is Rouse's self-described "ridiculous" inquiry into the

purchase of London Bridge from the Common Council of the City of London. He specifically asked "what might it cost to ship, transport to Columbia—erect to cross over Rt. 29" to connect the neighborhood of Stevens Forest to Town Center. It is an apt illustration of the bold ideas and grand features he considered to attract people and attention to Columbia.

But it was an unsolicited query, an opportunistic shot in the dark, that began a multi-year pursuit for a key urban feature: a professional sports franchise. The quest, which seemingly went nowhere at the time, began on October 26, 1965. Rouse sent a letter to the owner of the Baltimore Colts, Carroll Rosenbloom, inviting him to meet to compare notes about the plans for Columbia and Rosenbloom's plans for the Colts. He mentioned wanting "to see if there was some compatibility there, as the plans for Columbia contemplated the possibility of a major new stadium."

This was not the first time Rouse sought a significant project that would bring people and prominence to Columbia. Rouse's ambitious plan for a center for the arts, which became Merriweather Post Pavilion, was another such project. In a 2017 article in *The Baltimore*

Sun, The Laurel History Boys' Kevin Leonard pointed out, "James Rouse needed something big to attract attention to his vision in Howard County in the mid-1960s. His 'new town' had garnered quite a bit of media attention, but he made sure there would be a lot of traffic to the site with the second public building—preceded only by the Exhibit Center—to open in Columbia: Merriweather Post Pavilion."

In March of 1966, Richard L. Anderson, Rouse Company's general manager for Columbia, sent a memorandum to Rouse with his thoughts on "the sports arena [Rouse] had talked about." Anderson believed that Columbia should have a Houston Astrodome-type multi-sport sports center. In the memo, he compared the Major League Baseball attendance figures for the American and National Leagues and the attendance at NFL games versus the upstart AFL. He noted that upon completion of the Houston Astrodome, attendance figures jumped significantly higher the next year. Anderson envisioned a center with "unlimited seating for ice hockey, basketball, track and field, tennis, soccer, etc." He further reflected on the opportunity to "...schedule

the 1972 Summer Olympics for Columbia,” and “the substantial financial considerations” that hosting this event would bring. He ended with, “The promotional benefits for Columbia would be tremendous.”

In a letter to Rouse dated March 18, 1969, a resident wondered if thought had been given to building a replacement to Memorial Stadium in Baltimore that could house both the NFL Colts and the MLB Orioles. He suggested enclosing the new stadium as was done in Houston for the Astrodome, which would invite additional uses as an exhibit hall. The same gentleman further posited the idea of an “Astro world type Disneyland complex,” which he believed would no doubt lead to many visitors extolling Columbia’s virtues nationwide. In fact, he noted, such a draw might lead to the building of a monorail between Washington, D.C., and Columbia with a stop at Friendship Airport. Rouse responded to the letter saying: “Yes, at one time or another we have considered both ideas—we agree they are great—and, while there are many roadblocks, it is good to be prodded.” He promised to think some more about them.

Between February 1969 and late 1972, as Columbia was growing, what seemed to be a fortuitous series of events unfolded. Columbia was receiving attention from sports media for its novelty, its growing population, and its prime location between Baltimore and Washington. Meanwhile, two area professional sports franchise owners were becoming awash in discontentment about their fan bases and their team facilities. Both Abe Pollin, owner of the Baltimore Bullets NBA basketball franchise, and Carroll Rosenbloom, owner of the Baltimore Colts, had entered into negotiations with Rouse about building major new sports facilities for their teams.

Pollin had approached Rouse confidentially in early 1971 about a 15,000-seat sports arena to house the Bullets and potentially an NHL expansion team. Pollin had linked acquisition of an NHL expansion team to his move to a new arena. Also, it was reported that presumably Rouse officials were also in contact with the National Hockey League about the possibility of obtaining a franchise the next time the league expanded. The 15,000-seat arena capacity met the NHL minimum capacity requirement.

At this time, the arena was anticipated to “be situated in the eastern part of the community off Route 29,” according to Rouse and “was two or three years off.” Pollin was already actively marketing his Bullets as a Baltimore-Washington team, not just a Baltimore team. He was quoted as saying that “This is still my territory. We control a 75-mile radius.” He was adamant that he would not permit another professional basketball franchise to move into the area. Pollin also was aware that the site for his possible Howard County arena was also being looked at by Rosenbloom for the Colts. He considered Columbia an excellent location for what he was trying to accomplish in probably making the Bullets a Baltimore-Washington team.

By the fall of 1972, Pollin’s talks with Rouse seemed to be advancing for an arena located at the intersection of Rt. 175 and Interstate 95 in Columbia. He was planning to send a non-refundable check for \$25,000 to the National Hockey League to be considered for one of

two expansion teams, “[o]n behalf of Columbia.” There were six other cities in the running for the two teams, and Pollin’s bid was considered a long shot. Nothing had been finalized with Rouse yet for an arena.

Local sports writers were abuzz with speculation linking plans for major sports facilities to Columbia. Rouse made no secret of his willingness to support a professional sports team settling in Columbia.

The Evening Sun summarized the state of professional sports teams moving to Columbia in February 1971. It noted that both the Colts and Bullets were negotiating with James Rouse, developer of Columbia. It’s prime location between Baltimore and Washington and the growing number of people in that area were a major draw for both owners, neither of whom thought his team was posting sufficient attendance at their games. Indeed, both gentlemen were actively and eagerly looking to move their teams out of Baltimore.

The article stated, “The Rouse Company would welcome the Colts or any other professional teams because of the attention they would bring to Columbia. Getting people there so they can see it is one of the major projects of Columbia and sports would certainly do that.”

In September 1971, *The Evening Sun* reported that the details of the deal between Rosenbloom and Rouse had been completed in the spring for a stadium, parking, practice field, and office in Columbia. Rosenbloom was going to move the team there. When news of this plan became known, the Governor of Maryland, the Mayor of Baltimore, and the Greater Baltimore Committee prevailed upon Rosenbloom to return to Maryland from Florida for a “protracted, cards-face-up discussion.” Following the meeting, the Colts reluctantly agreed to call off their planned move to Howard County.

Subsequently, in an *Evening Sun* interview with Rouse Company vice president W. Scott Ditch, Ditch indicated that, “despite a report yesterday that the Colts will move to Columbia in 1973, no new developments have occurred in negotiations between the two parties.” Ditch also noted that discussions to bring the Bullets to Howard County were ongoing. According to the article, the Rouse Company had purchased 841 acres of land near the intersection of Route 216 and Interstate 95 the week prior. The interview with Ditch was the “first inkling the land could be used for athletics.” The parcel of land, located near Laurel, approximately 8 miles from downtown Columbia, is about midway between the Baltimore and Washington beltways.

Pressure on the Colts to remain in Baltimore was significant. Rosenbloom was persuaded to keep the team there. However, he continued to seek a way out of Baltimore and ownership of the Colts for himself. In what was one of the most astounding NFL team ownership moves ever, Rosenbloom transferred

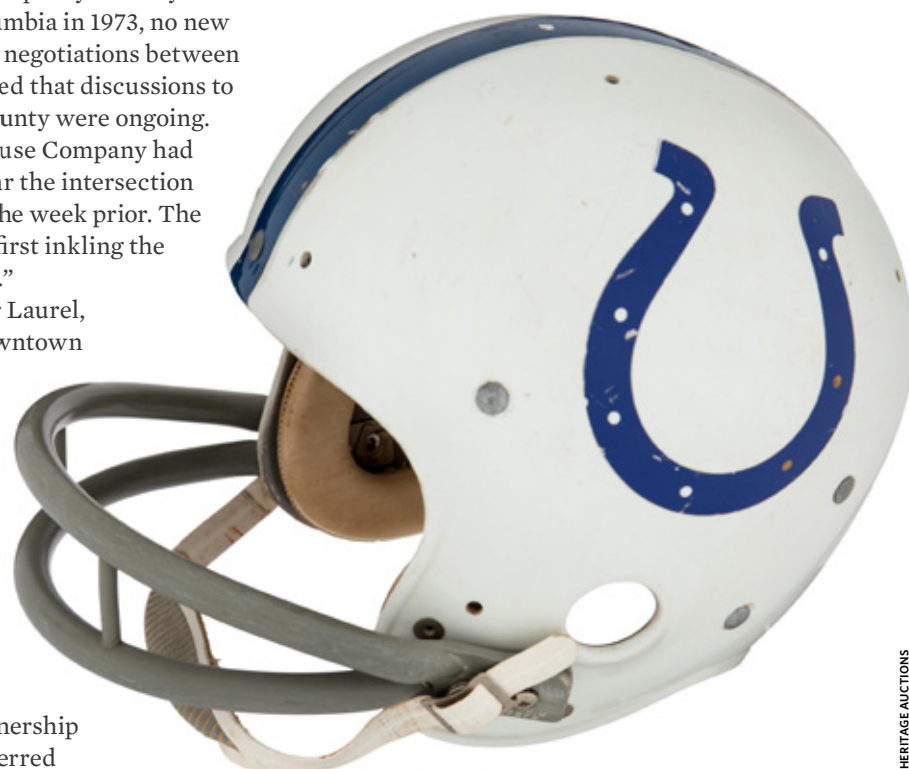
Opposite: A statue of developer James Rouse and his brother, Willard, stands at the Lakefront in Columbia. Rouse tried unsuccessfully to bring professional sports to Columbia, where he hoped to build a Houston Astrodome-like facility that could have accommodated the likes of the Baltimore Colts, Baltimore Bullets, and Washington Capitals.

ownership of the Colts on July 13, 1972, in exchange for ownership of the Los Angeles Rams. *The New York Times* reported that the two-part arrangement began with Robert Irsay buying up the Rams stock for \$19 million. Then, in a no-cash exchange with Rosenbloom, Irsay swapped the Rams franchise for the Colts’. The players and coaches were not affected in the ownership trade. Rosenbloom was able to leave Baltimore and save \$4.4 million in capital gains taxes. Irsay was quoted as saying that he would keep the Colts in Baltimore.

Columbia never did build the facilities or acquire a professional sports team. Those of us old enough to remember know the Colts did leave Baltimore for Indianapolis under the cover of darkness on March 29, 1984. The Bullets, too, found another home in another city and eventually got a new name. Despite never having acquired either of the pro sports teams, an NHL expansion hockey team, or the London Bridge, interest in the planned community and its population grew anyway.

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Angie Latham Kozlowski is a U.S. Masters swimmer with the Columbia Masters. When she is not swimming, she is often researching and writing about her family history or historical topics of interest to her, growing her own luffa sponges and blueberries in her backyard garden in Ellicott City, and actively promoting sustainable and Earth-friendly practices.



Only the Ball Was White!

Black Sandlot Baseball in Laurel (Part 2)



BY CHARLES H. CLYBURN

Oftentimes it is difficult to write about the past when the current news demands your attention. But since this column is devoted to finishing part two of the sandlot series, we will continue to do so. My research led me to concentrate on a book written by William A. Aleshire titled, *Sandlot: "The Soul of Baseball,"* which focuses on Black ball teams in northern Maryland. For our purposes, we will draw your attention to teams and individuals who played on local black sandlot teams and Negro League teams in and around the Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.

"This is an epic about African-American baseball. It emerged from the spirit and challenge generated from the excitement to play sandlot for fun and for the love of baseball."

Sandlot also served as the fertile ground for players whose talents would move them toward more advanced organizations. Local residents would acquire a piece of land and transform that land into a baseball diamond with bases, pitchers' mounds, right, left and center fields, dugouts, and home plate. Once established, teams would challenge other community sandlot teams. Baseball was also a sport that served as an entertainment center where local residents not only came to cheer on their hometown players, but also gathered in friendship and conversation. Often, team members of the Homestead Grays would play warm up games before playing official Negro League games at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. Most of these players have passed on, but their legacy to the game lives on.

There was not a lot of press coverage given to the Laurel team. One of the reasons for the large gap in coverage was that if the teams' management did not call in their results it was not reported by the newspaper. In addition, news reporting was affected by the re-location of the *Afro-American* newspaper from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore. The following was an article that appeared in the *Afro-American* on September 3, 1955: "On Sunday, the Vista Yankees were defeated by the Laurel Stars 5-4, but won the second game 4-0. The Laurel team scored 5 runs in the first half of the 6th inning, but those runs were nullified by the game being called because of darkness."

The Laurel Stars entered the Tri-State Baseball League in 1957 and earned 2nd place in their division in 1957, 1958, and the 1959 seasons. Maybe it was because



This exhibit panel on Seventh Street between Gorman Road and Talbott Avenue marks the spot where home plate was on the field used by Laurel's Black baseball teams until 1959. PHOTO BY JOHN MEWSHAW

Tommy Myers was the coach!

The Stars' efforts to gain the South Division pennant was considered by reporters as the most hotly contested race for the pennant in league history. On October 11, 1958, the Vista Yankees defeated the Laurel team, 9-7 to win the pennant in the Southern half of the Tri-State Baseball League.

Many of the loyal fans of sandlot teams in their glory days, remember those days were spent on empty lots or on actual fields, watching those who played American's game—baseball. One hotly contested game

between a team from Virginia and a team from Prince George's County was played before four Greyhound buses of visiting fans. Though the sandlot teams are a thing of the past, the players will forever live in our memories. May you rest in peace.

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Charles Clyburn, a resident of Laurel for 20 years, is a storyteller of African American folktales and a television and voice over actor.

COMMUNITY

Nationally Acclaimed West Laurel Charity Changes Life for the Better in Tonga



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

On the morning of January 15, 2022, the world woke up to unusual news: a massive eruption had occurred from an undersea volcano near a tiny southwest Pacific nation, the Kingdom of Tonga. The eruption spewed ash dozens of miles into the sky and sparked tsunami warnings as far away as California. That event dominated the news cycle for a day or two, usually highlighting the incredible satellite imagery of the massive explosion and spotlighting Tonga on maps, since most people were not familiar with the nation or its location.

But for two Laurel residents, Michael Hassett and Chiara Collette, news of the volcanic eruption hit on a much more personal level, and they needed no map for context: not only had they lived and worked in Tonga, but they also run an award-winning non-profit organization to support the Tongan people. They knew right away that the volcanic eruption had changed everything—both for the people of Tonga and for the focus of their charity, Friends of Tonga.

Couple is Called to Public Service in Education

Michael and Chiara, who live in West Laurel, actually met in Tonga while they were both stationed there as Peace Corps Volunteers between 2012 and 2014. Both seemed destined to be drawn to a life of public service. Michael's older brother had served in Romania with the Peace Corps in 2006, so it seemed natural to him to volunteer with the Peace Corps following his graduation from La Roche College in Pittsburgh. Chiara had grown up in Indonesia and knew early on that she wanted to be a teacher. She graduated from Goucher College in Baltimore with a degree in Education and a passion for early childhood development.

Both taught English during their Peace Corps assignments to Tonga: Michael taught in a primary school on the largest island of Tongatapu, while Chiara was posted to the island of 'Eua. In addition to teaching English to three elementary-level classes, Chiara trained

other instructors on effective teaching practices and even helped the principal of the rural school complete his Bachelor of Education.

After returning to the U.S., the two continued their public service as educators in Maryland. Chiara taught kindergarten, first, and third grades; she completed her Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at UMBC. Michael worked as a college access coordinator within the Baltimore City Public School system, and then as a research specialist for St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore. Both those roles occurred during his tenure as a Shriver Peaceworker Fellow at UMBC, where he subsequently earned a Masters and a Ph.D. in Public Policy. Today, both Michael and Chiara are employed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as a budget analyst and administrative officer, respectively.

The couple moved to Laurel in 2017. The following year, they married and honeymooned in—you guessed it—Tonga. They remained in touch with fellow Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RCPV) in the States, including a few who had also served in the Kingdom of Tonga. It was those RCPV friendships that resulted in the founding of Friends of Tonga.

Seeds of Education-Based Projects Planted in Wake of Devastation

During an interview just two weeks after the January volcanic eruption, Michael noted that Friends of Tonga was born in the wake of another cataclysmic weather event that had occurred almost exactly four years earlier: Cyclone Gita, which wreaked devastation in the Kingdom on the islands of Tongatapu and 'Eua in February 2018. Although cyclones and other serious weather events are common in the South Pacific, Cyclone Gita was unprecedented in strength, duration, and devastation. Two people were killed, more than 2,000 homes were destroyed, most of the population was left without power, and crops across both islands were ruined—a devastating blow both to Tongans' daily sustenance and to

the nation's agricultural-centric economy.

Six months after the cyclone, while honeymooning in Tonga, Chiara and Michael were shocked to see the cyclone's lingering impact: food was very expensive, deviance and sadness prevailed, and—most devastating of all—both schools they had taught at had been destroyed. Wishing to help in any way they could, the couple and their Tonga-focused group of RCPV friends were surprised to find that no 501(c)(3) organization existed to raise funds for the Tongan people. They decided to fill that gap by forming their own charitable organization, and thus Friends of Tonga was launched in 2018.

Michael serves as the organization's president, and the Governing Board comprises people from New Zealand, Australia, the U.S., and Tonga, all of whom have impressive resumes and a shared passion for the Tongan people and culture.

Since its inception, the group's main focus has been to improve educational opportunities in Tonga, with a strong emphasis on closing what Michael calls “a shockingly wide literacy gap.” Explaining that Tongan students need to have a strong grasp of the English language in order to further their education and build careers, he noted that three of the four programs designed by Friends of Tonga emphasize improvement of the English language:

Video Read aloud Library. A free program accessible via home computer or phone to anyone on any of Tonga's islands, the library consists of audio files of native English speakers reading books, each of which is accompanied by photographs of each page of the book and supporting resources, such as vocabulary lists. Creating each audio/video book takes some time, in part because author consent must be obtained for every book being used. The library currently has about 90 books and



Chiara Collette and Michael Hassett, wearing traditional Tongan wedding attire while on honeymoon there in 2018. Michael's Tongan “family” planned and hosted their Tongan wedding (Sapate Uluaki) in Fahefa, the village where Michael lived and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL HASSETT

hopes to add 150 more. It was this project that earned a Library of Congress Literacy Award Best Practice Honoree. Friends of Tonga was one of just 14 nonprofits recognized with this honor in 2021.

Pen pal program. Tongan students are matched with students in other countries, and they form friendships while also improving their English communication skills. About 450 students, including some from Maryland schools, participate in this successful program.

Scholarship program. Secondary education in Tonga requires school fees and the purchase of books and uniforms, something that can be cost-prohibitive for larger Tongan families. Thanks to its donors, this program has funded more than 72 Tongan students to date. Recipients maintain a high GPA and perform community service. Several have their sights set on college.

The fourth Friends of Tonga educational program is especially near and dear to Chiara Collette's heart: *building cyclone-resistant kindergartens*. The first project undertaken was the Ta'anga kindergarten destroyed in the 2018 cyclone. While the kindergarten was still running, classes were being

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How a Bid on a Miss America Crown Created a Friendship



PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHY LINDBERG



BY CATHY PASSMORE LINDBERG

She had no idea that I had been gently cyber stalking her. I incessantly watched every motivational speech that she did and all the YouTube videos that featured her winning the title of 1958 Miss America, which included footage of her family, her three pretty sisters, and her wealthy parents coming onto the stage. The online videos showed her crowning Mary Anne Mobley as her successor. My “obsession” with her began in 1991 when I received a *People* magazine in my mailbox. The magazine cover showed a beautiful, middle aged woman smiling named Marilyn Van Derbur, the 1958 Miss America. I tried to remember where I had heard the name in my memory banks before reading the horrible content of the article written about her.

In the 1970s, five-time Kentucky Derby winner Bill Hartack came to our home in West Laurel for dinner and stayed for many months. For some reason he seemed to enjoy the commotion of our household filled with seven children—five of which were teenagers. Bill was still riding but knew his career was in its twilight. We loved Bill and allowed him the space he needed for his privacy as he would come home from racing horses, eat a bit of dinner, then walk down the stairs of our home and retrieve to the basement. Bill had no family *per se*, and he did not have any children, so his time was spent on the racetrack and with his tight circle of friends, including my father, William J. Passmore, a long time Maryland jockey. While in the basement, Bill would hammer on pieces of leather to fabricate belts, hats, wallets, and, as I found out later by sneaking down into the basement, purses with the Passmore girls’ initials on them.

One of Bill’s habits was to watch the Miss America

Pageant on television. He believed that three things were necessary choices to watch on television: the Super Bowl, the Kentucky Derby, and the Miss America Pageant. He knew that I did a little bit of pageant work, so I challenged him for the best seat on our couch in our family room. Bill took the pageant seriously. He would write down notes on a legal pad and tell me why a certain state candidate would or would not make the top five. While sitting with Bill, whose career in the 1950s was stellar, I asked him who his favorite Miss America was. He replied, “Hands down, Marilyn Van Derbur and if I could, I would have asked her out on a date!”

So, as I clutched the magazine years later, I recalled hearing Marilyn’s name via the conversation with Bill in the 1970s. Marilyn Van Derbur, the 1958 Miss America was smiling in her photo and looked beautiful. But my shock was seeing the headline: “A Story of Incest—Miss America’s Triumph Over Shame.”

How could this be? How could this happen? What man, less alone a father, does this to a child?

Her book titled *Miss America by Day* left me in tears. I began to wonder how the “child” was, how the child survived, how she felt, how she managed to get through life and become Miss America. Oddly, I knew that before I passed away, I would somehow get a connection with her. It was the strangest feeling, but I knew. It was like a premonition.

Fast forward to December 2021. Like many, I follow a few people on Instagram and two of those are Gretchen Carlson, the 1989 Miss America, who brought down Mr. Ailes of Fox television and recently pushed to have Congress pass a bill preventing employees being sexually harassed from being coerced to sign non-disclosure agreements that would hide the name of the

perpetrators. Another woman that I follow is Mallory Hagan, Miss America 2007. Mallory was taunted by the then-Miss America fortress of petty individuals for her weight gain and her dating choices. (Those individuals have subsequently left the Miss America organization.)

Mallory’s postings mentioned a Miss America crown owned by one of the winners, who placed it for sale with a Dallas auction house to donate the winning monies to teachers. I simply knew it had to be Marilyn. I immediately went on the auction house’s listings and there it was. But sadly, it had a SOLD label on it. I also saw that it was Marilyn’s to confirm my instincts.

I began to think about what the crown represented: a little piece of Americana and a big piece of Marilyn. Then I got dismayed. How about if someone purchased the crown and uses it for a Halloween costume or how about if it ends up on a yard sale table? I could not rest until I got the crown to protect it, like protecting the child she vividly described in her book.

Fortune came my way. I began to stalk the crown SOLD listing and reached out to the auction house. The rep said, “Funny you should call, the person who won the crown never paid for it. It has been returned to the owner. Should I reach out to the owner and see if she would accept a bid?”

My answer came out of my mouth faster than one of Bill Hartack’s horses coming out of a starting gate, “Yes please, please reach out. I know that the owner is Marilyn Van Derbur.”

Soon thereafter, I was wiring funds to the auction house. I also went online and saw a YouTube video that Gretchen made discussing Marilyn’s charitable contribution to teachers. She was interviewing Marilyn who was very poised and still beautiful. I reached out

to Gretchen on Instagram and introduced myself as the new recipient of the crown and that I would preserve it in such a way that it would never ever land on a yard sale table. She in turn told me that she would contact Marilyn and give her my email address.

That evening I could not sleep. I began to feel like I was going to own something I did not work hard to receive so as I paced my home in the middle of the night, I decided to inform Marilyn that I would be the custodian of her crown (which came with a matching bracelet) and upon my death I would return it to her daughter or granddaughter or whomever she designated.

In the morning, I opened my email. In the subject line it said, "from Marilyn Van Derbur Atler." I could barely breathe. I just stared at the email with the name of the woman I prayed for, I respected, I ended up loving from a distance. I loved her for her resilience, for her courage, for her gracious way in responding to

people who wondered why she would desecrate the "good" reputation of her wealthy father by publicizing his incestual and pedophilia actions.

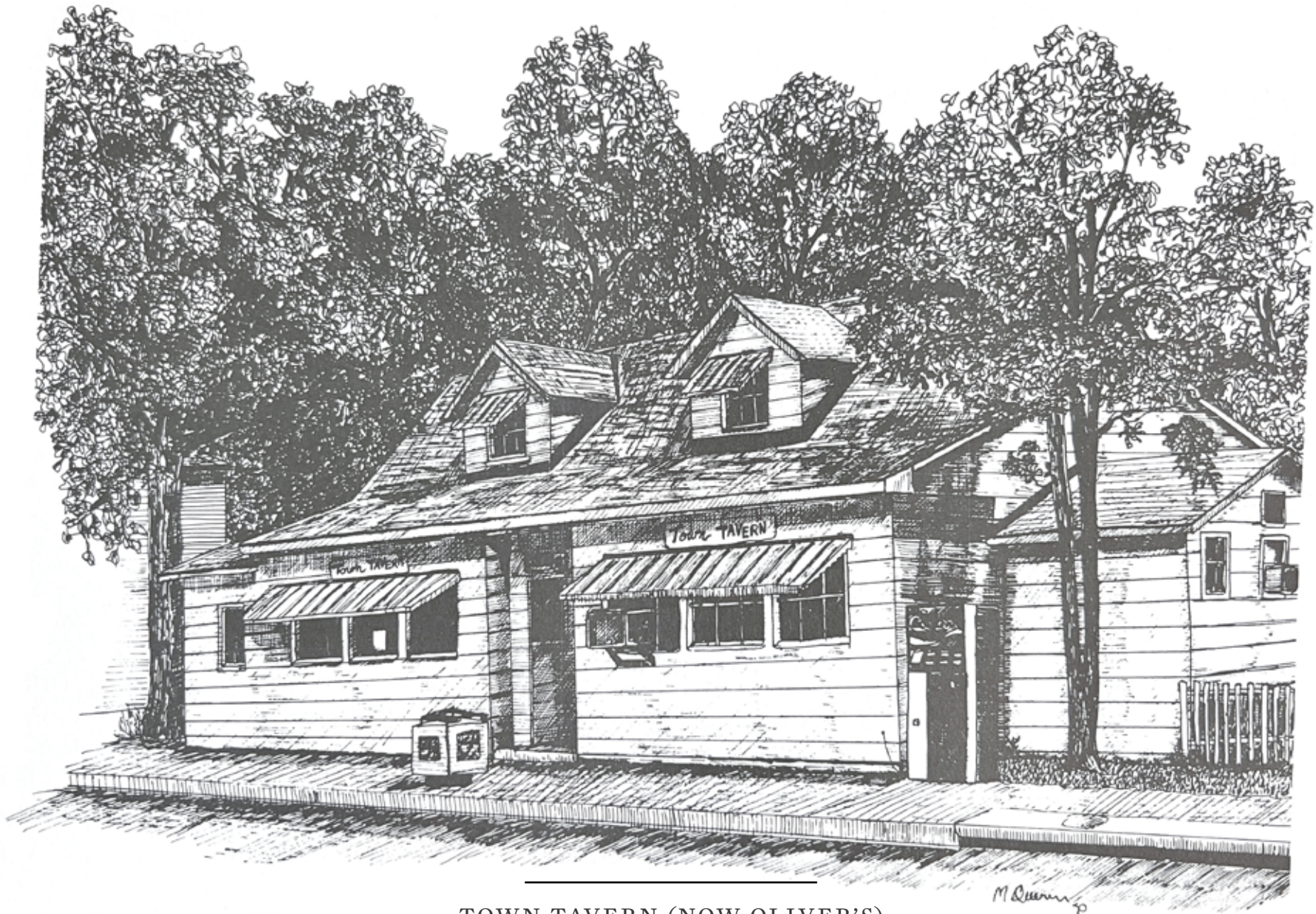
I responded with a letter to her and mentioned that I would be formulating a codicil to my will indicating where she would like her precious crown to go upon my death. Surely her nine-year-old granddaughter would reconsider keeping it? Marilyn told me later that she read my email response as she was going to bed. She mentioned that upon reading my email, she fell to her knees with awe, that someone would be so kind to her. She told me that she wanted to wake up her husband and read him my email. Those words from her gave me boundless joy knowing I made her smile. From that moment we have written each other every day and formed a small friendship of our own.

I am proud to say that she has labeled me a friend and I feel the same. She mentioned that she and her

husband owned a property in Vail, Colorado for fifty years. Again, fate is strange. Her condominium is within feet of where I stay and have stayed since the 1980s. I would have fainted if I recognized her while enjoying Vail with my family, many times sneaking seconds to watch her videos online or to read again the passages in her book.

She has recently inspired me to continue to seek young women to participate in the Miss America preliminaries, someone who carries the same strong attributes that she has carried all these years. So, if any young female aged 17-26 would like to participate in the scholarship program that would lead to the Miss Maryland contest and then on to the Miss America contest and would like to walk in the shoes of my new friend, Marilyn Van Derbur, please contact me at lindbergcathy@live.com.

MARIAN QUINN'S LAUREL



TOWN TAVERN (NOW OLIVER'S)

Marian Quinn, a local artist and framer for over 50 years, has a large collection of illustrations of historic and cultural sites in Laurel. She is also the owner of Fulton Art & Framing in the Cherry Tree Center at Routes 216 and 29. She is a regular contributor to Voices of Laurel.

Russett at 30: Where Nature is Part of the Plan

Part I: Home is Where We Are



BY ELIZABETH YSLA LEIGHT

As Russett turns 30, it's time to take stock of the many contributions residents have made to shape the Russett/Laurel/Maryland City community-at-large. Russett residents have taken pride in being community leaders and community environmentalists. Our pride comes from having a wonderful place to live and raise our families. The love of the green space around Russett is a tradition that comes from our unique community that started with the cattail logo and slogan that says, "Where Nature is Part of the Plan."

Russett Pulled Out the Welcome Mat

Russett sprung to life officially in 1991 when Anne Arundel County leaders, state representatives, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and Russett developers met to formalize and witness a landmark cooperative effort between business and government. The Russett Center Limited Partnership (RCLP) was born. The welcome mat was out for the October 1991 official grand opening of Russett, the newest and most creative planned community in the Baltimore/Washington corridor, when the Russett Preview Center, located in the landscaped entrance to the community, welcomed community leaders like Ray Smallwood, President of the Maryland City Civic Association and Chief of the Maryland City Volunteer Fire Department; Anne Arundel County public officials; and local, civic, and business leaders. Front and center was Anne Arundel County's Economic Development Director Samuel Minnitte, who said "We are fortunate to have such a unique community in our midst. It's philosophy of environmental presentation and commitment to being a good neighbor contributes the good of all county residents."

Attendees witnessed the official return of the nature preserve to the county as Russett's owner presented a symbolic deed to the Oxbow Nature Preserve to the county officials. County Councilman David Boschert witnessed

Russett pioneer an agreement with Anne Arundel County and a private sector consortium to create a public utility serving Russett homeowners and the surrounding area. Representatives from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation applauded the forward-thinking gift. County leaders praised a philosophy of environmental preservation and commitment to being a good neighbor and its contribution of over \$7 million in taxes to the county.

The development of the 900-acre mixed use community was hailed as a landmark cooperative between Anne Arundel County and a private sector consortium, led by Russett developers Robert Woodward, Dave Adler, and Marshall Zinn. The plan created a new public utility system serving Russett, Maryland City, Laurel, Highland, Bacontown, and surrounding areas for years to come. In fact, the change was immediate: area neighborhoods who had previously been living with well water since the late 1800s were now able to turn the spigot and have water rush out. Community leadership was part of the plan in Russett with the development of the Russett Venture Utility System, a Maryland City Water Reclamation Facility, which was built with 12,000 cubic yards of concrete (imagine a sidewalk 60 miles long) and enough electrical wire to encircle Baltimore three times over. When completed, the utility system would treat more than a billion gallons of water yearly with more than 52,000 feet of pipe (an estimated 14 miles of pipe alone) and bring much needed water resources to the greater community.

Oxbow Nature Preserve Plan

The Russett Venture Utility System was a pioneering agreement, but it would prove to be only the first of many. Most notable was the agreement to preserve and maintain the Oxbow Nature Preserve at Russett as a resource conservation area subject to protective legislation and regulations. "I was really proud of the fact that we were



Future residents emerge from the Russett Home Finding Center. ELIZABETH YSLA LEIGHT

able to protect the natural area around Oxbow Lake," said Zinn. Still protected 30 years later, the 220-acre wetland area, bounded on the north by the Little Patuxent River, includes the 70-acre Oxbow Lake formed by the action of beavers damming a horseshoe bend in the river. The unusual variety of plants and animals that thrive on the Oxbow Nature Preserve has been called "a rare find" in a pristine area where a lucky visitor may find a great blue heron, wood ducks, mallards, pintail, and the blue

winged teal, along with wildflowers, silky dogwood, and, of course, cattails, the symbol of Russett.

Many current residents are unaware that the Russett family tree is steeped in history. Maryland historical records indicate that as early as the 1780s, Native Americans frequented the banks of the Patuxent River, which flows along Russett's northern edge. These early residents set up temporary campsites when traveling to and from the Maryland coastline. Archeologists

later unearthed Russett's rich history at test pits where arrowheads, Colonial and Indian ceramics, and stone tools were found. "We will preserve these areas once identified, to ensure they are not to be disturbed," said Zinn. Even before that, historians taking carbon samples said they found the presence of an oak-chestnut forest over much of the land 6,500 years prior to human residents making the Russett area their home. Wildlife has always been a part of the Russett family, where red fox, beaver, deer, raccoon, wildfowl, and numerous wildlife also called Russett home.

While Native Americans were camping along Russett areas, across the ocean in the town of Marlow, England, a building firm established the Lovell Group in 1786. That residential development firm would later become Russett's major developer, whose coat of arms from 1786 can be found on early materials published by Russett.

The Russett Community Buildings Celebrated Nature

Many of the original Russett homeowners, or homesteaders as we called ourselves, remember the cedar exterior and interior of the bathhouse and the community center. The 28-foot ceiling of the Russett bathhouse was originally designed by Charles Moore to reflect Russett's natural setting. The bathhouse was the winner of the prestigious American Institute of Architect's Gold Medal. Russett's original facade was part of that historical award. Many don't know that the Russett community buildings were not built as originally designed, as the original Charles Moore design was "unbuildable" due to changes in building codes over the intervening years. However, the present community building was designed by Roger Lewis, an architect and professor at the University of Maryland. Many of the early residents remember Roger because he served for many years on Russett's architectural review board. The ultimate design followed the original Russett theme, "Where Nature is Part of the Plan" and paid homage to Charles Moore's original design, including the cedar shingle siding to reflect Russett's natural setting set in the woods.

Preserving Nature Came Naturally to Russett Homeowners

Since the early 1980s, developers had been looking at the available space in the Route 198 area. According to Zinn,

a design that included maintaining as much of the natural environment was a priority. The community with recreational opportunities and plenty of green space within it were considered "Parkites." "We put together an award-winning group of national planners, attorneys and architects that had the same vision and we met to decide what the green space would look like and to ensure that Oxbow Lake stayed undisturbed while building a mix of single family, townhomes, and multi-family homes. There was one vision, to ensure that nature was considered in all the decisions made," said Zinn. The vision "Where Nature is Part of the Plan" came from that.

One of the first things that the development group established was that Russett would be built with a series of rules designed to preserve trees whenever possible, and the Russett logo, featuring cattails, came to be. Tree preservation was a high priority in placing building, roads, parking, and other site elements. In addition, the developer set aside trails adjacent to the Oxbow Preserve marked with signage to help visitors fully appreciate the origin and importance of this significant national resource and its impact on the Chesapeake Bay.

"Once we designed the street scape, the home builders had to ensure that the landscaping would be in compliance with our landscape plan for individual parcels and lots. We had a list of trees that builders could select from, and some trees were set for specific streets, for example, the Kwanzan trees on Cherry Hill Lane. We had to fight for those. The county arborist didn't think they were good street trees, but we showed them that in Bethesda's Kentwood area, there were beautiful blooming Kwanzan trees that were as nice as the cherry trees in Washington, D.C. Eventually the county arborist gave up arguing with us," said Zinn. The beauty of the annual blossoming Kwanzan trees in Russett is a view to admire.

Build It, and They will Come

The early homeowners who chose Russett said they liked its convenient location along the Baltimore/Washington corridor. A diverse group of singles, couples, families, and empty nesters worked in local government offices, education, business, and science. But one thing unified them: the desire to find a home flanked by nature and woods. In fact, to further enhance

natural buffers, Russett's developer required builders to re-plant trees that would have been removed for development to other forest areas within Russett. This was Russett's way to maintain tree health in this new urban forest with a 2 1/2-mile walking trail system that grew to almost double that after it was completely built out.

"We worked hard to create walking paths rather than concrete sidewalks in the green space. We had to fight the county to tell them that the plan was for meandering trails along the roads. Finally, they allowed us to do that. It makes a more pleasant walking area," said Zinn.

Future generations have come to know and love these ancestral trees, and residents zealously protect them. "We made a conscious decision to leave a good green space in parcels where large parks are available for people to enjoy, like in Parcel 2/16 and Parcel 9, where there is a pocket park in the middle," said Zinn. "We wanted to soften the impact of housing itself on the natural landscape. That makes for a nice neighborhood," he added.

Before long, the buzz brought many future homeowners to the Russett Home Finding Center, which often served as a meeting area for new homeowners. Susan and Gary Clevenger were among the first homeowners at Russett. At that time, the developer gave an incentive to homeowners to bring their friends in to see the community. The developers offered a signing bonus, but a welcome from other residents was invaluable. Soon the lots were being sold quickly. Other first Russett owners were the Leisher family: Mike, Linda, and their daughter, Amy. They said they were especially happy to hear about the planned amenities, the swimming pool complex, trail system, and tennis courts when they visited the Home Finding Center to pick their home in the Spring of 1992. Richard Burney, an early owner, said he was impressed by the natural vegetation of the community.

At the end of Russett's first year, almost 300 lots for homes in Russett were sold. As sales took place, new sections for resident development were opened for construction. The residential acreage and streets we know today were landscaped using over 4,000 trees and 1,000 shrubs in dedicated sitting areas, trails, and gentle curves designed to provide shade, beauty, and identifying marks for each residential area. The "arches" that identify certain neighborhoods have become landmarks

many residents use when telling their friends and neighbors where they live. As each neighborhood opened, Marshall and Lynn Zinn took special care to name the streets.

On-sight amenities appeared in the Russett Commons at what was originally known as "Recreation Area A" in the original PUD Plan. "It was envisioned that this area would house a community center with possibly a mixed-use component. The latter never came about except for the KinderCare and the library. All the other planned community amenities are as planned," said Zinn. The Russett Commons area includes a 7,500-foot community center, play and picnic areas, and a regional public library. Here, too, the developers were ready to designate land for this important community improvement. In the Summer of 1992, the tennis courts were ready along with the eleven-acre Russett Commons area, which would soon add several swimming pools and a bathhouse/locker room facility for its residents.

Homeowner Involvement Begins

As a Planned Unit Development, Russett created a homeowner's association in 1992 that would manage community affairs, and impose requirements of membership and fees from each homeowner. This is a system that remains today and is known as the Russett Community Association (RCA). The RCA held its first meetings in 1992 at Brock Bridge Elementary School. It provided a forum for questions and dialogue with homeowners; local political leaders, including State Delegate Ted Sophocleous and State Senator Ed DeGrange; and representatives of the developer. New Russett homeowners peppered the board and political leaders about plans for the newly created community, like fire department services and police. Homeowners made it clear that having a new school for Russett children was on the list as well. Homeowner fees were designed to pay for the association's expenses. A major function of the Russett HOA was designed to protect the aesthetic quality of the community and preserve the economic value of each home. Part of that design was to draft covenants to govern changes that may be made to a home's exterior.

Russett Homeowners Become Activists

It didn't take long before others with

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“We had a guy...”

Tales From the Laurel Police Department



BY RICK MCGILL

I'd like to dedicate this installment of "We Had a Guy" in memory of Officer Joan Dale Kramer. Joani was a member of our department from 1974 to 1983 and her previous service was with University of Maryland Police Department. She was medically retired from Laurel Police Department as a result of a line-of-duty motorcycle accident. She was certainly a cop's cop and could plunge into a bar fight or any other brawl and hold her own. She was one of the old-school officers who made a lasting impression on this rookie back in the day. Joani had battled breast cancer for several years and unfortunately lost her fight on February 7th of this year. Everyone who knew her was saddened by the news, but heaven now has another veteran street cop on patrol. (See her obituary on page 39.)

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.

Midnights.

The Midnight shift is different from any other. People who are lucky enough to work a night shift, in any occupation but policing especially, get to experience the world from a unique perspective. It's a magical time when anything is possible and "normal" people don't even dream of what we do. Or get away with.

As a rookie I was raised with the belief that the city

limits are the absolute boundary of our universe. You don't go outside the city limits for anything unless specifically dispatched on official duties. It may be to back up another officer from a neighboring jurisdiction, but it better be a real emergency. You didn't roam across the line. You didn't snoop across the line because you're bored on Midnights. You didn't cross the line by mistake: part of your probationary Field Training was learning where The Line was. Venturing outside the city would risk the wrath of the Chief and he would definitely know it if you did.

So, imagine my shock and awe one quiet, boring night in 1977 when, as a young and impressionable dispatcher, a historically under-recognized position soon to be renamed Police Communications Specialist, I answered the phone, maybe around 3 AM, to the voice of my shift supervisor, Sgt. George:

"Hello, boy." You had to know George. This fits.

"Hi, George."

"Any calls for me?"

"Nope. Why?"

"I'm just hanging out down here in greenbelly."

"Green--?"

"Greenbelt PD. Visiting some friends, hanging out in their squad room, drinking coffee."

"Holy S--, George! You can't go down to Greenbelt! It's outside city limits."

"I'm a sergeant. I can do anything." Not only could I hear his laugh but the laughter of a few officers from our sister department in Greenbelly.

That was probably the first time it dawned on me that The Line might be more of a suggestion than a rule. It may also have been the beginning of my yearning for the three stripes.

Now remember: these were the days before take-home cars and guys living out in the surrounding counties. When that dam was breached it became very ho-hum to do my commute from Severn in a marked patrol car. Sgt. Andy lived way down in Charles County and CPL Joe way up in Frederick. Take-home cars were quite the luxury that the current generation now takes for granted.

But in the days of the solid wall surrounding the city there are times when the radio is jumping and we run from call to call and the night just flies by. But at times, even in Summer, which is usually busier at night, the hard part is finding things to do. Of course, patrolling your beat area is Job #1 but you can only drive in so many circles or shake doors on Main Street so many times before you convince yourself there are no living beings left in town. Then the Devil finds work for idle hands.

On another equally boring Midnight, again while I was watching the radio console clock move like the glaciers, I heard PFC Chuck on Channel 2, which was a non-repeater channel and hence only audible in close range, quietly and cryptically say, "Headin' north. Takin' orders."

What kind of code is that? What's he talking about? I've always learned more by keeping my mouth shut and listening but in this case it was not to be.

Within a few seconds PFC Harry came across the radio, "I'll take one!"

Then PFC Bill, "One!"

Sgt. George, who apparently had not ventured south to Greenbelt this night, again on Channel 2, "Two! With extra Mombo Sauce!"

An hour or more goes by and George walks into Communications and hands me a brown bag containing a very tasty Polish sausage sandwich. George sits down with his own bag and, with years of investigative proficiency on the mean streets, can see the question on my face and explains, "Boy, these are the finest Polish's in the land. You won't be sorry."

The sausage was indeed very good but didn't entirely answer my question. The long and short of it is, up in Baltimore there is a red light district with strip clubs, bars, and massage parlors, and a reputation equally unsavory, called The Block. On this block was an all-night eatery called Pollack Johnny's, which was apparently popular with all denizens of the midnight shift, including cops. Back then there were only three Pollack Johnny's locations but today they're everywhere. I learned that the more daring of our veterans would occasionally risk life and badge to make a quick run up to The Block in Baltimore and bring back some world-famous Pollack Johnny's sausages.

I began to surmise that perhaps there was no alarm bell on Chief Kaiser's nightstand that clangs the death knell of any errant officer who ventures across The Line.

Police officers are a competitive lot. Much later, but still probably the very early 1980s, PFC Richard (not the K-9 Richard), broke all records with a closely guarded Polaroid snapshot of himself holding that day's *Washington Post* newspaper to confirm the date, standing beside his cruiser parked on the boardwalk at Ocean City, MD. The hands-down winner of "How Far Can You Go?"

I relate these examples of daring-do only to show that, while we always take care of our mission first, there are instances of bravery that will forever be hidden from the public. Of course, I, myself, always followed the rules, but I can say that my cruiser once went off course and I had to use the U.S. Capitol as a landmark to find my way back into the State of Maryland.



Much later, now a shift sergeant, again on midnights—all the best stories seem to come at night—I was in stealth mode cruising the back of Laurel Shopping Center with lights off at walking speed near the High's Dairy Store on 4th Street near Montrose Avenue. I noticed a small compact car coming down

4th Street with a few young males inside. None of this was particularly suspicious but at that hour anything can get your attention, especially when they coasted through the stop sign at Montrose Avenue without stopping. *Gotcha.*

I eased out of the High's lot and called in the traffic stop over the radio.

Me: "Edward-10, traffic." (My radio call, Edward-10, and 'traffic' tells the dispatcher I'm about to make traffic stop so put down your paperback book and pick up something to write with.)

PCS Michelle: "Edward-10." (Her tone of voice at that hour means I hear you, but this better be good, I'm watching Cops on TV.)

Me: "Small dark-colored Nissan or Toyota. Four hundred block of Montrose... Maryland tags ABC123. (Pause) Nope—He's running." (Obviously the vehicle description and my location, followed by the license plate so she can work her computer magic, and now oh-by-the-way he's running from me.) This last point is transmitted for the benefit of my squad mates who should be immediately dropping their own paperback books and scrambling to join me.

Fast chases are like parties: you send out the invitation over the radio and everybody shows up. If it lasts long enough you even get guys from other agencies showing up. It's a way to meet new friends.

Now, I've had my share of fast chases and they are typically heart-pounding, not only because of the inherent danger of the pursuit itself but also the uncertainty of what happens at the end. The best way to stack the cards in your favor, to ensure everyone arrives at the party when you need them most, which is for the a---whipping, um, arrest phase to come, is to remain calm on the radio when giving your play-by-play. Back-up is coming but they can't help you if they can't understand what you're yelling over the radio, especially when your siren is drowning out the pertinent facts. In other words, I try to be a perfect party host and considerately turn off my siren when transmitting on the radio and always speak calmly and clearly to make sure everyone arrives on time. Gifts optional but appreciated.

Me: "We're turning left/south on 5th Street.... Now right/west on Greenhill... Now left on 8th Street... (which I know is a dead-end in about 200 feet)... Bail-out." (Giving out a running commentary of locations with breaks on the radio so other guys can contribute if necessary is all important. The final point of a "bail-out" means the vehicular chase has ended with the suspects fleeing on foot.)

At that point I had just turned onto 8th Street and see only the stopped car, still running, doors open, parked at the end of the dead-end and I assume the objects of my affection have disappeared into the townhouse project beyond. PCS Michelle then tells me the car is listed in the computer as stolen. I tell her to go ahead and send me a tow truck and then I start doing an inventory search of the car and begin writing my vehicle impound report, all of which occupies quite a while.

Eventually it occurs to me that my excitement for the evening has been under-enjoyed by my squad mates

who are conspicuously absent. While I'm writing up the impound report, PFC Don arrives and says, "Sarge? You really had one run? Man, I'm sorry. We were having coffee at 9th and Main and you sounded so calm thought you were kidding!"

Calm can work against you.



There was a vacant house on Montgomery Street near 6th Street that we had to do periodic checks on for a while until it became occupied again, meaning stop by and check out the place to make sure homeless people weren't getting in and taking up residence or kids weren't getting in and taking up carpet, plumbing and otherwise destroying the place. From a historical perspective it's always a treat to explore these old Laurel buildings so even though I'm the shift supervisor I'm not about to let my beat guy have all the fun.

One sunny day shift I called PFC Joe to meet me there and we'd check it out. "Big Joe" was the biggest specimen of largeness on the department at the time. And like a lot of big, scary intimidating people he was the kindest most gentlemanly soul you will ever meet. So, we started walking around the outside of the house and PFC Monty showed up, too, because it was the only thing of interest in town at the moment. On the side of the house, we found a first-floor window completely open, inviting, you might say. Surely anyone could have gone in to cause mischief, so it was our job to clear the house and secure it again.

Climbing in that window we each showed how ungainly we were with all our bulky equipment on our belts in full uniform. There was just no way to look cool scrambling through that little opening. But once it was decided there was no avoiding it. Suffice to say, we all got in. The place was empty except for some trash left by the last tenants. When it was time to leave, we couldn't go out the door because it had been locked up in a way we couldn't secure it again if we went out. So, we used the window again. First PFC Monty, then Big Joe. They made it look easy but when it was my turn, I just couldn't seem to find my footing and I'd turn one way and back around and try another way, and it just felt too far to stretch my pants outside to the ground, which seemed farther down that it was when I last stood on it.

Finally Big Joe said, "Come on, Sarge..." and he backed up to me outside the window.

"Come on what?" I said. "I can't reach the ground."

"Come on and get on, Sarge," and he pointed to his shoulders which were at the perfect height.

So, I climbed out the window onto Big Joe's shoulders, and he gave me a piggy-back ride all the way out to our cruisers parked at the street. I didn't see anyone drive by, but we were all laughing too hard to notice anyway.



Chases were fun at one time. Nowadays things are wrapped up in concerns over liability and worst-case scenarios. Don't get me wrong; I understand it. There's

way more traffic on the road, even on midnights when all the best chases happened. And maybe the bad guys are now even dumber and less considerate of the consequences to innocent bystanders. But back in the day chases were epic. Not long before I came on, I heard you could actually shoot at a stolen car. For no better reason than that it was stolen and running from you. They didn't have to be fleeing a robbery or murder, just running from the police in a stolen car. When I started, I worked with old-school guys who saw that as normal. Even my generation could see why that practice ended.

But you can't outrun that radio. If you could transmit your location and direction of travel out on the air, the world would come.

One day, this one is in daylight, CPL Al radioed that he "had one running," as he tried to make a traffic stop on Cherry Lane. The radio worked great, he spoke clearly above his siren and the squad all knew where he was and headed that way. But when he hung his microphone back on the dash, the transmit button got stuck and they all had a sense of "You Are There" while they listened to Al yelling at the other car that was refusing to stop. His windows were open and you could really hear both engines revving, the siren blaring, and the wind through it all.

Al turned south onto Rt 1 from Cherry Lane and by this time the car must have really opened up as everyone heard an admiring Al yell, "Look at that sonofabitch go!"

It was just about that time another engine was heard as Officer Joani pulled up next to Al and everyone heard her voice over his radio, "AL! YOUR MIC'S STUCK!"

CLICK.

I don't know if the guy got away or not. Whoever told me the story was laughing too hard to finish by that time.



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.

Pennants, Pins, and Tokens



BY PETE LEWNES

Once prolific in America, pennants, pins, and tokens are practically a thing of the past today. Produced for centuries, they were created for any number of reasons—including advertising, events, political campaigns, schools, sports, travel, and even currency. While some are still being made to promote politics and sports, it's mostly a bygone part of Americana. Here are a few vintage Laurel souvenirs from our collection.

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





Library

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Growing Pains—About Every 10 Years

The first big change came a decade later, when in 1977, then-branch manager Lillian Barker oversaw an aggressive two-week rearrangement of the entire collection, resulting in a more spacious and open layout. That layout served the library well, but by the late 1980s, the expanding collection—not to mention the expanding population—was rapidly outgrowing the building. In 1986 and 1988, Prince George’s County voters cleared the way for funding a 9,000 square foot expansion that nearly doubled the library’s size. That work was largely completed in 1992, with a dedication ceremony in 1993. I was part of the staff during that expansion, and vividly recall the all-hands-on-deck process of moving every book and piece of furniture.

Growing pains began again just barely into the new millennium. By this point, libraries across the country were beginning to experience a seismic shift in the types of services they offered, thanks to the emerging prevalence of the internet. Librarians found themselves assisting patrons less with finding books than they did with getting online, and making computers accessible became a priority.

Coincidentally, among the computer users at the Laurel Branch in the summer of 2001 were several of the 9/11 terrorists, who’d been living in Laurel in the weeks leading up to the attacks. Staff members were later interviewed by FBI agents, and the library’s public-use computers were confiscated as evidence.

By the mid-2000s, the building was rapidly becoming obsolete in the wake of growing demand for public computer access. Discussions of building a new facility designed to better accommodate the digital age weren’t limited to the existing site, and some lobbied for the opportunity to relocate the library. BOLD, an acronym for Bring Our Library Downtown, became a spirited campaign by 2010 calling for the library to forego the Seventh Street location in favor of moving to the Main Street corridor—specifically, to the site now occupied by C Street Flats. Critics of that plan cited the inherent hazards of having a library—regardless of its chief holdings being books or digital media—situated so close to the Patuxent River in a notorious flood zone.

Out With the Old, In With the New

The old library closed on March 8, 2014, and reopened in a small temporary site at 8101 Sandy Spring Road behind the Laurel Municipal Center with a fraction of its collection available while construction on the new facility took place.

After a year’s worth of delays in selecting a contractor, the building was demolished on May 6, 2015. Thanks to Nardi Construction, I had the unique opportunity to take one last walk through just moments before the proverbial wrecking ball descended. Even in its vacant state of demolition, almost every square foot of that main floor held memories for me—memories of conversations and laughs I’d shared with coworkers all those years ago. Seeing the walls come down was like losing an old friend, and the loss still hurts.



(Above): Before its current Seventh Street location, the library shared space with the Woman’s Club of Laurel at 384 Main Street. (Right): Librarian Elizabeth Fetty in 1958. (Below): Gladys Spellman speaks at the 1967 dedication of the Stanley Memorial Library.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The official groundbreaking for the new building took place on May 27, 2015, and its grand opening of the \$14 million 31,000-square-foot facility was held with much fanfare on November 26, 2016. But despite the new library’s undeniable architectural beauty (the Grimm + Parker-designed structure won the 2018 AIA/ALA Building of the Year Award) and its countless technological upgrades, the most common reaction from visitors who’d spent any time in the previous building was, “What happened to all the books?”

New Trends in Library Usage

The general assumption was that the small number of books that had been available at the library’s temporary location during construction was itself a temporary thing. But patrons were surprised to learn that PGCMLS had, in fact, cut the book surplus significantly, citing a lack of circulation of over 70%

of the volumes that had previously been on shelves. This paring down of collections became a system-wide thing, as other branches also experienced during their own renovations. And book reduction isn’t limited to P.G. County, but part of a rapidly changing trend in libraries across the country. Many traditional library services, like reference assistance, has declined despite an overall increase in public library usage over the past decade or more. Greater access to free public computers, free Wi-Fi, and digital materials account for the rise in usage. But ironically, as libraries like the Laurel Branch modernize, public funding tends to decline. When budgets are cut, libraries typically take the brunt before other government services.

But the optics of suddenly having so few books in this expansive new building remains jarring even today, more than five years after the grand opening. The shelves, shorter in both height and length than their



older counterparts, are half full at most. And where great care had once been taken to separate mysteries, westerns, science fiction, and romance novels from general adult fiction books, they're now all grouped together. Perhaps if PGCMLS had done a better job explaining the changing dynamics of library usage before the grand opening, the shock would have been less. But for years, the rallying call for a new library had been under the guise of having “outgrown” the old building. And the question remained—what became of all those old books? Curiously, branches of the nearby Howard County Library System that have also undergone major renovations in recent years managed to increase space without so drastically downsizing the number of available books in their collections.

When I had the idea to write this article, I emailed Karin Luoma again to ask if she or anyone from her staff could answer some questions about the evolving landscape that Laurel librarians have had to navigate. She responded, but only to direct me to the PGCMLS Public Relations and Marketing Department, headed by COO of Communication and Outreach, Nicholas Brown. Similarly, Mike DiFilippo of the nonprofit Friends of the Laurel Library didn't answer any questions specifically, but noted that most organizational functions are now handled at the senior management and administrative levels within PGCMLS rather than local library staff.

Nicholas was kind enough to provide many insightful statistics for me, but in times past, a branch manager would've simply pulled that data from a physical annual report and been able to provide an interpretation based on their personal experience overseeing the branch. That's where bureaucracy shows itself again, and the disconnect from what was once a truly community-oriented library. To this point, Brown, who noted that the 2016 opening day collection included 50,000+ items, reported that PGCMLS “(does) not have data available at present about the size of the collection at Laurel prior to the closure of the old branch.” However, I found a *Gazette Community News* article commemorating the Laurel Branch's 90th anniversary from September 2000 indicating that the shelves were stocked at that time with “about 170,000.” According to Brown, when PGCMLS opens a new branch, the physical collection



(Top left): The library's 1993 expansion moved the main entrance to the north elevation, facing the parking lot. (Top right): Longtime maintenance man Tom Acra and librarian Brenda Hill enjoy some downtime at the information desk in 1993. The library's robust reference section behind them included local phone directories, encyclopedias, stock market indexes, and more—much of which is only accessible online today. (Above): The spacious lobby and entrance vestibule of the new building. Hidden in the vending machine corridor is a countertop for giveaway publications, including *Voices of Laurel*.

that floats from the branch is completely replaced with new copies. Books that haven't circulated within 24 months are deaccessioned, which he says has become standard practice for a “popular” materials library—a trend throughout the U.S.

Brown notes that with the shift to eBooks and other digital materials, PGCMLS has added thousands of additional digital titles to the collection, including some 20,000+ eBooks and 10,000+ streaming films, which isn't necessarily evident on the physical shelves at branches. But ironically, for libraries, the cost of digital materials has become significantly higher than print copies due to the rising cost of licensing fees from publishers.

Likewise, the physical reference materials that were once the backbone of most local libraries are largely a thing of the past. Many books that were once printed are now only available digitally, which allows the

benefit of databases that provide updated information in real time. Gone are the days when libraries had to purchase costly new reference books each time the previous edition became outdated. Virtual reference can also now be accessed by multiple people simultaneously online, whereas a single printed reference book could only be viewed by one patron at a time.

As a clerical aide some 25+ years ago, one of my frequent duties was to run down to the basement to retrieve back issue newspapers and magazines, of which the Laurel Branch kept hundreds of titles. That's another service that Brown says was eliminated more than a decade ago. “It was extremely expensive and it was receiving almost no usage.” By the way, if you hadn't noticed, the new building doesn't even *have* a basement.

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Library

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In a photo from 1989, Branch Manager Dianne Ashworth holds a plaque presented to the Laurel Branch Staff in recognition of outstanding performance. From left to right are Yvonne Harris, Pauline Apperson, Shirley Muney, Dianne Ashworth, Nancy Erskine, Carl Keehn, Peggy Ransom, and Mary Downing Jacob.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD FRIEND

On the surface, the numbers seem to defy logic. The old branch, with its modest 23,000 square feet of space, held approximately 200,000+ items at the time it closed. Despite being 33% larger, the new building only has a physical collection of about 53,600 items currently, with a future capacity of 80,000 items, according to the PGCMLS Builds website. But studies show that this is the trend of the modern library—today’s patrons are simply more interested in popular new titles and accessing information online than they are in having libraries be a repository of countless physical books. But where PGCMLS has made great technological strides, the growing administrative control over every aspect of the branches belies their vision statement:

“We provide a collaborative foundation within the community for all Prince Georgians to create the world they want to see.”

I think back to the years that I worked at the Laurel Branch, and the wonderful people who worked there. From the clerical aides, to the circulation staff, to the librarians, to the branch manager, the late Dianne Ashworth—we all made sure that the library reflected and served the Laurel community, and that the people who came into that building were treated, well, like the neighbors they were. Not everything was mandated by PGCMLS Administration. Case in point, one of the librarians actually selected the interior paint color during the 1992 expansion. (A color called “Cracked Ice,” in case you’re interested in some particularly obscure Laurel Library history). But most importantly, if there was information that benefitted the community, the library staff made sure it was easy to find. The contrast today is striking, with greater importance seemingly placed on the lobby remaining empty and pristine. I don’t think that was something anyone had to “clear” with Administration back in the day—it was something that was simply expected of them.

Even the simple act of phoning the library has become unnecessarily complicated. While the telephone number is the same as it’s always been, dialing 301-776-6790 no



Despite “outgrowing the old building,” the beautiful new library’s emphasis on its digital collection saw its number of physical books on shelves reduced by more than 70 percent. Local staff today have no creative control over individual branches—PGCMLS Administration now strives for system-wide uniformity, which has increased bureaucracy.

longer rings a librarian at the Laurel Branch. Instead, you’re transferred to the “Ask a Librarian” call center. I called to ask if the library had Maryland tax forms, because they too were nowhere to be found in the lobby. I was put on hold while the call center phoned the Laurel Branch. How, I ask, is that more efficient than simply being able to call the branch directly? It certainly wasn’t any help to me. Before the operator came back on or transferred me to the Laurel Branch, the call disconnected anyway. I wasn’t surprised.

To be sure, the Laurel Library still does plenty of good things—there are countless online resources and programs that staff can assist with. And the building itself is indeed an architectural gem. But as a former employee, it’s impossible for me not to compare today’s library to the old one that I knew so well. Not just the building or staff, mind you, but the overall character; the *soul* of the library, if you will. And the soul of this library has changed from the time I worked here.

This feeling was confirmed not only by my recent dealings with the current staff managing the Laurel Branch and the PGCMLS Public Relations and Marketing Department, but with multiple former employees who validated all of my suspicions of growing bureaucracy. From the top down and from the inside out, there is little trace of the library that once put its community first: librarians who were given the creative freedom to develop programs that they knew local residents would relate to, and staff who would advocate for a community newspaper like *Voices of*

Laurel to be given a more visible and accessible pickup point.

Nicholas Brown added that PGCMLS “very much appreciate(s) the important work that *Voices of Laurel* and various other local publications are doing to highlight local news and library offerings,” and that they are “happy to provide the public with access to community publications at (their) branches.” He noted that each branch has a designated area for such publications, and that “we are not able to provide priority/preferential placement for one community publication over another.”

With the *Laurel Leader* now part of a large corporate portfolio with zero input from the Laurel community, *Voices of Laurel* is filling the void as best we can. But local organizations, including not only the library but the City of Laurel, Laurel TV, and others, can be doing much more to help make residents aware of this newspaper. Allowing a small rack in the library’s spacious lobby would be a great start, helping visitors find it more easily.

As a *Voices of Laurel* reader, please let the Laurel Library Area Manager know your thoughts.

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Richard Friend is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys, and creator of the popular “Lost Laurel” website and book. He worked as a clerical aide at the Stanley Memorial Library from 1987 to 1997.

Tonga

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The newly constructed kindergarten in Ta'anga, built to be earthquake and cyclone-proof. Friends of Tonga and their partner organization Schools for Children of the World together completed this labor of love.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL HASSETT

taught in an open-air tent. Friends of Tonga partnered with a group called Schools for the Children of the World, which had planned and built over 100 schools in rural communities in Africa and South and Central America. The project was underway when Covid hit in 2020, slowing things down considerably. But the new school finally opened in 2021 complete with its own bathroom and septic system as well as furniture crafted in New Zealand specifically for use in early childhood classroom settings.

Full-Circle: Friends of Tonga Leads Response to Volcanic Fallout

Once again, as in 2018, Tonga faces a long road to recovery. This time, instead of structural damage, it's a ubiquitous blanket of ash that has caused devastation. The ash covered EVERYTHING: buildings, roads, food supplies, and crops. It rendered the air dangerous to breathe, the water impossible to drink. Michael noted that its occurrence during the hot, rainy season made things worse: residents have had to wear long-sleeved garments and face masks constantly in the unbearably humid weather. And while the international community responded with assistance, it often created additional problems. For instance, Michael notes, an influx of bottled water to a nation that has no recycling programs created a new problem: tons of plastic bottles to be disposed of safely.

But, in contrast to the 2018 cyclone disaster, volcano disaster relief efforts are being led by Friends of Tonga and a few other organizations to ensure that the response is "thoughtful and community-driven," which Michael stresses is a must in any given situation. In partnership with the Civil Society Forum of Tonga and the MORDI Tonga Trust, Friends of Tonga has donated \$30,000 and helped to coordinate and publicize relief programs to ensure that Tongans have access to clean water and safe food and can practice good hygiene as well as continue to adhere to the strict Covid protocols. Unfortunately, as relief poured in, these measures were not enough to prevent the spread of Covid, and Tonga, as of early March, was under lockdown due to a rise in cases.

Moving Forward with Community Help

Both Michael and Chiara are optimistic that the spirit of the Tongan people will help them overcome the havoc of the volcanic eruption, just as it got them through the aftermath of Cyclone Gita. They have total confidence in their Friends of Tonga teammates, partners, and donors. Their greatest challenge, Michael says, is to figure out a way to make more Americans care enough about Tonga to help.

Some sports celebrities have helped raised awareness and directed their social media followers to the Friends of Tonga page. These include professional American wrestler and mixed martial artist Ronda Rousey; the Scarlets, a Welsh rugby team; and Charles Piutau, a famous New Zealand rugby player with England's Bristol Bears Premiership team. More locally, a coffee shop and art gallery in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, hosted an art auction to raise funds for Tonga relief, featuring live music, a Kava ceremony, and Polynesian dancing.

Although they seem too humble to acknowledge it, Chiara and Michael are a true embodiment of the famous quote from Margaret Mead: "Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

Want to help the people of Tonga? Visit friendsoftonga.org to read more about the group and its programs, as well as to donate.

Diane Mezzanotte has lived in Laurel since 1987. A graduate of Penn State's School of Journalism, she is happy to return to writing "people stories" after retiring from a 34-year career with the Defense Department.

Russett at 30

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

different ideas were drawing up plans to take advantage of the unique site. Jack Kent Cooke, the magnate who sought to build a football stadium on the site where Laurel Park is currently located, and NASCAR soon focused on our corner of the world.

So, it seemed that from the beginning, Russett homeowners had to make decisions about how to protect their little bit of heaven, and they showed up in force. Initially, it was a shock to Russett homeowners to find out from local news reporters that Jack Kent Cooke had purchased land near Russett with an eye on building a new football stadium for the Washington Redskins. The only good news for Russett homeowners was that they had Governor Schafer on their side in opposition to the plan. They also had grit and were hell-bent on fighting the effort. Russett homeowners launched an effort to attend every meeting in large groups related to the potential change and strongly opposed the incursion of traffic and noise to our neighborhood. Russett residents gave rebirth to CATS II, Citizens Against the Stadium, an effort that originated in Virginia to oppose Cooke's plan in Alexandria. Residents did their job to review the area topography and environmental impact and, armed with graphs and charts, showed up at every county meeting to object to the plan. Residents delivered Stop the Stadium literature, balloons, and stickers to members of the Maryland General Assembly to make their point. It took until 1995 for Cooke to read the tea leaves and abandon the stadium effort. By that time, Anne Arundel County officials were in agreement.

It did not take long before a spot near Route 32, within earshot of Russett, became a potential site for a NASCAR track. Fresh from going mano-a-mano with Jack Kent Cooke, Russett homeowners honed their arguments and tactical strategies and in 1998 mounted a ferocious offensive to challenge the idea of having a NASCAR track in the area immediately behind Russett off Route 32 and the Baltimore Washington Parkway. The Busch Grand National Auto Raceway died in its infancy. It was not welcome and would not be built in the Russett area.

Ironically, 1998 was also the year when Russett won acclaim as the 1998 Anne Arundel County Award of Excellence for planned communities from County Executive John Gary, the Anne Arundel Trade Council, and the Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation. Zinn gave credit to the "Russett standards" that all builders had to adhere to that preserved and protected the land.

Tired of being blindsided, Russett residents learned that they needed to become aware and understand the economic and environmental efforts in our area before they became official, and they set up Russett committees to keep track of new developments in the area. Residents became active in land development and economic environment groups and committees in Anne Arundel County to ensure that homeowners would be the first to know what was coming before it was ink on a daily newspaper.

Elizabeth Ysla Leight is an attorney and has been a Russett resident since 1993. She is a former Russett Board Member and Russett Community Association Representative. She also served as a member of the Kirwan Commission, Laurel Race Course Impact Fund Advisory Committee, and Anne Arundel County Plan 2040 Representative. She served as President of the Maryland State Parent Teachers Association and the Maryland Hispanic Commission. She currently serves as a Steering Committee member of Maryland Latinos Unidos.

Mike Leszcz

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

we did do was go from 420 houses down to 384. And then, of course, the builder wants to build more down there. And he's not the builder, he's the developer. So, it's Ryan Homes and NV Homes that wants to build more. They sold everything they're building down there.

Are they going to build another access road into the [Patuxent] Greens or is it just that one?

No, no. He's got to improve that. The light--the intersection with the light--there's just going to be a vast improvement. There is going to be some additional turning lanes. And then, of course, the only other access road will be the one out going north on the 198. No, to answer your question. No. And they looked at different ways to do it. We'd have to do some damage to the green space on the other side of the creek to get onto 198. So, you have to weigh all those things.

Plus, it's a floodplain.

Well, you can build on a floodplain over there for another access road. You're probably tied in the access road in the back where the Amish--you could do that. But that's not the answer. The answer is to improve that intersection of 197. So, we'll see what happens. But again, I'll come back to what I said. It takes a partnership with the mayor, the council, and those different entities: Planning Commission, Board of Appeals, Historic District. We've never had a Historic District Commission decision appealed. I know they're worried about that. We're not historic Annapolis, folks. And look at some of the decisions over there that ended up in the courts for 10 years. We're not going to let that happen.

One thing that really stands out to me is that you always seem to be the most focused one [on the City Council] as far as budgetary issues. Is that a fair statement?

That's a correct assessment. That was my thing at IRS. But the vision--we always executed, 99% of the budget didn't overspend and didn't underspend. And that's the key--the key to the success of this city in the future--because the inflationary factors that are going to come to bear in the next ten years is going to be maintaining that budget, maintaining a handle on a budget. I've got to respond to an email to the mayor on Monday. He had Steve Allen and I looking at the impacts of the virus on

the budget and Michelle's been feeding me information over the last year. I don't think they need to make a change, but they've got to maintain a handle on the budget. The on-designated reserves have got to stay where it is. So, you have that to fall back on.

Is that possible?

Yeah. If they're judicious in how they spend the dollars they have.

Because I'm assuming revenue like everywhere fell somewhat during COVID.

If they watch it closely, we'll be OK. That's my assessment to the mayor on Monday. They're spending the money that they've gotten from the feds carefully. They've handed out--I think you saw they handed out money this past week to the various food pantries. That's important.

There was a grant not too long ago to some of the Main Street small businesses.

It's all important. But you've got to have it in balance.

[During the] mayors roundtable [in 2015] I asked, "What is the one thing you are most proud of in your time as mayor." And your answer was "We had Frank Casula passing away. We had the tornado. So, my goal once I made the decision I was not going to run for mayor, was to make sure the city was on an even keel and ready for the next mayor, Mayor Moe. And I think we accomplished that."

That's correct.

Everybody else is talking about different programs or whatnot, and you were the only one that even touched on budget.

We could have failed then. The city could have failed. The death of a mayor. Tornado comes through. 9/11. All kinds of things falling apart. And, you know, where's the ship going and how are we doing? So that's true, but that's all budget-dependent.

Looking back now, do you see your success in keeping things together was related almost entirely for budgetary reasons?

The focus was the budget and making sure that the mayor when he came in, and you're going to have a new city administrator--

But you knew you weren't going to run.

The mayor and I, we determined that right away.

Why? Why don't you want to run?

Not my job. I don't kiss babies. Not my job. When I worked for the different directors at IRS, I was the guy they went to to talk about IT and budget.

So, you just never really had the itch to be mayor for any particular--

A lot of pressure to run, but not my thing. Craig and I had that discussion pretty quick. He came to me. "It's not my job, Craig. I know what my job is--my job is to help you do your job and the way you do this with the budget." You want some help, I'll tell you where I think there's a problem. Come talk to me, some of the people in the council now, I'll tell you where the problems are. But again, you know, like I said, Valerie sat down in this living room and talked to me. Keith came and talked to me. Brencis came once, but at least they came and talked to me. I think these are the important aspects of this job. Not as a steppingstone to the next job. But as an understanding of solving problems for people. These people rely upon us, they really do. I might disagree with somebody. Like I say: five o'clock, that's martini time. But I'm not going to take it home with me, and my wife doesn't want me bringing it home. But my biggest critic--my wife. Who's got my back the best--my wife. She watches every meeting that I'm in.

Since you've done both, what was the difference in being a councilman for the ward versus one for at large? Was there any real difference?

Not from my perspective. I think there is a perspective on the current councilmen for Ward 2. They think that they're representing Ward 2, but you're actually representing what used to be at large--everybody. There was a lot of criticism over excluding some groups by doing that. I disagree. And again, I try to tell my colleagues on the council, "Look, you got a problem here." They have a problem over there too, Ward 2. So, I don't see a big difference, except in how some council members play it out. You know, I'm your councilman because I'm in this ward. Well, I'm a councilman. So, you got a problem, call me. We used to get phone calls 11, 12 o'clock at night. And they stopped. I always tell people, "Look, you can call any time at night, but don't forget my wife turns into

a pumpkin at 11 o'clock." And I react the same way at seven o'clock in the morning as I would at 11 o'clock at night. So, I don't see a big difference.

You didn't see it. But do you think there's a difference now?

I think it's become more polarized by ward.

Really?

Yeah. Some people in Ward 2 don't know anything about Main Street.

Why do you suppose that is?

Because I believe that the council members are not doing the right thing. Got to educate people. You know, you got a Main Street, it's pretty nice. Got a couple of restaurants. So it's not just the restaurants over here, it's the restaurants over there. Or--they have the Main Street Festival over there is going to attract 50 to 100 thousand people. Not just 4th of July. It attracts 10 to 50 thousand over here. Now the interesting thing is when I talked to people from outside the city, they know about both. They know what's going on over in that ward and they know what's going on over in this ward. My dentist is a good example. He just retired, but the new dentist, I said, you really got to pay attention to what's going on in the whole city, like schools. Don't forget you got Laurel High School and you got Pallotti High School and you got the Baptist school and you got St. Mary's and you got a lot going on here. You need to understand it all.

When the Redskins came calling, I remember Joe Robison saying he was all for it. What was your take on that?

I was invited to come over to the racetrack by Bobby Joe, and because, of course, the whole thing, the whole argument was the traffic, the problems, the ingress and egress.

You were Planning Commission then or on the council?

I think I was Planning Commission. So, I go over there and Joe DeFrancis was there, Karen DeFrancis, Bobby Joe and some other people. I said, "Look, the answer's here, hey, look at this." They said, "What do you mean, the answer's here?" I said, "Look, take a lesson from the Cap Center." They had the same problem with the Cap Center, and I said, "What did he do? He creates an 11-lane highway in and out of the thing. And when it's time to get people in, it's 10

lanes in, one lane out. When it's time to get people out, it's 10 lanes out, one lane in. You got the same issue here. Stop arguing about 198 and Route 1. There's the answer, right there--32. There's a 300-foot right away and you only got 10 houses, one church to buy between where you put the stadium and 32."

That would have been vacant then, right?
Yeah. And the big thing is going to be the church.

The church is still there?

Well, yeah. And I said, "You build the same kind of ingress/egress." I said, "Get out of the bargain with, you know, Tom, and the traffic on 198, the traffic on Route 1." People need to remember how Tom came to become involved in that. He volunteered his time to start. And then he got paid.

Tom who?

Dernoga. My buddy. Because he's anti-everything. Any development Tom's anti-this and anti-that. And again, it would have benefited Laurel and Anne Arundel County and Howard County. It would not have directly benefited Prince George's County. And I said the only other answer you got is to go talk to Kingdon Gould about his property because that's right off 95. And I said, "The Contee Road interchange is coming, folks." We've been arguing for it ever since I've been on the Planning Commission and it did come—it's called Konterra Road interchange. But again, I said the answer's here. But the access is off 32, because that leads to BW Parkway, at least, eventually, 97. And they were planning to 97 at that time and 95 and 29. And again, it all fell apart.

Do you know why? I know the Anne Arundel County Commissioner nixed it. But was there any--

I don't think they played politics right. That's my belief. But it would have been a far better location than where it is now, which is why they want to vacate that location.

Where's the lawsuit sit now against the WSSC? Fred [Frederick] was telling me--

He sued them when they opened up all the gates.

But he told me that he wants to know whose responsibility it is to clean the river. He says you can sometimes walk across it with all the stuff that's in there.

Well, we don't own the water, unfortunately. It's the counties that own it.

And it's the county line, right? So, who owns what?

I don't know, I'd have to ask. I haven't paid much attention to that, except Fred's argument started that with the flood. And they lost 200 cars in water. Well, we get a warning now. And in fact, we're getting ready to install—the city has applied for a grant and the money goes to all six sensors. We're going to hopefully make it a showpiece. We're going to have more rain and they don't know. What they do do is they don't open up the floodgates all at once like they used to. But again, I sympathize with Fred, but they don't warn them for Christ's sake. They call and say you got ten minutes to move 200 cars. First of all, you got to find the keys.

He is convinced that if they could clean the river out—dredge it out and clean it—that a lot of the flooding would just not be an issue.

That's one belief. But we've had arguments on both sides with the Corps of Engineers and the fact that the snags--they don't call it damming--the snags serve a purpose. Now, you know you've got beavers in the river again up here.

What a contentious history between Laurel and the WSSC. Every single mayor has horror stories.

They're independent. They'll tell you they're independent. And it's like they got a golden ticket or something. I've got one of their engineers on the Patuxent River Commission—he's been very forthcoming. They always make the argument we're in the drinking water business, not the storm water business. But again, Fred has had a long running battle. You talk to him because I don't want that poor guy to have a stroke.

Now that you're retired, if you look into your crystal ball, what do you see as the future for Laurel? What do you think's going to happen over the next decade or so?

As I said, if they maintain control of their physical resources and--we're going to see inflation problems. It's coming. We've already seen in some respects materials have gone up, but what hasn't gone up is the interest rates from the Fed. Some inflation's good. I learned that from my economics teachers. Nothing wrong with some inflation. But when it's out of control like it is now, if you pass that along to municipalities and counties, we have to

have a balanced budget. We're not like the state or the federal government. Got to have a balanced budget. So, if we maintain control, when I say control, maintain or we have our arms around that, they can maintain control to avoid any adverse impact on operations or the tax rates. Tax rates are crucial to that. I think the city will be fine if they don't end up like any other, they could end up like other municipalities that are facing some extreme conditions.

Do you think that there are going to be any permanent changes to the way the city operates based on the COVID crisis? Or eventually is everything going to go back the way it was?

We're never going to regress. But we've got some permanent changes to how we do business. I think there'll be a continuation of some Zoom meetings. But again, you lose something. If you don't have the in-person meetings, it truly loses sight. Even if you have only five people sitting in the audience, will lose something. At least people know they can go down, stand up, and say what they've got to say. And people are going to have to listen. But I think if--and I have confidence--I think some people that are on the council will disappear. I think it's going to come back to, geez, I'm interested in what happens in my community. Therefore, I'm going to apply for the council and apply for mayor, and I want to give all to those efforts. I'm not interested in going to the county council. I'm not interested in going to the state legislature. So, I think we'll be all right. I believe we'll be all right.

[This interview was edited for space.]

Ron Ladue Responds

Given the nature of Mike Leszcz's comments, Voices of Laurel asked Ron Ladue (a contributor to this newspaper) if he wanted to respond. Here is his statement:



I willingly took the blame for the issues with Patuxent Greens as the CEO of Ladue & Miller, but Mike Leszcz has no idea what he is talking about in his disparaging remarks.

In our partnership, I was responsible for acquiring land and financing, coordinating the product to be built, planning, construction budgeting, marketing, and overseeing sales. Until the issues arose, I had no idea of the problems with the city although as CEO I probably should have. The responsibility of land development and construction was initially with one particular individual and he knows who he is. That role was to supervise the site development and home construction. When the

issues arose with the project, I brought them to the field personnel's attention although I don't recall any with the land development—only with the home plans; and as I understand it, reviewing them with staff, they were being built according to the approved construction plans the architect submitted for us.

The city's position communicated from a newly brought-on staff member was that they did not meet the then-current code. That was after a large portion of the homes had been built. The builder's license was never in my name so there was nothing to take away. Ladue & Miller were the developers. Nor have I ever been involved with a project in Howard County as Mr. Leszcz would appear to

suggest. I suspect I know where Mr. Leszcz's rhetoric is coming from, but Tom Sr. and I never pointed fingers at each other or exchanged a cross word when things disintegrated. That was because we were more than just business partners. In fact, I loved him dearly as a friend, welcomed his company, and was saddened as he was by the circumstances.

There were a lot of nasty things published in the *Leader*; most of them directed at me, but I accepted the criticism and responsibility without whining despite the opportune remarks and publicity piled on by political motivation. Mr. Leszcz's remarks are both clueless and baseless and border on libel. Yet I have learned it is impossible to debate ignorance.



Finley Gibson doCarmo

*Founding member of Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad;
designer of heavy rescue vehicle*

Finley Gibson doCarmo died on January 12, 2022 at the INOVA Mt. Vernon Hospital. He was born on May 10, 1934 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the son of Reverend Daniel and Helen Gibson doCarmo. At the age of eighteen, Finley joined the Laurel Maryland Rescue Squad as a founding member. He told the story of a call he went on when he was a new on the job...he helped deliver a baby and it really scared him. Finley continued to serve the Squad as an ambulance driver and quartermaster. After years of experience, Finley was asked to design a heavy rescue truck for the Squad. He completed the design and the truck was produced. In December of 2011 the Squad dedicated the rescue truck to Finley for his fifty years of service with the Laurel Rescue Squad.

After graduating from Laurel High School, Finley went to work for Western Auto as a manager but soon realized he wanted to continue being of service and joined the Baltimore City Fire Department. Finley served the city for thirty years and retired June 9, 1994 as Captain of the Seltzer Tower Fire House, Aerial Tower #102, in downtown Baltimore.

Finley was married to Pamela Bakhaus doCarmo for forty-seven years. Pam and Finley loved to travel and saw much of the world. They rode camels in Egypt, toured the castles of Europe and panned for gold in Alaska. Finley was a fan of the Baltimore Orioles and Pam loved the Detroit Tigers. Every time the two teams met in Baltimore they were in the bleachers cheering on their own team.

Finley is survived by his brothers, William Norton doCarmo (Delores) and Winston Gibson doCarmo (Lauretta), seven nieces and nephews and his friends Tom and Nancy Pirritano. His wife, Pamela, died in 2020 as did his brother Daniel doCarmo, Jr.

Finley will be remembered for his shy smile, his quiet nature and his dedication to the people he served in Maryland. In an interview on the day his heavy rescue truck was dedicated, Finley said, "It's still the same motivation. I enjoy helping people. I've always gotten a good feeling out of it."

H. Edward Ricks

Former City Councilmember

Hayes Edward (Ed) Ricks, age 77, passed away on Sunday, March 6, 2022.

Born on June 19, 1944 in Cheverly, Maryland to Hayes Middleton Ricks and Mary Ruth (Kraeski) Ricks, Ed lived in Laurel for his entire life. He worked as the Director of the Family Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Ed was a Life Member of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad, and was elected and served on the Laurel City Council from 1980 to 1988, and again in 2011 to 2019. He served several times as Council President—most recently in 2011. He also held the honor of Justice of the Peace.

Ed spent his entire life serving the community of Laurel. One special and memorable way he gave back to the community was bringing joy each Christmas to children by playing Santa Claus. He enjoyed cooking and entertaining friends and family and he was always willing to lend a hand to anyone in need.

Ed is survived by brother, Robert Ricks and his wife, Linda; brother, Paul Ricks and his wife, Denise; nephews: Aaron Ricks, Ryan Ricks, and Kyle Ricks; niece, Lindsay (Ricks) Beil; great nieces: Everly Ricks and Taylor Beil; great nephew, Milo Ricks; and many friends who Ed considered family.

Ed was preceded in death by parents: Hayes and Ruth Ricks, and brother, Ronald Ricks.



Finley and wife Pam DoCarmo with Laurel Rescue Squad Chief Mark Arsenault at the 2011 dedication of the new Rescue Squad 49 vehicle. The plaque adorns the driver's side.

PHOTOS BY JOHN FLOYD/LAUREL HISTORY BOYS COLLECTION

RESCUE SQUAD 49
DEDICATED TO
FINLEY G. doCARMO
DECEMBER 10, 2011
IN RECOGNITION OF HIS LIFELONG
DEVOTION TO THE FIRE SERVICE AND
THE LAUREL VOLUNTEER RESCUE SQUAD
"A TRUE SQUADSMAN"

OBITUARIES

Joan Kramer

One of Laurel Police Department's first motorcycle officers; first woman to serve in motorcycle division

Former City of Laurel Police Officer Joan D. "Joani" Kramer began her law enforcement career by performing undercover narcotic work for Brevard County Sheriff's Office in Florida. After returning to Maryland, Officer Kramer worked at the Hecht Company at Laurel Shopping Center as a store detective from 1970 to 1972 and then joined the University of Maryland Police Department in College Park from 1972 to 1974.

Officer Kramer was hired by the Laurel Police Department on September 23, 1974 where she proudly served the community until December 1983. On Joani's Police Application, she replied to a question asking, "why are you making this application for police service?" with: "My interest in police work first started when I worked narcotics undercover in Florida. After I returned to Maryland, I was hired by a local department store to do security work. I felt that I could have a more meaningful career with police training. I have received as much schooling as possible in my present job with the University of Maryland. Hopefully the Laurel City Police Department and community will offer me the opportunity to grow in my field."

Joani quickly earned the respect of her fellow officers, demonstrating her ability to properly and correctly respond to all police calls for service from stolen property to public disturbances. When the Laurel Police Department started its motorcycle division, Joani was the one of the first three officers assigned to the division and was the first woman to serve in the motorcycle division.

Residents and businesses owners saw Joani for what she was: a capable, competent Laurel Police Officer. Joani worked tirelessly on each call she responded to. Her work was appreciated by everyone she served.

Joani was a member and served the University of Maryland Fraternal Order of Police; in Laurel she was also a member of the Laurel Fraternal Order of Police. She was a member of the American Federation of Police, Vice President, and acting President on the Board of Directors of Adelphi Terrace Condominium where she resided.



Oliver Wilford, Jr.

Former Laurel TV Production Manager



Oliver Wilford Junior, age 92, of Silver Spring, Maryland passed away on Sunday, February 6, 2022. Oliver was born September 2, 1929 in Frenchman's Bayou, Arkansas. He was a former production manager of Laurel TV from its earlier days, when it was known as the Laurel Cable Network Foundation.

Oliver was preceded in death by his parents, Oliver Sr. and Alice and siblings Joe and Lena Mae.

Oliver is survived by his spouse Ernestine, his son Daryl (Sabina) Wilford, Patrice Harris, Karen

(John) Dawkins and Andrea (Ernest) Veil; brothers and sisters James, Peter, Sylvester, Cordell, Kenneth, Gwenetta, Lestine, and Marion; grandchildren Endia, Danielle (Neil), Caleb, Aaron, Johannah and John; great-grandchildren Daniel and Devyn; his niece Danielle Stewart and a host of other nieces and nephews and other relatives.

Angela "Dea" Porrino

Dea Porrino nee Filopanti, 87, died January 12, 2022. She is survived by her children: Stephen Porrino and wife Gwen of Las Vegas, NV; Gina Martell and husband Kevin of Mt. Airy, MD; Jim Porrino and Sonia Lawson of Washington, DC; and Cara Porrino and fiancé Paul Hunsiker of Ellicott City, MD. Grandchildren/great grandchildren: Jeremy Porrino and wife Vanessa with Arrabella; Nick Porrino; Angelica Porrino with Roman; and Jordan Biniak and fiancé Cheyenne Porter.

She was born March 14, 1934, Ardmore, PA, where she met and married Francis (Frank) Porrino, on July 18, 1953. Soon after the wedding, Dea and Frank moved to Washington DC where Frank started work for NSA. His job ultimately led them to Japan where the family resided for 4 years. Upon their return, the family home was in Laurel, MD (Montpelier). This is where the family settled and became founding members of St. Nicholas Catholic Church; which started in a gymnasium, and moved to the Laurel Movie Theatre before the building on Contee. They hosted regular Sunday meals to the seminarians with the first Pastor, Rev. Anthony Griffin; Frank helped with the carpentry and painting of the existing facility, and where all four children had their Confirmation. Once she became an empty-nester, she moved to a smaller home in Ellicott City where she eventually retired, at age 80, from a surgical facility after working for NSA, JH APL, and HOCO Board of Elections.



Pallotti Annual Spring Gala
100 Years of Pallotti Pride
 Saturday, April 30, 2022

St. Vincent Pallotti High School

113 St. Mary's Place, Laurel, MD 20707

6:00pm Cocktails & Silent Auction

7:30pm Seated Dinner

8:30pm Live Auction

9:00pm Raise Your Paddle for Pallotti

9:30pm Cash Raffle Drawing

9:45pm Dancing

JOIN US IN PERSON!

100

Tickets

Early Bird tickets on sale until April 15:

\$85 per person | \$850 table of 10

After April 15:

\$100 per person | \$1,000 table of 10

Bidding

Online bidding begins April 25

Bring your smartphone for mobile bidding

Register Online

Visit bidpal.net/2022pallottigala to purchase tickets, sponsor the event, register for bidding, and to browse auction items



Cocktail Attire | Must be 21 or older to attend



Come and Visit Ellicott City's Newest Museum
The Ellicott Mills Children's Museum

Opening April 23

Get hands-on history in a period schoolroom, general store, and family great room as well as learn about the mills that dotted the Patapsco Valley at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Open Saturdays and Sundays 1-5

For more information visit www.hchsmd.org or call 410-480-3250



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