

VOICES[®] OF LAUREL

The
LAUREL
HISTORY
BOYS

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

FREE

SUMMER 2026
VOL. 6, NO. 3

CELEBRATING



LAUREL PARK

A Run for the Ages

For one unforgettable weekend, Laurel Park became the center of the horse racing world by hosting the Preakness Stakes for the first—and possibly only—time.

PAGE 12

VOICES OF LAUREL

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

SUMMER 2026 | VOL. 6, NO. 3

What's New With
The Laurel History Boys

3

CITY BEAT

4

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

6

KRISTEN NORTON

Laurel Elementary School
Marks 100 Years

11

SHANE WALKER

What Will the Next
Century Bring?

11

CELEBRATING  LAUREL PARK

SPECIAL 8-PAGE SECTION ON
THE PREAKNESS AT LAUREL

12

Angie Latham Kozlowski
Diane Mezzanotte
Murray Siegel
Charles Sisler

RICHARD FRIEND

From History to Headlines:
Laurel History Boys Reflect on
Milestone Anniversaries

20

PETE LEWNES

Laurel Archaeology

22

CARREEN KOUBEK and
MIKE SELLNER

Hot Stuff From the Laurel
Volunteer Fire Department

24

DANIELLE DELGADO

“Art-Official” Intelligence:
The Concerns of GenAI
in Government

25

KEVIN LEONARD

NSA Defectors: Snowden Wasn’t
the First—Two Laurel Men Were

26

MARK TOMASSONI

Look Down for Dinosaur Fossils
In and Around Laurel

28

KEVIN LEONARD

History Crumbs

29

MARK OPSASNICK

Rock the Patuxent

30

WAYNE DAVIS

Jonathan Jessop: From North
Carolina to York, Pennsylvania

32

JIM CLASH

Hurry Up and Wait: Rare Visit
to Nuclear Missile Base

34

OBITUARIES

37

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Cover photo: Charles Sisler for *Voices of Laurel*

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LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys



NBC Sports' Kenny Rice, reporting live from Laurel Park before the running of the Preakness Stakes, introduced a video package showcasing the racetrack's long history featuring photos provided by The Laurel History Boys. We had been contacted by NBC Sports, who discovered our previous coverage of Laurel Park through Voices of Laurel.

Grants and Donations

Thank you to Connie Lucas and James Bowman for their monetary donations. We appreciate the continued support.

We also received an interesting item from one of our readers. Mary McNeil sent us this photo of her dad's 4th grade class at St. Mary's in Laurel. Her dad was Vincent Knox, who was the youngest of nine children that attended St. Mary's and then St. Mildred's Academy (now St. Vincent Pallotti). Both her parents grew up and lived in Laurel during the 1940s. Her dad lived on the Knox farm that was just across the Patuxent River from the Laurel pool where Settlers Landing is now. Mary asked us to see if anyone knew who any of the students in the photo were. The photo was featured on our Saturday photo of the week on our Facebook page.



Spotlight in NBC Preakness Coverage

In early May, we were contacted by NBC Sports, who came across our *Voices of Laurel* newspaper and asked if we could share some images that reflect the long history of Laurel Park! NBC's national coverage of the historic running of the Preakness Stakes at Laurel Park featured an historical look back at the track's history with numerous photos we provided. We were honored that the national audience got a taste of our work.

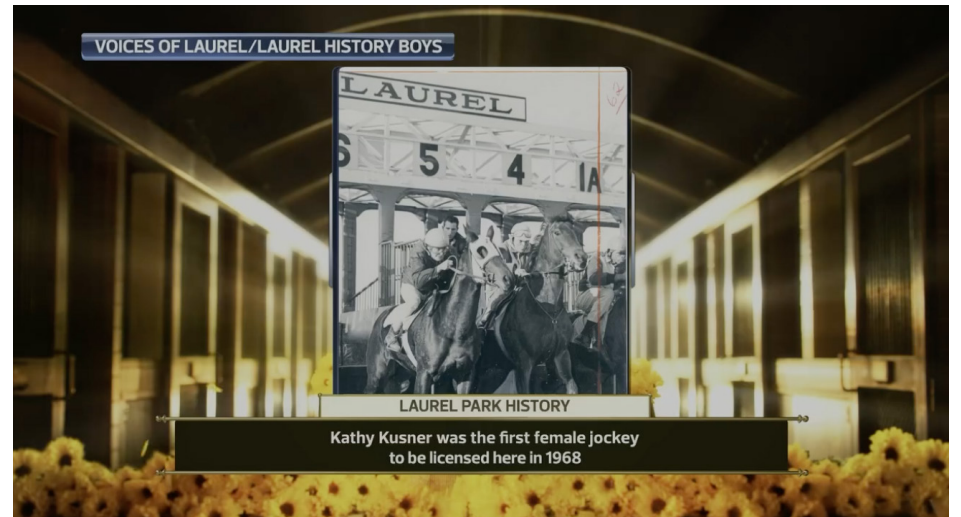
Wider Distribution for *Voices of Laurel*

The list of outlets where printed copies of our newspaper are available continues to grow! Every effort to replenish copies is made throughout the week, with our boxes receiving priority treatment.

Food Lion (Sandy Spring Road)*
Food Lion (Montpelier)
Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center
Laurel-Beltsville Senior Center
Laurel Branch Library
Laurel Museum
Laurel Post Office*
Laurel Train Station*

Maryland City at Russett Library*
Montpelier Arts Center
North Laurel Community Center
Oliver's Old Towne Tavern*
Robert J. DiPietro Community Center*
Savage Library
Savage Post Office
Victoria Falls Community Center

**Voices of Laurel* newspaper box or rack on site



Forty Years of Heavy Metal Parking Lot

Jeff Krulik, a member of The Laurel History Boys' Board of Directors, marked the 40th anniversary of his landmark documentary *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* on May 31 with a special event at AFI Silver Theatre in Silver Spring.

Krulik and co-creator John Heyn premiered the original 60 minutes of unedited footage they filmed outside the Capital Centre in Landover before a Judas Priest concert on May 31, 1986. The screening also included the iconic 16-minute documentary, which has become one of the most celebrated rock documentaries ever made, along with live commentary from the filmmakers and appearances by several of the film's memorable participants.

Upcoming: Laurel History Boys' 3rd Annual Book Fair

This year's book fair will be held on Aug. 23 at Oliver's Old Towne Tavern on Main Street from 3-5 pm. Every year the number of authors grows, and we anticipate up to 15 authors for attendees to talk with. Check with our Facebook page as the event draws near for a full listing of the authors. The event is FREE to attend.

Upcoming: Wallace Presentation

On July 22, Kevin will present the 1972 "Shooting of George Wallace" with an emphasis on the police investigative files that reveal much information that was never released to the public in the aftermath of the attempted assassination of the presidential candidate at the Laurel Shopping Center. *Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore at 6:30 pm. FREE.*

Laurel Light Award Call for Nominations

We are seeking nominations for our 2026 Laurel Light Award, which was created in 2024 to recognize everyday people who make our community a better place.

Let us know who you'd like to nominate for the next Laurel Light Award:

- Tell us what is special about this individual or business and the work they're doing.
- Explain how they are making a positive difference in our town.
- Be sure to include your name and contact information, as well as that of the person, organization, or business you're nominating.

The nominee does not have to be a current resident of the city, and anyone is eligible. Nominations can be submitted by messaging us directly, via email, or by traditional mail via the addresses below:

The Laurel History Boys, Inc.
P.O. Box 759
Laurel, MD 20725
laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com

City Beat

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

Laurel Hit with String of Violent Crimes in May

The month of May saw an unusual surge of violent crime within Laurel's city limits. Six people were shot and three stabbed—one fatally—in four separate incidents that garnered both local and national media attention.

May 5: After the crowd at a Cinco de Mayo celebration at Amigos Mexican Grill spilled over into the parking lot and caused traffic disruptions, the Laurel Police Department (LPD) shut down the event at 8:30 pm. As police were trying to disperse the crowd, a fight broke out near Longhorn Steakhouse and shots were fired, injuring three people. The shooter was later identified as Michael Dakernu Dannah, 24, of Beltsville. He was still at large as of early July, and the U.S. Marshals have joined the manhunt.

While police and medics were still dealing with that shooting, they were called to a stabbing in the same parking lot, finding two people suffering knife wounds. The suspect in that incident, determined to be domestic in nature, was quickly identified as Shon Juan Cook, Jr., of Columbia. He turned himself in the next day and is awaiting trial.

All five victims sustained non-life-threatening injuries. One of the shooting victims announced in late May that she was suing Amigos for failing to provide adequate security at the event.

May 9: A few days later, a fatal stabbing occurred at the Aventura at Contee Crossing apartment complex, adjacent to the scene of the Cinco de Mayo violence. Responding LPD officers found Dwayne Julien, 48, of Laurel, suffering from multiple stab wounds; he later died. Witnesses helped to track down the suspect, Samai Gahyle, 26, of Arlington, Virginia, who was charged with multiple homicide-related offenses; police said he knew the victim.

May 15: A fight between two groups of teens led to another shooting, this time at Discovery Park. One juvenile male suffered a non-life-threatening gunshot wound. While on scene, LPD officers heard more gunshots, coming from Eighth Street—not far from the police station. Luckily, no additional victims were found. LPD later released a photo of the shooter, identified as a 16-year-old Laurel High School student. As of early July, he had not been located.

May 24: Ten days later, Laurel residents again heard sirens as social media posts talked about a shooting near Harris Teeter. LPD later confirmed rumors that the shooting occurred during a parking lot meetup to complete an online sales transaction. Two people, including a bystander, received non-life-threatening gunshot injuries. Details were scarce about a potential suspect, with LPD saying only that the investigation was continuing.

Anyone with information about any of the above incidents can contact LPD at 301-498-0092 or anonymously at LPDtips@laurel.md.us

City Takes Punitive Action, Steps up Prevention

Shortly after the Cinco de Mayo incidents, the City of Laurel on May 8 suspended Amigos' use and occupancy permit. In a May 11 public notice, the city said Amigos would remain closed for "30 days or until all conditions established by the city are satisfied." The statement alleged that Amigos had misrepresented its security plan and the intended use of the space on its permit application. LPD Chief Russ Hamill later revealed at a town hall meeting that Amigos had said 12 off-duty Prince George's County police officers would provide security for the event, but responding officers had found none.

Amigos' closure caused a firestorm of reaction on Laurel-centric social media, with commenters divided between blaming the restaurant for letting things get out of hand and deeming the suspension unfair. City Councilmember Kyla Clark submitted a memorandum to city officials stating concerns over the potential impact of a 30-day shutdown, namely "lost revenue, employee hardship, strained vendor relationships, and ... financial pressure that can lead to permanent closure." Discussions within pertinent city departments and between the city and Amigos led to a fairly quick

resolution: Amigos reopened on May 14. But the incident came at a cost: Amigos is banned from holding outdoor tent events for three years, must close no later than midnight, and must hire law enforcement officers from 8 pm to midnight Thursday through Saturday.

In response to community concerns over the violence, Mayor Keith Sydnor shifted the focus of an already scheduled May 20 City Hall in the Park, allotting most of the time to Chief Hamill and special guest Tara H. Jackson, Maryland State's Attorney. Both discussed the difficulty of prosecuting juvenile-involved crimes—a subject Hamill raised last year in the wake of over 100 cars being stolen or vandalized. Both officials have asked the Maryland legislature to revisit laws that put juvenile offenders back on the streets. "We're witnessing a lack of accountability," Hamill said. He also pointed to a severe truancy problem at Laurel High School and called on parents and guardians to "stay engaged and know where your kids are."

Hamill outlined extra measures LPD implemented:

- deployed "considerable" assets throughout Laurel, including at Laurel High School;
- increased student engagement to help build trust and community;
- launched a drone program to provide first-response assistance; and,
- sought funding in the city's 2026–27 budget to install license plate readers.

Hamill stressed the need for community awareness and assistance. "[The police] are not a magic pill; we need the community's help. At the same time, we the police have to take responsibility, too, for the events of that 10-day period."

Mayor, Council at Odds over Proposed \$1 Million Assistance Program

Also in May, an unusual situation arose at city hall: two mayoral vetoes were cast, followed by council overrides. Mayor Sydnor had added a \$1-million housing assistance program to the 2026-27 budget close to the submission deadline, raising questions and concerns from councilmembers. Under the mayor's proposed Family Resiliency Program, the city would partner with Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services (LARS) to provide 100 families with \$750/month for one year to help them gain financial independence. Sydnor proposed funding the program using interest from a high-yield investment account, previously tapped for other projects, including aspects of the city's multi-service center. Councilmembers lauded the program's intent but questioned whether an appropriate process had been followed, citing the need for council discussion and public input before earmarking such a large sum of money. Councilmembers also took issue with \$30,000 Sydnor had allotted toward the *Laurel Independent*, with most advocating for \$45,000.

At its May 27 public meeting, the council passed two budget amendments: one temporarily removing the mayor's program until details could be worked out; and a second amendment to increase the *Independent's* allotment to \$45,000. Both amendments passed in a 4-1 vote. The next day, Sydnor notified council members via memo that he was using his line-item power to veto both amendments. (Full disclosure: The council's second amendment also raised from \$4,000 to \$6,000 the amount allotted to *Voices of Laurel*, which was not at issue in the mayor's veto.)

At a special June 1 meeting, the council voted unanimously to override both mayoral vetoes. In public statements, councilmembers reiterated their previous concerns over how the assistance program was added to the budget, while Sydnor stressed multiple times that he had "followed the process to a T." Council President Brencis Smith ended the meeting with a vow to work with the mayor and the council to find workable solutions.

Mid-Year Analysis: City sees highest single-month violent crime volume in over 3 years



BY HANNAH HOFFMAN

What may have felt like a difficult crime season this Spring for Laurel residents was confirmed by *Voices of Laurel* (VoL) in its 2026 year-to-date (YTD) analysis. A thorough review of publicly available data posted online by the Laurel Police Department (LPD) showed an unusual spike of violent crime in May, with 25 incidents within city limits—84% of which were deemed aggravated assault. This marks the highest recorded month of violent crime since March 2023, when 29 incidents were recorded.

Violent crime in May alone was equal to the combined volume in January, February, March and April 2026. Many attribute the incidents at Amigos Restaurant, Discovery Park, Harris Teeter, and Aventura at Contee Crossing as evidence of increased crime in Laurel; however, these high-profile events account for just 20% of the month’s total. Twenty-one other violent crimes also occurred in May that were not largely publicized or documented on the LPD’s Daily Crime Record (DCR). These incidents were, however, included in the May Monthly Crime Report. A disclaimer on the DCR states that it is “not a comprehensive list of all police related activity for the city of Laurel for the dates posted”; an LPD spokesperson noted that the publicly available DCR often omits incidents related to domestic violence, suicide, overdoses, and activity related to minors. While this may explain why 21 violent incidents were not listed on the DCR, VoL discovered that the stabbing at Aventura Crossing incident was also not recorded on the DCR and are unaware of any possible reasons for its omission.

Lower violent crime levels recorded in January through April 2026 seemed to offset the massive increase experienced in the singular month of May. But even despite the May violent crime surge, year-over-year (YOY) violent crime is still on track with previous years’ trends at 10% of total crime and has, on average, drastically improved since 2023 YOY. Total violent crime recorded from January through May 2023 was more than double the count for the same period in 2026.

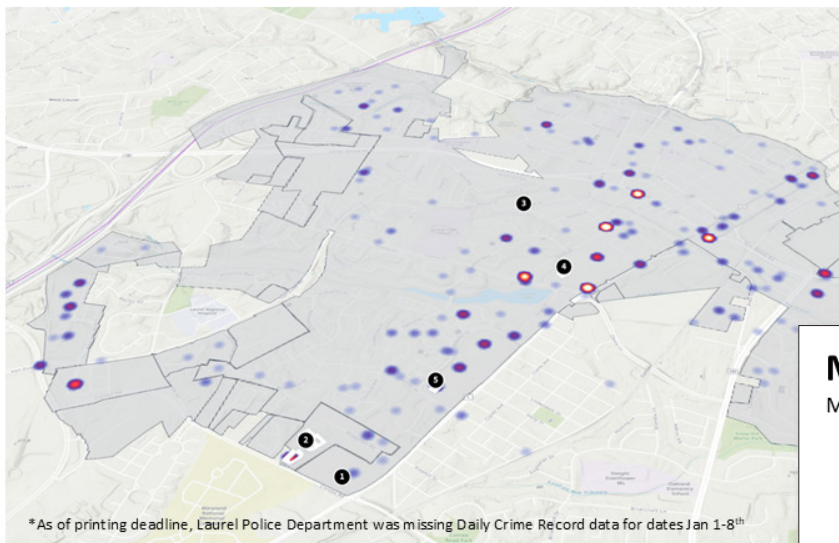
Current data shows property crime fluctuated in the first few months of 2026. April shows the highest on record this year at 102 incidents, likely due to a spate of Honda Civic airbag thefts that occurred on the night of April 22 in Oldtown. The lowest month on record this year was February, with 74 reported property crime incidents.

To better understand the geography and spread of crime, VoL geocoded the DCR, which provides an approximate location for each incident, often by block or intersection. VoL found that while the majority of 2026 violent crime occurred in central and southern Laurel, property crime has generally remained high across almost every neighborhood within the city. The most common property crime to affect every neighborhood over the last three years is vehicle-related crime (theft from auto, vehicle break-ins, auto theft, etc.); it accounted for 42% of property crime in 2025 YOY and currently accounts for 49% of property crime YTD in 2026.

It’s no surprise, then, that LPD has stayed in demand. The data shows a 15% increase in the average month’s call log between 2025 and 2026 YOY. Calls for service are on track to hit almost 65,000 by the end of this calendar year, which would mark an estimated 9,000 more calls than in 2025.

Author’s note: LPD did not provide missing DCR data for January 1-8, 2026 before this issue went to print. Additionally, there are many inconsistencies and errors across LPD data that have not been addressed or corrected, despite several VoL attempts to clarify with LPD. VoL used discretion to classify and categorize the DCR based on universal crime definitions and common sense.

Jan - May 2026 Daily Crime Record - Geolocation

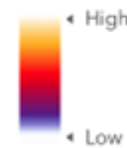


*As of printing deadline, Laurel Police Department was missing Daily Crime Record data for dates Jan 1-8th

May 2026 Violent Crime Incidents

- 1 Amigos Restaurant
- 2 Aventura Crossing
- 3 Discovery Park
- 4 Harris Teeter
- 5 Laurel Lakes Shopping Centre

Jan - May 2026 Crime Reported Location (all classifications)

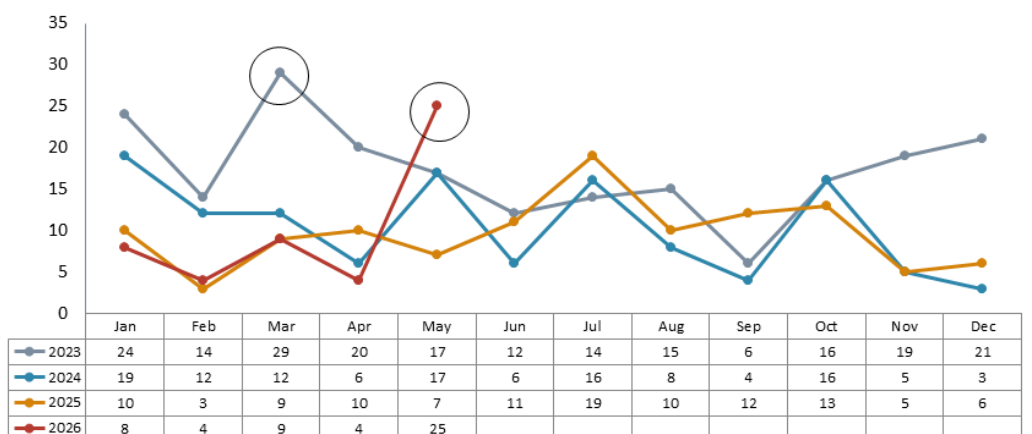


See more:

View these and additional crime data visualizations online at voicesoflaurel.com. Click on City Beat.

Monthly Violent Crimes 2023 - 2026

May 2026 was highest single month on record of violent crime in the last 38 months (since March 2023)*



Oldtown

Local news covering the Oldtown area



BY CAITLIN LEWIS | OLDTOWNVOICES@GMAIL.COM



A section of the Lewis family's backyard garden.

The Garden Tour: A View from Inside

In March, my friend Maria Gonzales Jackson texted me: “Question for you. The Laurel Museum is working on planning our garden tour and a board member passed by your house and wondered who the owner is and if they would be interested in being one of the gardens on the tour.”

Flattered, I ran the idea past my husband, since he would be on kid duty while I was prepping for the tour. He was all for it, so I said yes to Maria, and suddenly realized how many unfinished projects I had around the yard.

I tend to do projects in a circular fashion: I start one, get a bit done, then one of my four kids has a crisis and I must stop. Then the next time I'm in the yard, I work on another project, another crisis ensues, another stop, and the cycle repeats. I

bounce from project to project depending on two factors: where the kids are currently playing and how many of them are not currently crying. If you ever walk past our house and see garden tools lying on the ground, just know there was a crisis of toddler proportions and no time to tidy up.

Last fall, we decided to make a raised bed around a tree in the front yard. I was tired of losing plants because the soil retained so little moisture. We measured, bought materials, put up one side of the raised bed, then went inside because it was cold. It stayed cold, so we stayed inside.

When I agreed to the garden tour, I decided to finish the one-sided raised bed. After completing the wooden structure, I had the brilliant idea that I could dry-stack broken pieces of concrete around it. What could possibly be hard about stacking

uneven concrete pieces on an uneven slope around a tree with roots protruding unevenly through the ground?

It turned out to be the world's most annoying jigsaw puzzle. Every time I worked on it, I teetered on the brink of existential crisis. But I was in too deep to stop. And besides, the garden tour was coming.

I spent most of May furiously finishing projects and telling my kids to save the tears for therapy. I hired a teenager to move mulch and stones around while I planted herbs like a rabid witch.

The week of the tour was sweltering, with intermittent thunderstorms. On the evening before, all the garden owners in this year's tour were supposed to meet at the Laurel Historical Society (LHS) museum and then travel together to see each other's gardens. Unfortunately, the weather threatened another thunderstorm, so LHS Director Kristen Norton changed the preview to a postview gathering the following week.

Saturday morning arrived with beautiful weather. I did some last-minute tidying up while waiting for my LHS house captain to arrive. To my great delight, Kristen assigned Maggie Hubbard to our house. Upon arriving, Maggie advised that the program listed our house as the first stop (although attendees can go in any order), so she expected a lot of people at the start. She was right: a few minutes after 10 am, a couple of ladies showed up, followed by a steady stream of guests for the next two hours.

Over the course of the tour, over 40 people stopped by. It was charming to see so many neighbors enjoying my garden and asking questions about this or that plant.

Between visitors, Maggie and I rocked on chairs on the porch. While I know Maggie as the director of the children's choir at St. Mary of the Mills, we'd not had much time to chat before. I learned that she's the daughter of former Laurel Mayor Leo E. Wilson, and that her mother, Jean Wilson, was very involved with LHS.

Just before the tour's 2 pm end, City Councilman James Kole (one of the tour's sponsors) stopped by. Kristen Norton also arrived to check on us. I found myself exhausted, but happy in the sense of community that sharing a garden can bring. And I don't think I'll start any new projects for at least another month. Maybe two.



Joanne Wilson, Dan Dove, and Mike Dyer at a recent “gym class.”

The First Period Gym Class

Speaking of community, I recently interviewed a wonderful group of seniors—two from Oldtown—who meet three times a week to exercise at the Robert DiPietro Community Center. About six years ago, when the exercise room at the Armory underwent renovation, Joanne Wilson and Mike Dyer switched to working out at the DiPietro center. Along with Dan Dove and Merry Worthington, Joanne and Mike formed what Dan calls “First Period Gym Class.” They meet three mornings a week and spend about 45 minutes exercising, followed by 45 minutes of talking.

Laughing, Joanne said, “Social exercise is as important as physical exercise.” They use a text thread to keep each other accountable, with the expectation that they will text each other if one is absent.

Joanne said she tends to focus on strength training while at the community center (she's an avid walker in the Oldtown neighborhood), while Mike and Dan prefer cardiovascular exercise on stationary bikes or treadmills. (Merry was absent the day of the interview). Mike described the group as “a motley crew,” and joked that if my picture of them didn't turn out well, I could find all their photos on the Post Office's Most Wanted wall.

==

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

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

North Laurel/Savage

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



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI | HOCOVOICES@GMAIL.COM



The new memorial to veterans and their loved ones

HoCo Updates Neighboring Community on Status of Route 1 Housing Plan

Approximately eight acres of property along Route 1 from Whiskey Bottom Road northward could be the future site of condominiums and an apartment community. A status report on the plan was provided to area residents by Howard County Housing Commission Executive Director Peter Engle during a 7 May meeting hosted by the North Howard County Civic Association. Engle noted that much of the land in question has already been purchased by Howard County: the 5.5-acre site of a former mobile home park called Beechcrest and the 1.9-acre former site of Hurst's Antiques. The county also hopes to purchase the former Randy's California Inn and the still-operating America's Best Motel in order to carry out the development plan fully, to include traffic flow upgrades.

As presented by Engle, the development plan includes desirable amenities such as green spaces and a dog park in the condominium community, and ground floor restaurants and shops in the apartment community. Artist renderings showed the condominiums located on the Beechcrest parcel, with the apartment complex located on the Hurst and Randy's California Inn parcels, assuming the

latter can be purchased.

The housing commission seeks to provide quality, affordable housing. Engle stated, "We don't have good economic mobility in this area; affordable housing programs help people get ahead of their bills and save money so that they can have mobility." Condominium ownership offers the "ability to buy up," he added. However, most of the properties the commission manages are rentals, which are more affordable to potential residents, especially in the current economy. Engle stated that the federal money on which the commission operates is getting tighter. In addition, recent federal job losses and rising expenses are causing an "outmigration" from Howard County, as remaining in the county becomes increasingly unaffordable for people on the low end of middle-income status or lower.

For their part, neighbors of these future communities expressed concern over traffic congestion on Whiskey Bottom Road and Route 1, which several noted already poses a big problem. One resident was unaware that renters pay school taxes, while another attendee thought rental units might bring down property values by bringing "blight" to the area. Engle showed photos of long-standing, similar communities managed by the commission to show how well maintained they are. He

also pointed out that problematic renters can be removed more easily, under the law, than a problem homeowner.

Veterans & Military Families Monument Officially Opens to Public

Howard County recently unveiled a monument honoring military veterans and military families. Located at Millie Bailey Park at Lake Kittamaqundi in Columbia, the monument stands as a permanent place of honor for the county's 20,000 veterans, military members, and their families—including more than 1,000 Howard County Public School System students with a parent on active duty.

Artist Larry Kirkland designed the monument with deep meaning. The base star represents the community that supports military members and their families during deployment. The blue star honors service members and military families. The hollow gold star embedded within it reflects the grief and lasting impact left behind when a service member is lost in the line of duty. The reflecting pond and bench invite quiet contemplation, while engraved words about service, freedom, and democracy remind us of the values our veterans help protect.

Protect our Environment: Report Litter and Debris on State Roads

If you see litter along major state roads such as US1, US29, US40, MD32, MD100, or MD216, please contact the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), which is responsible for litter removal along those roads. It only takes a moment to report the offensive debris.

SmartER—Emergency Medical Care Online Tool

Howard County has officially launched SmartER, an innovative online tool designed to help residents quickly find the right place for care before they leave home. The online tool shows real-time hospital capacity and offers clear information about urgent care options across the county. SmartER helps residents make more informed care decisions while reducing unnecessary waits and supporting a more efficient healthcare system. To learn more, visit the SmartER public dashboard webpage.

Happenings at North Laurel Community Center

Teens looking for a fun way to spend their free time can come to the community center for Teen Kick Backs. From 5 to 8 pm every Friday through August 21, teens (ages 11 to 17) can enjoy activities, free pizza and snacks, sports, video games, and lots of fun.

Register today for aquatic fitness classes being offered at the new North Laurel Community Center pool. There are many activities to choose from, including: Aqua Zumba, BOOM Shake SPLASH, and water aerobics. No swimming experience is required. All fitness levels welcome. Classes are for ages 16 years +. Instructors offer a dynamic mix of dance-inspired movement, cardio, and strength training. Visit: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/recreation-parks/north-laurel-community-center> for more information on classes and activities.

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

South Laurel

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



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE | SOUTHLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



Qamaria's beautiful décor greets you as you enter.

Talk of the Town: Qamaria Coffee Shop

I've covered several restaurant openings in South Laurel over the last few years. Unfortunately, a few of them have already come and gone. (RIP, Dirty Dough) But this latest opening, Qamaria Yemeni Coffee Co., feels like a real winner. Qamaria has enjoyed a steady flow of customers since opening in mid-May. I first visited in early June and spoke with Nazish, one of the location's four co-owners. She said the staff has already come to know many "regulars," some of whom stop by daily. "We had a busy opening day, and word spread quickly," she said. "We're thrilled to have this level of community support already."

Qamaria was founded in 2020 with a goal of bringing authentic Yemeni coffee, tea, and pastries to the United States. The first location opened in Dearborn, Michigan, in 2021 and the company expanded quickly: there are now 38 Qamaria cafés in the United States, with multiple locations in Michigan, Illinois, California, and northern Virginia. The Laurel café is the first to open in Maryland; another one will open soon in Columbia.

Several types of Yemeni coffees are available: from light to medium roast, hot or iced, espresso, and lattes. Many feature cardamon, ginger, or cinnamon and are brewed in the traditional Yemeni way of boiling finely ground coffee beans unfiltered, then pouring off the liquid. For non-coffee drinkers, there is hot tea, chai lattes, hot cocoa, and even fruit smoothies. A pastry display features honey cake, croissants, savory meat pies, and more.

But it's not just about the food. Nazish explains that the owners' overall goal was "to build a culturally centered community space, a safe space for families and kids." She notes that while the owners are Muslim and the restaurant includes a prayer space in the back, everyone is welcome. "We want all faiths to come and work or hang out in a beautiful community space."

And beautiful it is! Arches, latticework, and geometric fabric patterns give a distinctly Middle Eastern feel. Booths and sofas sectioned off to form "cozy areas," as Nazish calls them, provide semi-private seating. Customers can take advantage of free WiFi to work "from home," and a conference room with a table, chairs, and

a smart-TV hookup can be rented for \$15 an hour.

Laurel-based groups are already making use of the spaces: a book club meets there, an embroidery club will soon begin using the space, and families often hang out late into the evening. The café is open until 11 pm Monday through Thursday, midnight on Friday and Saturday, and 10 pm on Sunday. "Our later hours were purposeful," Nazish explains. "Often, families want to do something later—play games, chat, or just spend time together—and there haven't been many other good options."

At least one well-known area resident has already posted rave reviews on social media: Rabia Chaudry, a Howard County attorney and author made famous through the "Serial" and "Undisclosed" podcasts. In an Instagram video she shot during a soft-opening visit, Rabia lauded the delicious food and drinks and "an atmosphere that is gorgeous."

I'm not a coffee drinker, but I have hung out in many coffee shops with friends over the years, and this is already my favorite for ambience. During our visit, my husband had a light, flaky butter croissant and I had a delicious Adeni Chai Latte and Sabaya, a Yemeni honey-and-flaky-pastry dessert that I thought about the rest of the day. (Yes, I had it for breakfast. Don't judge.) I will definitely be returning to Qamaria, with friends in tow!

Qamaria is located at 7401 Van Dusen Road.

Housing Boom in Southern Laurel

Amid a severe housing shortage in the greater DC area, anyone who travels Laurel's Contee/Van Dusen corridor can attest that strides are being taken to address the situation locally. At least three housing developments are under construction, leading some to praise the efforts and others to vilify the loss of green space and an assumed uptick in traffic. As someone who covers planning commission meetings, I think both sides have valid points.

Construction began last April on a 62-unit townhome community called Anderson's Green, just off Contee Road between Van Dusen and Route 1. Built by Lennar Homes, the 2,200-square-



Construction has begun on the Oaks at Laurel.

foot residences have 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths, and a 2-car garage in a stacked, 3-level design. Listed in the \$480,000 – 550,000 range, the homes began selling in Fall 2025. The development includes a playground.

Not far away, tucked behind a daycare and medical offices between Park Center Drive and Westmeath Drive, construction recently began on a similar development by Stanley Martin Homes. Called the Oaks at Laurel, this community will consist of 2- and 3-bedroom townhomes, situated over 1- or 2-car garages and ranging from 1,600 to 2,600 square feet. The rows of homes will form a U-shaped formation, surrounding a playground and green space.

Lastly, long-time Laurelites may find it hard to believe, but the long-awaited Konterra development finally broke ground in May on its "downtown" district. About 220 townhomes built by Caruso Homes and called The Marais are expected to become available by Fall 2026 as part of Phase 1, which will also include retail spaces and green spaces. Eventually, Konterra will cover roughly 2000 acres between I-95 and the Intercounty Connector (toll road 200).



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

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



Ginny Geis (front row, second from right) with her AFS classmates.

Another Reunion—How Time Flies!

I recently had the amazing privilege of attending yet another 50-year reunion, this time in Sweden rather than Laurel High. The year after I graduated from high school, I was an AFS (American Field Service) exchange student and lived with a family in Sweden on a potato farm. The Swedish high school system is very different, and one group of students follows a specialized line of study together for 3 years. My host mother had requested that I be placed in a specific class because the students were particularly friendly and fun to be with—even though they were studying advanced math and sciences!

My year in Sweden set me on a lifetime path of studying languages and cultures—there is no better way to have

a total immersion experience than out in the middle of nowhere. I was matched with the Mattsson family because we had music in common; I was a flutist, and most of the family played violin in their spare time, Swedish folk music to be specific. The farm was located about 9 miles from school, and I rode a local bus to get there. (I had always walked to school in Laurel.) I learned to enjoy the lifestyle on the farm and spent much more time reading! My classmates were very supportive and even got a chuckle when I made errors on an English test—I had immersed myself in Swedish and had “forgotten” my own language somewhat.

Gathering with my class from Domarhagskolan (my Swedish high school) after 50 years was almost surreal. The 18 class members present for the

day—from a class of 22—included a nurse, a chemist, economists, teachers, and entrepreneurs. We started the day at “Verket & Avesta Art,” the old iron works in Avesta—the reason the town was founded—which had been turned into an industrial history museum. We participated in a guided tour in both Swedish and English and learned the history of the factory, heard explanations of art exhibits portraying the differing lifestyles through the years, and learned the significance of the factory’s proximity to a major Swedish river. Afterward we ate a buffet-style lunch together at a restaurant called Koppardalen and enjoyed a typical meal of ground meat, mashed potatoes, and lingonberry sauce. As we toured the school where we had spent so much time together,

we reminisced about the teachers and marveled at how little some parts of it had changed even after 50 years.

Dinner was at Koppardalen also, but this time it was a fancy sit-down dinner with the canal in view: shrimp toast for an appetizer; salmon, potatoes, and salad for the main course; and a fancy chocolate cake for dessert. The food was delicious, but it was the company that made the occasion memorable. After 50 years, we were still the same fun-loving group of people who had cared so deeply for and supported each other during school days. We were all close friends together once more. It was indeed difficult to part at the end of the evening, but, of course, we all promised to stay in touch and to attend the next reunion.

Upcoming West Laurel Recreation Council Events

The West Laurel Recreation Council (WLRC) sponsors several activities for residents. Here are a few coming up to round out the summer:

- **55-Plus Exercise Class.** Running July 15 to September 2, with a cost of \$40 for an 8-week session; held from 10 to 11 am at the West Laurel Community Building. Contact njwhip54@verizon.net for information.
- **Lego Robotics.** Two 8-week sessions are being offered: September 2 to October 21 and October 28 to December 30. Cost is \$75 for each 8-week session. Meets from 7 to 8:30 pm at the West Laurel Community Building. Contact Rush Kester at rwkester@aol.com.

This year’s **West Laurel dumpster and shredding day** will be held on October 17 from 8:30 to 11:30 am. Contact Cassandra Hostetler for information at ctseckares@comcast.net.)

If you want to contact me, write to me 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.

Russett/Maryland City

Local news covering the Russett and Maryland City areas



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



Russett's new community gardens await gardeners.

Russett Unveils First Community Garden

New things are growing in Russett! Known for its park-like setting, the community is nestled next to the Little Patuxent River, encompasses 613 acres, and has 12 miles of walking trails and 70 acres of wetlands, which are part of the Oxbow Lake, a natural preserve. Originally farmland and undeveloped woodland, the area is now a bustling residential suburb.

In the spirit of the Russett's farming origins, a new and exciting development was recently announced: the creation of a community garden, spearheaded by the Russett Community Association's Amenities Committee.

The idea for the garden was brought to the committee by a resident. It was taken up by the Amenities Committee, whose responsibility is to recommend and suggest ways to conserve, uphold, and improve amenities and facilities for the community's pleasure. After receiving community input, the committee put a plan in motion, selecting a location and working out the details for running a community garden. A photo taken by Russett resident Rick Goddard shows eight raised garden boxes, each one seemingly divided in half. The beds sit on crushed stone and are enclosed by a fence.

When asked about the next steps and whether additional plots would be added in the community, committee member

Felicia Bond said, "Right now, this is a trial, and we will see how it goes."

The rental plots will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The Committee is hard at work developing procedures for the allocation of the limited spaces.

Coming Soon: The Shops at Watershed

If you've driven east on Route 198 just past the BW Parkway recently, you probably noticed construction underway on the righthand side of 198. That is the future site of a retail development called The Shops at Watershed.

An artist's rendition of the Shops at Watershed.



Real estate brokerage firm KLN B has produced a brochure to attract businesses to the retail space, pointing out the site's proximity to Laurel, Fort Meade, and major highways—and of course to the Watershed community itself, which will have over 1,300 townhomes and 633 apartments when construction is complete in late 2027. The brochure shows that at least four buildings will each hold multiple retail spaces, with a daycare center and adjacent play area to be added in the future.

Special Zumba Classes Offered This Summer

This summer, Sundays are for Zumba classes taught by Jess Deinlein. A teacher at Monarch Global Academy for 10 years, Jess is described as a "shero" by many who attend her free Zumba classes. When asked why she doesn't charge, her response was, "There's so much negativity and sadness. I wanted to help the community. And what better way to give back to the community than by providing a way for others to get and stay fit and meet new people."

Classes will be held at Brock Bridge Elementary School parking lot, 405 Brock Bridge Road, Maryland City. The 9 am class will be sure to have you moving, grooving, and feeling good.

PJ's Coffee Offers Exclusive Deals for Russett Residents

PJ's Coffee, located next to Wal-Mart on Russett Green East, recently announced a

special deal for Russett residents. Between 3 and 6 pm every Thursday and Friday, Russett Green residents can save \$1 on a coffee beverage 20 oz. or larger; or, buy one and get a second 50-percent off. This applies to hot, iced, or frozen coffee beverages. To receive the discount, show a copy of their digital ad, which was posted to social media, including the Laurel MD Connect group on Facebook. So, sip, connect, unwind, and choose your coffee-hour perks.

Einstein Bagels: Coming Soon?

Alert Laurel residents have posted photos to Facebook showing signage for Einstein Brothers Bagels at the Maryland City Plaza. The presumed new Einstein location is next to Navy Federal Credit Union and a nail salon. Although the official Einstein website doesn't list the site as upcoming, official signage on the shopping center can't be wrong, can it? I'll keep an eye on this potential development.

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

COMMUNITY

Laurel Elementary School Marks 100 Years



BY KRISTEN NORTON



COURTESY OF LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On June 5, community members, students, alumni, and current and former teachers gathered at Laurel Elementary School (LES) to celebrate the school's 100th anniversary. The celebration began with a short ceremony in the school cafeteria. Across from the stage was a mural of the original 1926 school building, a nod to the past and a reminder of the school's century-long history!

The ceremony began with a presentation of the colors by American Legion Laurel Post 60 and a performance of the Star Spangled Banner by the school's choir. After a welcome speech by Principal Tyrone Harris, Mayor Keith Sydnor shared remarks highlighting historical events of the last century and presented Harris with a mayoral proclamation. The evening's ceremony proceeded with a moving tribute to past and present teachers and students made by Nicole Parks, the school's Guidance Counselor. The ceremony concluded with attendees joining together to sing the school song.

The Laurel Historical Society (LHS) was proud to participate in the festivities with a display of historic photographs, newspaper articles, yearbooks, class photos, and other materials from the LHS and LES archives. The exhibit, curated by Amy Dunham (incoming President of the LHS Board and current LES teacher) with assistance from the LHS Collections Committee, gave attendees an opportunity to reminisce and share fond memories of their time at LES.

For 100 years, LES has been a cornerstone of the Laurel community. Constructed in 1926 at a cost of \$60,000, the original brick school building opened with 340 students and eight teachers. A growing student population in the early 1930s led to additions in 1932 and 1938. By the early 1960s, the school had grown to a total of 13 classrooms, plus a multipurpose room, teacher's lounge, cafeteria, storeroom, attic, and principal's office.

LES was the city's first consolidated school, bringing together students from Laurel's former "Uptown" and "Downtown" schoolhouses. Built during the era of segregated education, the school became part of the Prince George's County Board of Education's integration efforts in 1955. By the start of the 1956 school year, 21 African American students had enrolled.

Construction of the current school building began in 1972. In July of 1974, the original 1926 building was demolished. All retired teachers received a brick from the building as a memento. Construction on the current school building was finished in 1974, and it welcomed students that fall. Today, the original location of Laurel Elementary School is the circular driveway and parking lot to the north of the present campus.

Kristen Norton is the Executive Director of the Laurel Historical Society. The LHS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit founded in 1975 with the mission to deepen the understanding of the past and cultural heritage of Laurel, Maryland to connect and inspire, for today and the future. To learn more please visit laurelhistoricalsociety.org.

What Will the Next Century Bring?



BY SHANE WALKER

I wonder if, 100 years from now, there will still be a City of Laurel and if the citizens will remember that, 100 years earlier, it was declared that June 5th is Laurel Elementary Day.

Laurel Elementary held its centennial birthday on June 5, 2026, with an after-school celebration unlike anything we have put on before. The cafeteria staged the proclamation made by Mayor Keith Sydnor and Councilmembers James Kole and Adrian Simmons before current families and many guests who had either worked at or attended the school throughout the years. Classrooms were opened so visitors could see how much the school has changed over the years. The media center was transformed into a museum showcasing the history of LES.

"A lot has changed over the years," said Nicole Parks, the school's guidance counselor and director of the centennial celebration. "But we also keep many traditions that have lasted over the years, and people shouldn't feel like strangers when they come back to visit."

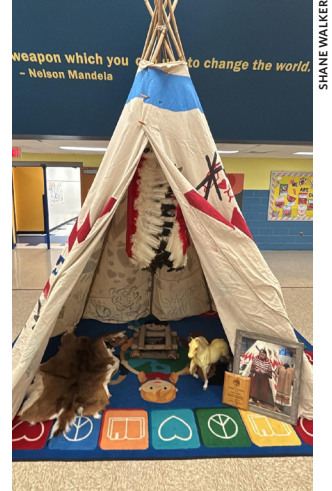
Tables filled the media center covered in old photos and yearbooks. Current students freaked out to see some of their teachers' youthful faces smiling out from the yellowing pages. One of the kids humbled me in an exceptional way: "You were in the 1900s?" Fortunately, all my pictures were in color.

Executive Director of the Laurel Historical Society, Kristen Norton, presented even older photos (in black and white) of school events and staff. James Walker stopped by to donate pictures he had saved of the Beautification Day, when he managed the installation of the front playground. A temporary wall, saved from the days when classrooms were separated into pods by sound-dampening dividers, was covered in photos both new and old that would never make it into a newspaper but still brought life to the past.

Photographs were not the only relics being displayed: the Native American History Month exhibit (a teepee and campfire setup, which my mother put up for decades); a leopard costume worn by former principal Melinda Lee (impressively, also for decades); awards the school has earned over the years; and even pieces of a time capsule from 2000. It may have been opened a little early, but the centennial seemed like an appropriate occasion.

"It's an exciting time to be working here," remarked Jen McLaughlin, known to her many students as Ms. M. "But then again, it's always been exciting. And it always will be! As long as there are students, there will also be me." This sort of commitment is typical for Laurel teachers, and it explains why so many past teachers and students returned to celebrate. Since its opening, Laurel Elementary has served the same mission: binding the community together.

If there is still a City of Laurel 100 years from now, I hope its citizens remember more than a proclamation. I hope they remember that on June 5, 2026, generations of students, teachers, and families came together to celebrate a school that had already spent a century bringing them together.



SHANE WALKER

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



CHARLES SISLER

CELEBRATING



LAUREL PARK

Historic Laurel Park Shines Again as Host of 151st Preakness Stakes



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

Over its 115-year history, Laurel Park has played a major role in thoroughbred racing. It hosted the first-ever international thoroughbred race held in the United States, the DC International, for decades. Six Triple Crown winners raced at Laurel before they became household names, and Seabiscuit trained at Laurel Park prior to his storied race with War Admiral. Back then, the 4,000-seat grandstand would fill up for big races, with hundreds more standing trackside. But today, as interest in racing wanes and offtrack betting options have increased, attendance at Laurel Park for everyday racing is usually in the dozens. In fact, the park usually imposes a cap of 400 spectators, for both logistical and safety reasons. Most races are now run with very few on-site spectators.

In 2024, with Maryland's thoroughbred industry in trouble, the state announced a \$500-million project to revitalize the industry. That plan included the purchase and total renovation of Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course; moving the Preakness Stakes to Laurel in 2026 and possibly 2027; the purchase and conversion of Carroll County's Shamrock Farm into a training facility; and the eventual demolition of Laurel Park. Plans to build a mixed-use development on the site of Laurel Park already were being drawn up when fate intervened. Some ecological and financial dealbreakers cropped up related to Shamrock Farm, leading the state to pivot and announce that Laurel Park would become the training facility.

As racing fans who have been on that roller coaster ride know, the state's plan could change yet again. In the meantime, however, the exciting news was that the Preakness was coming to Laurel, giving it at least one more opportunity for an international spotlight.

A week of excitement

Preakness week started on Monday, May 11, with the post position draw, in which starting gate positions are randomly assigned. Usually done by computer algorithm for everyday racing, major stakes races still use a traditional "pill pull," in which a numbered pill-shaped object is drawn from a container at the same time as a slip of paper with a horse's name is drawn from a separate container. An animated full-house crowd was on hand to witness this year's pull, at which local favorite Taj Mahal drew the first position, while eventual winner Napoleon Solo drew the 10 slot.

For the next few days, trainers and jockeys were at the track by sunrise to take their horses through training runs. Afternoons were fairly quiet on the track, in contrast to the grandstand, where a parade of delivery trucks brought pallet after pallet of restaurant supplies and potted plants.

The traditional Alibi Breakfast filled the Terrace Dining Room on Thursday



morning. Hundreds of attendees buzzed with anticipation as they enjoyed a buffet breakfast. Many hung around afterwards to catch the day's slate of races.

Friday was Black-Eyed Susan Day, which offered a full day of 14 races, six of which were stakes races worth a total of \$1 million in purses. Race 13 was the prestigious Black-Eyed-Susan stakes race, a 1-1/8-mile race for three-year-old fillies. The \$300,000 purse was won by My Miss Mo, ridden by Tyler Gaffalione and trained by Saffie A. Joseph, Jr.

Saturday came at last, and so did the sold-out crowd of over 4,200 people—many of whom were already eating, drinking, and celebrating before the first of the day's 13 undercard races began at 10:30 am. Social media influencers and TV journalists took selfies and recorded videos from railside, people dressed in colorful Preakness couture and fascinators paraded the concourse, and teller booths set up throughout the grandstand took in a steady stream of bettors all day. Live music wafted from the Governor's Tent, and dedicated bartenders served private parties in grandstand suites.

The signature race, the 151st Preakness Stakes, occurred at 6:50 pm as the 13th race of the day. With a maximum-allowable field of 14 horses, it seemed to take almost as long to gate the horses as it did to run the 1-3/16-mile race. Much of the crowd, including Maryland Governor Wes Moore, was cheering for Laurel-trained Taj Mahal, who started out strong but finished a disappointing 10th. The winner was Napoleon Solo, ridden by Paco Lopez and trained by Chad Summers, who bested pre-race favorite Iron Honor to take the \$1.2-million purse.

On Sunday morning, the exodus started the night before continued, with a parade of horse trailers and media trucks being packed and driven off, and cleanup crews removing most of the evidence of the previous day's events. By afternoon, the grandstand sat empty and silent once again, but with another memorable event added to its life story.



Mayor Keith Sydnor distributes posters for Main Street businesses to promote the city's "Saddle Up Laurel!" initiative leading up to the Preakness.

The City of Laurel Saddles Up



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

As many Laurelites know, Laurel Park isn't actually in Laurel. It is located outside the city's administrative borders, in Anne Arundel County, but falls within an area—overlapping four counties—that the USPS has designated "Laurel" and which most people recognize as "greater Laurel."

Try explaining that to out-of-state reporters.

Borders, schmorders. In the spirit of Laurel-wide pride and celebration over hosting the Preakness, the City of Laurel sponsored an initiative called "Saddle Up Laurel." In March, Mayor Keith Sydnor unveiled the special program, describing it as "a citywide call to celebrate, participate, and showcase the very best of Laurel." More than 20 downtown businesses participated in the program by displaying posters in their windows, participating in a resident scavenger hunt, offering promotional specials, and hosting watch parties. The Department of Public Works installed temporary artwork at two places on Main Street—literally on the street—depicting the silhouettes of four horses and jockeys racing in tight formation. That same artwork was featured on souvenir cups handed out by select restaurants. The city sponsored a special Movie Night, showing the award-winning film *Secretariat*.

Area restaurants were prepared for larger crowds than usual. Nadol Hishmeh, owner of Olive on Main, reported hosting several large groups from out of town during Preakness Week. Ginger Reeves, owner of Toucan Taco, said that her business was quite steady, but it was a different crowd:

"My regulars weren't here, I think because they wanted to avoid the traffic. But we had a lot of new customers come in, and Saturday was busy all day." Oliver's Old Towne Tavern on Main Street also reported a full house, as did Bank Shot Bar and Grill on Laurel-Ft. Meade Road. Judging by the cups and food wrappers seen in both of the grandstand's media rooms, the WaWa on 198 and the Starbucks near Russett saw a lot of repeat customers over the course of the week.

Surrounding areas also benefited from Laurel's big event. With not very many hotel rooms available in Laurel, many visitors stayed near the BWI Airport or Arundel Mills Mall, or in downtown Baltimore. At least one travel agency-organized group had a three-day agenda that included a visit to the Columbia Mall, and a small group of reporters from the Midwest watched the Orioles beat the Yankees at Camden Yards on May 13.

Although area residents expressed concerns over traffic jams, local news reported no major issues on Preakness day beyond the immediate areas near Laurel Park's two entrances. Police and K-9 units conducting car checks at the backfield/barns entrance caused backups along Whiskey Bottom Road for a while on Saturday morning, and the parking lot itself was jammed up at the conclusion of racing, but no worse than after an Orioles or Ravens game.

Now that Laurel has successfully hosted the 2026 Preakness, the odds are long but hopes are high for a chance to repeat in 2027. Only time will tell.

CHARLES SISLER





Long-time Alibi Breakfast Attendees Enjoy Tradition at Laurel Park



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

The pleasant sounds of live music floated from the Club House entrance into the parking lot. The smooth jazz was welcoming, as people began arriving before 9 am for a cherished Preakness week tradition—the Alibi Breakfast.

Begun in the 1930s, the breakfast is held on the Thursday before Preakness; it started as a roast-like event, with trainers and jockeys offering excuses (“alibis”) as to why they had not won the Kentucky Derby. Today, it serves as a kickoff event for the weekend, with trainers, owners, media, and racing fans mingling over breakfast prior to the start of the day’s races. At Laurel Park, the party seemed to start in a mid-event raucousness that spoke of the experience, ease, and longtime friendships of returning attendees, mixed with the excitement, curiosity, and possibilities of newcomers.

Lifelong Baltimore resident John Barnes, a retired Army combat medic and reservist, was one of those longtime attendees. His grandfather took him to the Preakness every year starting in 1967, and Barnes proudly said that he has seen every Triple Crown winner in his lifetime race at Pimlico. Other than when he was away on active duty, Barnes continued the tradition started by his grandfather by taking his own daughters and grandchildren. Being at Laurel Park for both the Alibi Breakfast and the Preakness marked a change; however, Barnes said he really liked the more formal atmosphere at the Laurel Park breakfast, compared to the Pimlico event, despite not getting an up-close look at the horses. Barnes, who lives near Pimlico Race Course, is watching the progress of the new Pimlico. He guessed that it was maybe about a third of the way complete so far.

Jackie and Rae, also from Baltimore, greeted old friends, posed for photos, and shared photos from past breakfasts showing Hall of Fame trainers and horseracing celebrities. This year marked their 54th consecutive Preakness. “And we’re only 39!” they joked. They bought tickets to the breakfast during a pre-sale event offered to prior attendees. Jackie said, “We started out years ago watching in the infield.” And right on cue, Rae retorted, “But Jackie didn’t actually see a race until 13 years later, when we moved into the stands.” Jackie was spotted waving to the cameras of passing press from along the fence at the Preakness on Saturday. She looked thrilled to be there, continuing her decades-long attendance streak.

A first-time attendee, Laurel City Council President Brencis Smith, was happy to participate in the storied tradition of the Alibi Breakfast and to take in the festive atmosphere. He was looking forward to watching the big race on Saturday along with his four fellow City Councilmembers and Laurel Mayor Keith Sydnor.

Following Alibi Breakfast tradition, trainers and jockeys did speak at the event. But, for those in the back—the media and people who purchased tickets via online public sales—it was near impossible to hear the speakers. No matter, though: throughout the breakfast, the jam-packed Terrace Dining Room was filled with excited chatter over the delicious buffet spread, the souvenir Old Bay tins and Preakness glassware, and memories of Preaknesses past.

As the breakfast was ending, conversations turned to the big race on Saturday. Then there was a sudden rush for the exits as people left the Terrace Room to explore Laurel Park, visit the Paddock, and place bets on the Thursday races.



ANGIE KOZLOWSKI

Race Day for Longtime Laurel Park Jockey Valet

BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

Jockeys count on him to get everything just right. He is the one who knows which saddle out of a number of differently weighted choices to use for each jockey and what position it needs to be in for each jockey for each ride. He makes sure the saddle is fitted properly and is completely safe for the jockey. He takes in the temperament of each horse and lets the jockey know if it is out of sorts in any way. Daniel Orellana has been keeping his jockeys safe for 28 years at Laurel Park.

Orellana works for three jockeys during normal racing at Laurel Park: Javier Perez, Victor Carrasco, and Angel Cruz. However, when big races come to town, Orellana will work for three different jockeys.

Big races, such as the Preakness, draw big-name jockeys. During these races, Orellana would normally travel to Pimlico to work for Flavien Prat, Rafael Bejarano, and Jose Lezcano when they are in town. Lezcano was at Laurel Park, not riding in the Preakness Stakes race but to ride in undercard stakes races during Preakness week.

However, having the Preakness at Laurel Park offered a different opportunity for Orellana. He continued to prepare his usual jockeys’ horses and the big-name visitors, as well. While he said that it is exciting to be at a new racetrack for the Preakness this year, he is looking forward to going back to the rebuilt Pimlico for the Preakness next year.

He observed that “old Pimlico is where everybody wants to go.” But he thinks the jockeys like different types of racetracks and would like the “big, long stretch backside [of Laurel Park]. It is really nice. It’s very fun.”

Preakness Saturday began at 5 am for Orellana. He was well into his workday by 10 am, having prepared Javier Perez’s first ride, on Itsamonstahmash, for the first race of the day.

Orellana also can be found working at Colonial Downs in Virginia during the summer.



Baltimorean John Barnes enjoys the Alibi Breakfast at Laurel Park, which included a souvenir Preakness edition tin of Old Bay seasoning.

ANGIE KOZLOWSKI



(From left): Mike Muscato, a clerk from Saratoga, handled bets in the rooftop Press Room. Laurel resident Lori Caraway, clerking in the grandstand. Philadelphia-based Gail Valdes has worked every Preakness since 1992. Dominic and Ron have worked together as clerks on major stakes races for almost 40 years.

ANGIE KOZLOWSKI

Big Races Bet on Traveling Tellers

BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

Times have changed. Jobs once entrusted only to smart, quick-thinking, honest, and friendly humans have been delegated to machines and now, even cellular phone applications. But in an industry that does not often stray too far from its nostalgic roots, humans are still getting the call. That call is to travel to big races or big venues or big races at big venues.

Despite its alternate location and smaller crowd, the 151st running of the Preakness Stakes in Laurel Park was no exception to the need for highly skilled tellers, also called mutuel clerks. The betting that takes place at the racetrack is called pari-mutuel wagering.

According to the Maryland Jockey Club's Laurel Park online "Beginner's Guide to Pari-Mutuel Wagering," pari-mutuel wagering means, literally, a mutuel wager or "betting among ourselves." The information page describes it as being "similar to a stock transaction." When you buy a \$2.00 ticket on a horse you are, in effect, buying one share in the horse's performance in the race. The racetrack merely acts as the broker for the

transaction and deducts a commission fixed by the state and shared by the state, track, and horsemen. The track's takeout remains the same, regardless of whether a favorite or a longshot wins.

Working as a teller at a horse racing venue generally is a part-time job, and waning demand for in-person betting has reduced the number of tellers at most tracks. The demand for in-person tellers during big-stakes races—for example, the three races of the Triple Crown—led to the rise of the traveling teller. Several of the traveling tellers at Laurel Park had taken time off from their full-time jobs to work this special Preakness weekend.

Mike Muscato works part-time at Saratoga Race Course. He arrived in Maryland the Thursday of Preakness week. He was stationed in the press room for both Friday and Saturday. A full-time dog trainer in Albany, New York, Muscato loves to help people and train dogs. Early on Friday morning, he was getting accustomed to using the older machine made available in the press room. Once races began, it only took a single transaction before he was

entering wagers for eager bettors.

Lori Caraway, from Laurel, started her career 31 years ago at Pimlico, where she works part-time for the Maryland Jockey Club. While not technically a traveling teller, she was transferred to Laurel Park when Pimlico was closed for renovations and hopes to return to Pimlico when the rebuild is complete.

Gail Valdes came to Laurel from Philadelphia Parx racing. She arrived on Friday morning and would be in town until Sunday, working both Friday and Saturday. Valdes has come down to work the Preakness every year since 1992. She became interested in working at the track because her father was a trainer; he retired in 2002.

Two of the traveling tellers, Ron and Dom, have worked big races together for many years. Ron works full-time as a Casino Supervisor at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino in Hollywood, Florida. He took vacation from his job to work the Preakness and drove 18 hours straight to Laurel Park. He enjoys working the big race days, saying, "I get to watch everyone win money!" Dominic, who goes by Dom, traveled from Virginia.

He said that he and Ron get together every year for these big races and have been working together for a long time: "We've been a package deal since 1990."

Laurel Park's Mutuel Supervisor, Nick Konialian, said that 40 of the 115 mutuel tellers working Saturday's Preakness Stakes were traveling tellers. He said most of the tellers who travel to these big races do so because "they like the experience of the Triple Crown, being a part of it; a lot of them go to all three races."

However, having experience working at the Preakness did not necessarily mean the clerks had experience working at Laurel Park. For most of the staff brought in to work various jobs over the long Preakness weekend, Laurel Park was a "new venue." The clerks and staff at the track on both Friday and Saturday were friendly, helpful, and happy to be enjoying the excitement and anticipation of the weekend.



Capturing the Spirit of the Preakness

PHOTOS BY CHARLES SISLER

Photographer Charles Sisler joined *Voices of Laurel* for remarkable behind-the-scenes access to Laurel Park during both Black-Eyed Susan Day and the Preakness Stakes, capturing the excitement from every angle—from the grandstand and paddock to the infield and winner's circle. This special photo essay offers a glimpse of the unforgettable moments he documented. A selection of his images appears in this print edition, while the complete gallery can be viewed online at voicesoflaurel.com.







Making the Most of Laurel Park's Final Season



BY MURRAY SIEGEL

Before I share my horse racing wisdom with you, please consider my credentials. I was born in a Baltimore hospital across from Pimlico Race Course and grew up a short trot away from the track. For nearly 40 years, I've lived five miles west of Laurel Park. Given these two facts, many people have long thought of me as a horse racing connoisseur. That makes them kinda wrong. In fact, by my estimation, I've attended approximately zero races in my life. Enough about my credentials.

With Laurel racing ending soon, I knew this past April was time to end my non-attendance streak and visit the track. I was shocked. It was nothing like I expected.

What I was told: As a special welcome, first-time patrons may race horses on the track, to the sound of deafening applause, while other customers shower them with fifty-dollar bills.

What really happened: They weren't bills; they were rocks. Painful rocks, thrown hard. I was clearly misinformed! I wish I had someone like me for helpful advice.

As a grossly underqualified rock-battered racing expert, I want to encourage readers to visit Laurel Park before it is too late. Here are some fun facts to help prepare for your day:

- Horse racing is the number one spectator sport in the country, just behind baseball, football, basketball, hockey, and soccer. Technically, I suppose that makes it the number five sport. Number six, if you're really good at counting.
- Horses can reach speeds of 40–45 mph during a race, just like the guy in front of you in the left lane on the DC beltway.
- Horses are extremely responsive to music. When Seattle Slew won the Triple Crown, he listened to early Little Feat before each race.
- Horses have a special locking mechanism in their legs and can sleep lying down or standing up. You can buy this mechanism at Home Depot for \$8.95 and have it surgically installed in your own legs for \$19,000.

By this point, my level of expertise is probably very obvious to you. Painfully obvious, perhaps. For your first-time visit to the track, I hope these tips help you enjoy a fun and profitable day.

- Don't press your face against a betting window. You don't know where it's been.
- Horses are paranoid, so don't engage in horse whispering. It makes them think you're saying bad things about them and they get irritable.
- Bring binoculars. If you don't own a pair, you can prepare by reading a CVS receipt from ten feet away.
- If you stay after the races end, you can get autographs from the jockey and the horse.
- Go big! Don't be afraid to make that \$2 bet! Hire that bodyguard to help protect your earnings! If you lose money, your bodyguard can always help with household chores.
- Don't go on snowy days. The track is closed and the horses are home watching reruns of *Friends*.
- Some fans attend Oriole games in cow costumes to support Colton Cowser. It is perfectly acceptable to wear a horse costume at the racetrack. Better yet, get a full-sized one you can share with a friend. But always make sure you're the guy in front.

If you're looking for betting tips, you've come to the right place. However, I seem to have run out of space. So, I'll pass along the same advice my father always gave me: "Buy low, sell high." I'm not sure how that applies to horse racing, but if you figure it out, please tell me.

There you have it, straight from the horse's mouth. Or, from somewhere between its mouth and tail. Enjoy your experience.



Murray Siegel is the author of *MurMurings: Funny Tales of Terror and Other Desperate Cries for Help* and the novel *Cupid Wore Snow Boots*. He is a University of Maryland graduate.



ANGIE KOZLOWSKI

International reporters Emanuel Aguilar M. (Chile) and Frank Pineda (Peru) pose with photographer Juan Gamboa (Peru) in the media room at Laurel Park for the 151st Preakness.

International Press Coverage of the Preakness

BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

Spanish-speaking horse racing fans made up much of the worldwide audience for the 151st Preakness, turning to social media and other outlets for live updates. In the media room at Laurel Park, members of the international press worked alongside American counterparts from print and on-line outlets. Among them was Chilean reporter Emanuel Aguilar M., who covered the two days of racing for *America's Best Racing* by providing live, Spanish-language coverage.

Aguilar talked to several jockeys, trainers, and a local jockey valet during the lead-up to the Preakness. Most of his interview subjects greeted and wished the Spanish-speaking viewers well. Two of those who offered a brief hello to the viewers were jockeys Irad and Jose Ortiz. The now-famous Ortiz brothers had busy days of racing and had won several races but were not available for lengthy interviews.

Aguilar interviewed another jockey, Uruguayan Carlos Lopez, who had taken the spotlight in an unfortunate way the day before—Black-Eyed Susan Day. Lopez was injured in a two-horse collision on the homestretch of an early race, in which both horses and jockeys ended up on the turf. The jockeys were attended to by medical personnel but were able to walk off the track on their own. The horses were both up on their own feet quickly and were deemed fine by racing officials. Lopez described his injuries as a broken rib and a broken collarbone that his doctor said would take four weeks to heal. He thanked all his fans in Uruguay, Chile, and all over for their best wishes, which he had received via his social media.

Aguilar also spoke to Pedro Velez, an exercise rider for Corona de Oro, who said that he enjoyed being in Laurel Park for the races, and that Maryland was treating him very well. He said with a chuckle, "There is a lot of food." He added that his horse traveled well and had been improving every day. Running as a longshot, Corona de Oro finished 11th in the Preakness.

Peruvian reporter Juan Gamboa of *Derby Race Horses Peru*, assisted by photographer Frank Pineda, provided his audience with a comprehensive video that included short interviews with the Ortiz brothers; a sweeping video of fans lined up along the fence watching the races and waving to the Peruvian audience for the camera; a photo montage of people and views from Laurel Park; and an on-the-spot interview of Preakness Stakes-winning jockey Paco Lopez as he walked toward the Paddock after his big win on Napoleon Solo. Later, Gamboa wrote an article about the Preakness victory for his outlet's blog.

Both Aguilar and Gamboa mentioned they would be traveling to New York for the Belmont Stakes.



(Left): The author as a teen in Adams County, PA, and (right) Angie Kozlowski and Diane Mezzanotte in the media room at the Preakness.

Covering the Preakness: Some Teenage Dreams Do Come True

BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

As a teenager in southcentral Pennsylvania, I was in love with horses. My paternal grandfather occasionally took me riding along country backroads. He had a framed portrait, now passed down to my father, of three early 1900s trotters: George Gano, Minor Heir, and the famous Dan Patch, with the caption “Fastest Stallions in the World.” My family watched every race of the Triple Crown. I read all the *Black Stallion* books. I went to trotter races at county and state fairs with a friend. I always think of 1973, first and foremost, as the Year of Secretariat. And, when Appaloosa breeders moved in next door, I excitedly took on a summer job of brushing down two of their mares. Sadly, that job lasted just a week, after discovering I was highly allergic to straw and horse dander.

Other interests took over as I went to college, moved to the DC area, and got caught up in work and family life. Now and then I would catch one of the Triple Crown races, but I didn’t really follow horse racing—which is ironic, I know, since a world-famous track sits less than 2 miles from my home.

But that all changed when I started writing for *Voices of Laurel*. I found myself researching the origins of Laurel Park, the legendary DC International race, and related topics. When we (twice) hosted “A Day at the Races,” we sat trackside. Hearing and feeling the thunder of hooves awakened a strong memory that I didn’t know I had been missing. When it was announced that the 151st Preakness would take place at Laurel, I was excited. And when *Voices of Laurel* was granted media credentials, I was over the moon. “I’m going to the Preakness!” I texted my parents.

Spending four days at Laurel Park was a great experience. On Wednesday, we watched dozens of workers preparing the grandstand and VIP tents and met other members of the press in line for photo IDs. Thursday’s Alibi Breakfast brought a level of excitement I was unprepared for, as regular attendees greeted each other and racing VIPs got up to speak. Many stuck

around for that day’s slate of races, against the backdrop of landscape contractors creating a special winner’s circle in the infield and erecting lines of (fake!) hedges to define walking paths among the tents.

Friday was when it really sank in. Laurel Park was a bustle of activity from early in the morning: the parking lots, restaurants, and trackside viewing areas were filled with fans of Black-Eyed Susan Day. Many were dressed in yellow-and-black floral designs and wearing fascinators, in a preview of the next day’s fashion parade. I caught Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott as he left the winner’s circle presentation for the featured race; he was high-fiving the crowd and posing for selfies.

And, of course, Saturday’s crowd was even bigger as over 4,000 people joined in an all-day celebration of Maryland thoroughbreds and racing tradition. Many were local residents, while others had traveled from all over the country; some were at their first Preakness, while others attend yearly. I watched as many races as possible, placed a few small (and losing) bets, but I never forgot that I was on assignment—which, in itself, was another lifelong goal come true, to be able to say “I’m on assignment.”

My colleagues and I were there to capture what could turn out to be Laurel Park’s last hurrah after over a century of thoroughbred racing history. We took notes and photos, made recordings, posted Facebook updates, and talked to as many people as possible. We talked to people behind the scenes who were cleaning bathrooms, guarding tents, parking cars, and selling concessions. We talked to trainers, owners, workers, fans, and other members of the press. We trudged through the old, condemned area of the grandstand, up what seemed like hundreds of steps and through musty, narrow hallways to get to the traditional media box on the roof. It was a nondescript room with a few metal tables and chairs, filing cabinets, and a single, beat-up manual typewriter that was older than me, but it exuded a charming,

Lou Grant-like atmosphere. The room hummed with mumbled conversations and the sound of laptop keystrokes—until the “quiet on set!” call just before the horses leapt out of the starting gate for the next race; only the official race caller, watching through binoculars, could speak as a recorder took down his second-by-second updates on horse positions. After each race ended and the caller’s binoculars went down, pent-up cheers and curses alike erupted and the room was alive again.

I could go on and on about my experience, but I will share just one more memorable moment. Shortly before the actual Preakness Stakes race, my colleague Angie Kozlowski and I were sitting alone in an area of the grandstand off-limits to the general public. We were both exhausted and sad that our whirlwind experience was about to end. We also lamented the fact that Maryland Governor Wes Moore wasn’t in the Governor’s tent when we managed to get inside. Low and behold, a small party of people led by tall, stern-looking men in dark suits and wearing earpieces walked down the steps next to us and took seats a few rows in front of us. It was the governor, his wife, and just a few other people.

As journalists who had been seeking That Interview all day, we looked at each other with wide eyes and silently squealed at our good fortune. But without even discussing it, we both knew that we weren’t going to try to talk to the governor. After smiling and hobnobbing and doing media spots all day, he and his party had found an empty part of the grandstand to enjoy the main race in relative privacy. And so, we honored his desire to remain incognito, which in turn gave us the honor of sharing in his experience: watching from behind, rather than among, the crowds; laughing and cheering with friends and family, like everyone else; and focusing only on the power-and-grace motion of 14 beautiful thoroughbreds seeking their own moment in the spotlight.

It was a fitting end to our Preakness experience.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

From History to Headlines

Laurel History Boys reflect on milestone anniversaries for organization and Voices of Laurel



BY RICHARD FRIEND

While it seems like only yesterday that we started, *Voices of Laurel* recently celebrated its five-year anniversary. More incredibly, The Laurel History Boys have now been an organization for more than a decade. Time really does fly when you're having fun!

These milestones had me thinking—reflecting on the stories we've covered and the things we've accomplished over this past decade—and I thought it would be a great opportunity to ask my fellow co-founders and core contributors what they're most proud of. But first, a quick recap of just how we got here might be in order.

Back in 2015, Kevin Leonard and I were serving together on the board of directors of the Laurel Historical Society. Kevin also wrote the "History Matters" column for

the *Laurel Leader*, and one week he turned his attention to a small but devoted group of local history enthusiasts: the people who collect pieces of Laurel's past.

By then, I'd been hunting down old postcards, photographs, signs, and other memorabilia since launching my *Lost Laurel* blog in 2011. But compared with Pete Lewnes, I was still a newcomer. Pete had spent decades assembling what has become the largest private collection of Laurel artifacts outside of the Laurel Museum itself—a remarkable archive that reflects both the city's history and one collector's lifelong dedication to preserving it.

As we talked, Kevin and I realized we shared a vision for telling Laurel's history in a way that would resonate with a broader audience. Pete's extraordinary collection

of artifacts gave us an endless supply of stories waiting to be told, but we wanted to present them in a style that felt informal, approachable, and relatable. Rather than creating another traditional historical organization, we envisioned something different: a grassroots project that would meet people where they were.

We agreed that our presentations would always be free, there would be no memberships to join, and we wouldn't shy away from any part of Laurel's story. Alongside the proud moments, we'd also explore the controversies, colorful characters, and forgotten chapters that make local history so fascinating. Above all, we wanted people to feel welcome—whether they were lifelong history buffs or simply curious about the place they call home.

With that, The Laurel History Boys were born.



The late Windy Floyd pours coffee for Kevin Leonard, Pete Lewnes, and Richard Friend at the Tastee Diner in January 2014.

Diner Days

In those early days, the Tastee Diner became our unofficial headquarters. Nearly every Saturday morning, we'd gather over breakfast to brainstorm ideas for our website and Facebook page, then dive into stacks of old *Laurel Leader* newspapers, cataloging stories and identifying leads for future research. We also spent countless hours meeting with longtime residents who generously shared their memories, photographs, and treasured artifacts. Those conversations—and the pieces of Laurel's past they entrusted to us—became the foundation for many of the stories we would later share with the community.

Ironically, the Tastee Diner became part of our own story in 2018. That year, it was announced that the property was under contract to be sold to a company planning to convert the site into a marijuana dispensary, a proposal that called for gutting much of the historic building.

We were surprised that the administration of then-Mayor Craig Moe showed little interest in pursuing options to preserve the diner. At the same time, I don't think anyone anticipated the level of public support that would emerge for saving it. We helped organize and champion a community campaign that rallied residents who saw the diner as more than just a restaurant—it was a local landmark and gathering place. That fall, the City of Laurel Planning Commission unanimously voted to deny the proposal, and the prospective buyer graciously chose not to appeal the decision.

The effort put us at odds with both the former city administration and the diner's owner, but we're proud of the role we played in helping preserve one of Laurel's most recognizable landmarks while protecting the livelihoods of the employees who had worked there for so many years. The diner's long-term future remains uncertain, as it has for much of its history, but we're grateful that its doors have remained open ever since—continuing to serve customers and create memories for another generation of Laurel residents.

The History Books

By 2019, we had built a loyal online following and were ready to take on our biggest project yet: *Laurel at 150*, our first collaborative book. The book tells the story of the city's first 150 years through a decade-by-decade journey, highlighting the people, places, and events that shaped Laurel's history. Around the same time, I also published

Postmark Laurel, a collection of historic picture postcards spanning the early 1900s through the 1990s.

Producing *Laurel at 150* was an ambitious undertaking. We had to research and write the book, design its layout, and raise the money to print it—all in time for Laurel's sesquicentennial in 2020. We met that goal, but the celebration itself unfolded very differently than anyone expected. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of many of the city's planned 150th-anniversary events, our book became one of the few lasting tributes to the milestone, giving Laurel residents and anyone who loves the city's history something meaningful to commemorate the occasion.

Voices of Laurel

By 2020, it had become clear that the *Laurel Leader*—which had served the community since 1897—was nearing the end of its run. After being absorbed by the *Baltimore Sun*, the once-vibrant hometown newspaper had steadily lost its local focus, and stories about Laurel had become increasingly rare.

Kevin and I saw an opportunity to help fill that gap. We envisioned a free, quarterly publication that would blend community news with local history, celebrating Laurel's past while covering its present. Just as important, we wanted it to reflect more than our own perspectives by inviting local writers, photographers, historians, and community members to contribute. That vision became a reality in January 2021 with the debut of the first issue of *Voices of Laurel*.

Honoring Joe

Following the death of former Mayor Joseph R. Robison in November 2020, we launched a campaign urging the city to honor his legacy by naming the Laurel Municipal Center in his memory. The tribute was especially fitting because it was under Mayor Robison's leadership that the city purchased and renovated the building, transforming it into the modern municipal center that replaced the cramped and outdated City Hall facilities where city government had long operated. The effort was successful, and nearly two years later, in October 2022, the city officially dedicated the building as the Joseph R. Robison Municipal Center, unveiling his name in a public ceremony attended by family, friends, city officials, and members of the community.

Day(s) at the Races

Laurel Park has long fascinated us. Since opening in 1911, the historic racetrack has played an important role in Laurel's identity, yet much of its rich history remains untold. Over the years, we explored that history in both our books and the pages of *Voices of Laurel*.

By 2024, however, Laurel Park's own future had become uncertain. With plans in place for the track to eventually end live racing and transition into a training center following the completion of renovations at Pimlico, we wanted to give the community an opportunity to experience the venue while it was still an active racetrack.

That October, we hosted the inaugural *Voices of Laurel* Day at the Races, inviting readers and residents to discover the sport of thoroughbred racing firsthand. The event introduced newcomers to the track, showed them how to place a bet, and offered a chance to watch live racing from

trackside. It also served as a reminder that, as Laurel Park enters its next chapter, opportunities to experience live racing there may soon become part of history themselves.

Personal Reflections

Convening at Oliver's Old Towne Tavern one Saturday as we prepared this issue of *Voices of Laurel*, I asked Kevin Leonard, Pete Lewnes, Diane Mezzanotte, and Angie Kozlowski to reflect on the journey we've shared over the past five and/or ten years. What moments stood out to them? What are they most proud of?

For Kevin, the answer came easily: his work unraveling the 1963 cold-case murder of Carol Replane, featured in our Summer 2021 issue. "Having the chance to really dig into that story with the FBI files... things that hadn't seen the light of day in 60 years. It took a lot of research and a lot of time to put it all together." He's also proud that we have shared quite a lot of local Black history.

Pete said his most rewarding moments have been when we've been able to "bring something back home for somebody"—returning a long-lost photograph or family artifact, or identifying an unfamiliar face in a vintage image for descendants who had never known who they were looking at. "Those are the really special moments."

For Diane, one of the defining experiences has been her extensive coverage of Laurel's rent stabilization debate. "Over a series of many months, I was going to all these meetings... you kind of felt like you were part of this movement. More and more people were showing up, sharing stories about their rent doubling with little or no notice. I didn't enjoy the subject matter, because it was a bad thing happening; but I felt covering it was really important. We covered it more thoroughly than anyone else I saw, and that's been very satisfying. It's also gratifying to have people from those early meetings still reaching out and saying, 'Diane, maybe you should cover this...' It feels good to have developed sources I can rely on."

Angie reflected on the excitement of seeing her first *Voices of Laurel* article in print, also in the Summer 2021 issue. Her story explored the early growth of girls' soccer in Columbia, Maryland, and how the passage of Title IX in 1972 opened new athletic opportunities for young women. More recently, she said, receiving media credentials to cover the Preakness at Laurel Park was another unforgettable milestone.

For me, one of the things I'm most proud of is knowing that our books have found a permanent home in public libraries throughout the region, including the Library of Congress. It's especially meaningful to me that, thanks to the initiative of Councilmember Kyla Clark, our books are also available at the Laurel Branch Library, making them accessible to the community whose history they tell.

That recognition has been particularly gratifying because it reflects how far our work has come. There was a time when some in city leadership viewed us as outspoken critics rather than as partners in preserving and celebrating Laurel's history. Today, seeing our work embraced by the community and its institutions is a reminder that our commitment has always been to Laurel itself.

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

Small Souvenirs, Lasting Memories



BY PETE LEWNES

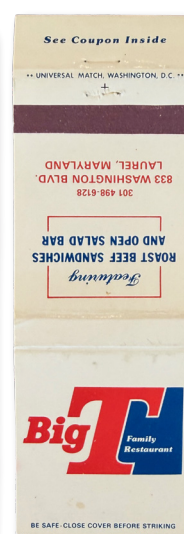
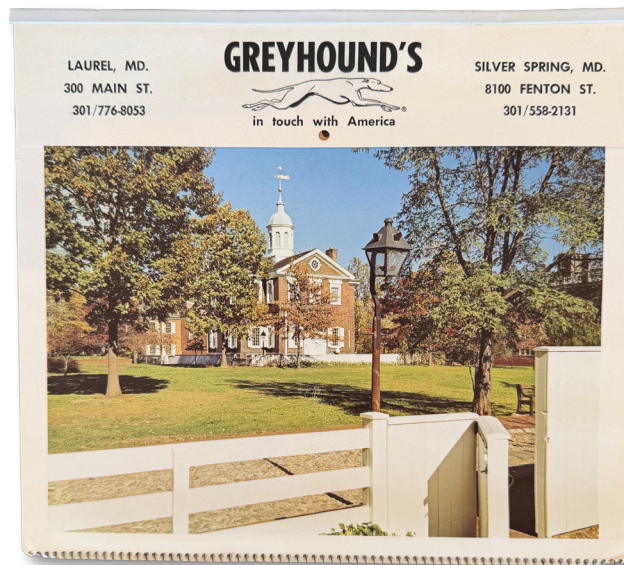
Years ago, promotional items like these were a common way for businesses to advertise. Restaurants, bars, and other local establishments often gave customers free ashtrays, matchbooks, and calendars featuring their name and logo.

As a kid, I assumed taking an ashtray from a restaurant was stealing. One day, after I slipped one into my pocket, a waitress caught me. Instead of getting me in trouble, she smiled and told me it was perfectly fine—they were meant to be taken as souvenirs. She even encouraged me to keep it as a memento of our visit. That waitress saved me from a much worse fate, because my mom and dad were not happy when they thought I'd stolen it.

When you paid your bill, the cashier might ask if you'd like a free calendar before you left. Matchbooks were usually piled in a bowl next to the cigarette display behind the counter, ready for anyone to take. It seems like just yesterday these little giveaways were everywhere, but as smoking gradually fell out of favor, ashtrays and matchbooks largely disappeared as promotional items. Today, calendars remain one of the few traditional business giveaways that some companies still offer.

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





Hot Stuff from the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department



BY CARREEN KOUBEK AND MIKE SELLNER

53rd Annual LVFD Joint Memorial Day Service

Members of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) were honored to once again host the Annual LVFD Joint Memorial Day Service on May 25. The event brought together members of the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad, American Legion Post 60, and the Laurel Police Department, along with residents from throughout the community. Persistent rainfall throughout the week forced the service to relocate indoors at the Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center. This annual service provides an opportunity to recognize, remember, and honor the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the freedoms cherished by our city, county, state, and nation.

This year marked a significant milestone, as it was the first time in 50 years that the event featured a new Master of Ceremonies. The Honorable Frederick Smalls assumed the role previously held by former Mayor, the Honorable Robert J. DiPietro. Mr. Smalls guided attendees through the program, which included the Presentation of Colors, remarks from representatives of each participating organization, and a special presentation honoring former Mayor DiPietro for his decades of dedicated service.

Please mark your calendars for next year's service, scheduled for May 24, 2027. We look forward to favorable weather and the opportunity to once again hold this special event at Ivy Hill Cemetery.

Lifesaving Incident and Above-and-Beyond Care by LVFD Members

It is with great pride that LVFD Chief Brian Cox recognized an extraordinary achievement by three of our own. On March 24, at the 8500 block of Spruce Hill Drive, Firefighter/EMTs Min Hwang, Jim Codespote, and Wren Rickenbrode responded to a patient in cardiac arrest. The crew immediately initiated CPR and worked seamlessly alongside our C-Shift career personnel and Anne Arundel County Medic 27 to deliver exceptional pre-hospital care under pressure. Their efforts paid off in the most meaningful way possible: the crew achieved Return of Spontaneous Circulation on scene. The patient was transported to Howard County General Hospital, where, we are happy to announce, they recovered and returned home. Because of the actions of Min, Jim, and Wren, a person who may not have survived went home to their family.

This is what we train for. This is why we show up. A cardiac save is one of the rarest and most rewarding outcomes in emergency medicine, and it does not happen without crew members who know their job, stay focused, and refuse to quit. Min, Jim, and Wren did all of that and more. They represent the very best of us and are a living example of what our motto, "Service for Others," truly means.

We also received a thank-you from a family member of a patient our crew transported on May 25. The crew that morning was Min, Wren, and Lily Loft, and, in the writer's words, they were "so professional and kind" and treated her 89-year-old aunt "with kindness and respect." The patient was trying to decline transport, but the crew recognized hospital care was needed, and the writer added she is "so glad that EMTs are trained to see when hospital care is needed." The hospital ended up admitting the patient.

She also wanted to recognize the crew's age and dedication: they "were young and it is great to see some in our younger generation carrying the torch," and, she noted, "it takes a special kind of person to be an EMT." She closed with this: "You truly are blessed to have Min, Wren, and Lily on your staff!"

Chief Cox has said this before and this note from a citizen is proof of it. No one calls 911 because they are having a good day. Most folks will only ever interact with a fire department or an EMS crew once or twice in their life, and that single interaction decides how they see this service, and this department, for the rest of their lives. They remember how we made them feel, not just what we did clinically. Min, Wren, and Lily got that right. An 89-year-old woman and her family walked away from a difficult day feeling cared for and respected. That is the job. A BIG well done to Min, Wren, and Lily for exemplifying our motto, "Service for Others"!

Main Street Festival

On May 2, members of the LVFD proudly participated in the Laurel Board of Trade's Main Street Festival, one of the community's most anticipated annual events. LVFD members showcased several pieces of apparatus during the festival parade, which provided an opportunity for residents and visitors alike to see the equipment and resources that help the department respond to emergencies throughout the area.

LVFD also hosted an informational booth where members met with the community, answered questions about the department's services, and shared information about volunteer opportunities.

Welcome to our Newest Members

Every month, the LVFD is pleased to welcome new members into the LVFD family. Following are those welcomed in the most recent months:

March: Ayomide Funsho, Lesley Perez, Aidan McWhirter, Elizabeth Bollam, and Stefon Williams. Voted in after their 6-month probation: Cable Rea.

April: Kathy Do, Benjamin Bundy, Jr. Voted in after their 6-month probation: Elliot Paisner and Ki-Aire Rounds Javar.



COURTESY OF LAUREL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The following certifications have recently been earned by our newest members:

- Ki'Aire Rounds – Firefighter Phase 2 and 2A
- David Ferrando – Ambulance Aide
- Caitlin Young – Firefighter 1
- Lily Loft – Probationary Training completed
- Min Hwang – Support Vehicle Operator and Ambulance Driver Qualification
- Kevin Villatoro – Ambulance Aide

Their certifications and qualifications are important to ensure our community has the best care at their most vulnerable moments, so congratulations to everyone on reaching these benchmarks!

President Whipple and Rosa Recognition

In March, the Prince George's County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association (PGCVFRA) and their Ladies Auxiliary held a 2026 Special Tribute program that was dedicated to recognizing those whose service, leadership, and commitment have made a lasting impact on the volunteer fire and rescue service in Prince George's County.

PGCVFRA announced that "this year's honorees represent the very best of our fire service family. Their dedication, countless hours of volunteerism, and unwavering support of their departments and communities embody what the volunteer service is all about. Each of these individuals has contributed to the strength, tradition, and future of the volunteer fire and rescue service in our county. From leadership in the firehouse to support through the Ladies Auxiliary, their service reflects the core values of dedication, sacrifice, and community."

Chief Cox and members of LVFD were proud to learn that two of our own, President Vic Whipple and LVFD Auxiliary President Rosa Mahr, were among the recipients of this prestigious honor!

We wanted to recognize their outstanding service to the Laurel community and express our sincere gratitude for all they have done, and continue to do, for the citizens of Prince George's County and the volunteer fire service.

Become a Member

LVFD is always looking for new members to allow for more station coverage and help our community. If you are interested in becoming a member, please visit www.LaurelVFD.org/membership, and apply today! Our motto "Service For Others" is not just a tag line; it's a way of volunteering and giving back to our community!

COMMUNITY



CITY OF LAUREL

OPINION

“Art-Official” Intelligence: The Concerns of GenAI in Government



BY DANIELLE DELGADO

Whether you like it or not, the AI revolution is here to stay. It has become nearly impossible to go a day online without artificial intelligence playing some role in our digital experiences, from Google’s AI Overview appearing at the top of search results to the content that fills our social media feeds. As AI continues to change how we consume, create, and interact with information, communities and organizations are steadily contending with both its opportunities and challenges.

One area of the AI boom that has received far less attention is the growing use of AI-generated images in government communications and marketing. While artificial intelligence can offer a quick and inexpensive way to create promotional materials, its use by public institutions raises key questions about environmental impact and public trust.

The City of Laurel recently began incorporating AI imagery into its social media communications, starting in March, when the city’s Facebook page posted a flyer reminding residents to keep their trash container lids closed. I immediately noticed several telltale signs that the image had been generated using artificial intelligence. The cartoonish artwork stood out from the format of previous city communications, some text was misaligned, and the visual message implied that recycling was better than trash.

What ultimately confirmed my suspicions, however, was the city’s seal. Although AI image generators have come a long way since they first became publicly available, they still often struggle to reproduce text, logos, and official symbols. Each quadrant of the seal was incorrect—the knight and horse flanking the emblem were distorted beyond recognition, the banner at the

bottom was the wrong shape, and its text was illegible.

Since then, several additional flyers containing AI-generated imagery or AI-generated elements have been published on the city’s social media accounts. Flyers promoting Financial Aid Night, the Juneteenth celebration, and information about the FY2027 budget all contained incorrectly generated versions of the city seal, among other visual oddities. The latter two were eventually removed due to the inaccuracies. While an interim Juneteenth flyer was posted to replace the previous, a revised version was later published that contained a different problem: an incorrectly generated Juneteenth flag. In the official flag, a centered white star surrounded by a bursting outline signifies freedom for African Americans and the emancipation of enslaved people. The curved arc separating the red and blue represents a new horizon and the promise of opportunity. In the AI-generated version, the star is noticeably off-center, and the arc was omitted entirely.

The symbols of our cultural and civic institutions matter, down to the finest detail, because they are carefully designed to convey specific meanings. When those symbols are altered, intentionally or not, part of that meaning is lost. The problem with generative AI is that these models lack true comprehension. They do not actually understand symbolism, history, or culture. They do not know why a star is centered, why a particular shape appears on a seal, or what a design element represents in the abstract. Instead, they generate images by predicting patterns from vast collections of training data, producing what looks visually plausible rather than what is historically or culturally accurate.

Beyond concerns about accuracy and representation, the growing use of AI-generated imagery also raises ethical dilemmas regarding the artists whose work was plagiarized to make these systems possible. All AI image generators were trained using vast collections of images gathered from across the internet. In most cases, the creators of such art were neither asked for permission nor compensated for the use of their work in training AI systems. Artists have attempted to resist the appropriation of their creativity; however, the underlying legal questions surrounding AI-generated art remain unresolved.

These disputes highlight an uncomfortable reality for public institutions. How can a government claim to support artists, creatives, and local culture while relying on technology whose development is built upon the unauthorized use of countless creative works? Even if the use of AI-produced images is ultimately found to be legal, legality alone does not answer the larger question of whether it is the most ethical choice, especially when the environmental impact is also in question.

Data centers have been a hot topic in Maryland politics for good reason. The excessive consumption of water and electricity has strained public infrastructure and outraged environmental advocacy groups. With the ever-increasing integration of AI systems and tools, these data centers are being built to meet the demand. The United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment, and Health in June 20216 published its finding that AI data centers can withdraw millions of liters of water per day as system coolant. Rare minerals are being extracted at unprecedented rates to meet demand for new batteries and hardware, causing further environmental harm and directly contributing to slavery and child labor in the mining industry. So, while many in our community fight to have data centers outside of our respective counties, the more we use AI, the more data centers will need to be created. If not here, in some other jurisdiction—but we all share the same finite resources.

I believe that each person has the right to choose whether or not to use AI. It doesn’t make you a bad person if you use it to check your outgoing emails or to brainstorm ideas, just as you’re not a bad person for indulging in some chocolate now and then (even if both have slavery somewhere in their supply chain). It’s wholly different when our government, the institution that we elect to represent our best interests, chooses to utilize such tools on our behalf. I am hopeful that more sustainable and ethical solutions to the broader problems of AI will be explored, but as it stands, we are nowhere close to that reality. Until then, I believe our municipalities should refrain from integrating generative AI into publications and artwork, speaking in the voice of the people rather than an artificial facsimile.

Danielle Delgado holds a Master of Science in Communications from Purdue University and is an educator and community advocate. In June 2026, she was elected to represent District 21 At-Large on the Prince George’s County Democratic Central Committee.



NSA Defectors: Snowden Wasn't the First— Two Laurel Men Were



BY KEVIN LEONARD

In 2013, when Edward Snowden leaked thousands of documents detailing the inner workings of the National Security Agency (NSA), the reaction and outrage from the government was later summed up by former Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who said, “We had a cyber Pearl Harbor. His name was Edward Snowden.” Snowden initially fled to Hong Kong and then relocated to Russia, where he was granted asylum and where he remains to this day.

But in the extensive media coverage of Snowden, it was rarely mentioned that he was not the first to defect with classified NSA material to Russia. The first were two men from Laurel in 1960. In the years since, many of the files (including NSA documents) about the two men have been declassified and are part of the National Archives holdings in both the Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy papers. Much of the following story is taken from those files.

Pals Since the Navy

Bernon F. Mitchell (31 years old in 1960) and William H. Martin (29) were mathematicians engaged in statistical

research and cryptology at NSA at Fort Meade, as GS-11 civilian employees. They were hired together in 1957. They had been friends since the early 1950s, when both were in the Navy, stationed in Japan doing cryptologic work for the Navy and Army at Yokosuka Naval Base. Neither was married.

When they were hired by NSA, they both took up residence in Laurel. Mitchell rented a house on Eighth Street in Laurel Hills, and Martin lived in a local motel.

Both passed NSA's security background checks, but not without some concerns. According to the NSA archival documents, the younger Martin's “background investigation had revealed such comments as the following: insufferable egotist ... effeminate ... not wholly normal ... rather irresponsible ... might be swayed by flattery ... former supervisors in Army and Navy were almost unanimous in not wanting him to work for them again, but with only one exception they saw no reason why he couldn't have access to classified information.”

Mitchell's investigation was even more suspect. “A check of lie-detector results at time of employment

revealed that Mitchell had some sexual aberration prior to age 20. Investigation then showed he had been having psychiatric treatment recently for highly emotional disturbance. Martin's mother, in Ellensburg, Washington, in her talks to the NSA Security officer, described her son as a genius, far superior to ordinary men.”

Author James Bamford reported in his book *The Puzzle Palace* that, during Mitchell's polygraph interview, “He showed little reaction until the questions began turning to sexual perversion and blackmail. ... Mitchell gave in and told his interrogator about certain ‘sexual experimentations’ with dogs and chickens he had done when he was between the ages of 13 and 19.”

Even though both were hired, their background investigations became fodder for the government and the media after they defected.

Disillusioned

According to the NSA documents, “both had access to compartmented, classified projects at NSA dealing with Soviet [redacted]. Martin's knowledge is on [redacted].

He brought himself up-to-date on the project when he returned to NSA for the summer from the University of Illinois. Mitchell has knowledge of a [redacted] project.”

But after just two years at the agency, the two friends became disillusioned by what they perceived to be illegal or immoral activities. In their book *The Sword and the Shield*, authors Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin (a former KGB agent who defected to the U.S.) labeled Martin and Mitchell “politically naïve and socially inadequate.”

An incident in late 1958 seemed to be the pivotal event that led to their defecting. As described by Bamford, NSA required ELINT (electronic intelligence) spy planes to “not only skirt the Soviet borders but actually penetrate them in order to trigger otherwise inactive radar equipment and thus capture their telltale signals for later analysis. ... That America engaged in such dangerous and provocative activities shocked both Martin and Mitchell.”

Unknown to the pair at the time, in September 1958 “an Air Force EC-130 had crashed inside Soviet Armenia; six crew members were killed and eleven others declared missing,” according to Bamford. When the NSA community learned of the incident a few months later, Martin and Mitchell decided that someone in Washington should be aware of the program.

They contacted Rep. Wayne Hayes (D, Ohio) to blow the whistle on the program. Hayes, whom Bamford described as “never accused of being one of Congress’ brightest members,” resigned from Congress in disgrace in 1976 when *The Washington Post* reported that Hayes had hired his mistress as a secretary. The mistress, Elizabeth Ray, admitted to the *Post*, “I can’t type. I can’t file. I can’t even answer the phone.”

The meeting with Hayes was described in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1960): “Mitchell and Martin also said that in February 1959 they had talked to ‘a Congressman who had publicly expressed concern over the State Department’s concealing from Congress pertinent facts’ about a U.S. C-130 plane shot down over Russia in September 1958. They said they informed the Congressman of the plane’s ‘intelligence mission,’ which Martin had learned of from an NSA ‘high official,’ but that their conversation with the Congressman was interrupted when he received a call from William Macomber, assistant secretary of state for congressional relations, who requested him to ‘refrain from further public discussion of the C-130 incident.’”

“To Martin and Mitchell, rapidly becoming disenchanted with American society as a whole, the lack of even a letter of acknowledgement from the congressman on an issue as important as the illegal ELINT flights was the last straw,” wrote Bamford. Around this time the men began planning to defect.

Defection

Andrew and Mitrokhin documented the pair’s initial efforts to defect. “In December 1959, Mitchell flew from Washington to Mexico City, in defiance of NSA regulations, entered the Soviet embassy and asked for political asylum in the USSR, giving ideological reasons as the motive for his action. The KGB residency made strenuous attempts to persuade him to stay on inside NSA as a defector-in-place, but without success. Mitchell

agreed to a secret meeting with another KGB officer in Washington, but maintained his insistence on emigrating to the Soviet Union with Martin.”

Then, later that same month, according to NSA files, Martin “went to Cuba with Mitchell, without NSA permission and against its directives. Undated information in a UAC [Unamerican Activities Committee] report, doubtless pertaining to this period if not before, said he was a masochist and an agnostic; outspoken against the US and for SU [Soviet Union], which latter known to several dozen NSA employees but not to NSA security office. ... This previous visit to Cuba and Mexico was unknown to NSA, which requires employees to report foreign visits to NSA Security prior to departure; neither Mitchell nor Martin so reported.”

The two men put their plan into action in June 1960, as described in NSA documents. “Mitchell and Martin went on summer leave together on June 24, telling fellow employees they might visit their parents, the Mitchells in Eureka, California, and the Martins in Ellensburg, Washington. They hinted that if they had not returned in two weeks, they would take another week of annual leave, returning on July 18. Thus, they were not missed until after July 18.”

Mitchell left \$100 with his neighboring landlady, to pay rent on his house in Laurel Hills until August 15. Martin checked out of the Laurel motel where he lived.

At National Airport, both purchased one-way tickets to Mexico City on Eastern Airlines. The next day, they flew to Havana on Cubana Airlines. “There they were quietly hustled aboard a Soviet freighter ... for their long voyage to their new homeland,” wrote Bamford.

According to Andrew and Mitrokhin, “Security was so lax at NSA’s Fort Meade headquarters that no attempt was made to track Mitchell and Martin down until eight days after they had been due to return from their three-week vacation.”

NSA Security broke into Mitchell’s house on Eighth Street in Laurel. As described by Bamford, “The agents found the house a shambles. One item that intrigued them was a key to a safe deposit box, which was apparently left for them to find. The agents quickly got in touch with the Maryland State Police, who obtained a court order to open the box, and then proceeded to the State Bank of Laurel” in the Laurel Shopping Center. “There they slipped the key into box number 174, rented under the name of Bernon F. Mitchell, and pulled out a sealed envelope, which bore on the top a request that the contents be made public. It was signed by both Martin and Mitchell.”

Laurel and DC police were notified and searched for the missing men. NSA Security, the FBI, and the CIA went into overdrive investigating the case. But the government hoped that the NSA’s secrecy would keep a lid on the whole affair, especially the contents of the

Missing At NSA

(See Story Front Page)



Bernon Mitchell

William H. Martin

envelope discovered in the safe deposit box at the Laurel Shopping Center.

Writer David Durant, in an article titled “The First NSA Defection: 1960” for the Cold War & Internal Security Collection at East Carolina University, wrote, “On August 1, the Department of Defense announced that Martin and Mitchell were missing, later acknowledging on August 5 that it was likely that the two men had fled to the Eastern Bloc. On August 11, 1960, William H. Martin and Bernon F. Mitchell were officially granted asylum in the USSR and each awarded a monthly allowance of 500 rubles, roughly equal to their NSA salaries.”

But the NSA tried to downplay the significance, according to Durant. “The official Defense Department account, of course, indicated that they were just junior code-breakers and couldn’t give away anything affecting the security of the country.”

Then, on September 6, Martin and Mitchell held a press conference in Moscow, during which Martin read to the assembled journalists the document they had left in the safe deposit box:

“We were employees of the highly secret National Security Agency, which gathers communications intelligence from almost all nations of the world for use by the U.S. Government. However, the simple act that the U.S. Government is engaged in delving into the secrets of other nations had little or nothing to do with our decision to defect. Our main dissatisfaction concerns some of the practices the United States uses in gathering intelligence information. We were worried about the U.S. policy of deliberately violating the airspace of other nations and the U.S. Government’s practice of lying about such violations in a manner intended to mislead public opinion. Furthermore, we were disenchanted by the U.S. Government’s practice of intercepting and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



Look Down for Dinosaur Fossils In and Around Laurel

Did you know that greater Laurel is a hotbed of dinosaur and early mammal species? Just look down—fossils may be under your feet in your own yard.



BY MARK TOMASSONI

Dinosaur Park in Laurel

Just a short distance from downtown Laurel and the Patuxent Research Refuge is Dinosaur Park off Contee Road near U.S. Route 1. The Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) owns and operates Dinosaur Park. This site preserves an Early Cretaceous deposit, dating to ~115 million years ago, and is one of the best dinosaur fossil sites on the East Coast. The Cretaceous Period lasted from ~145 million years ago to 66 million years ago, spanning about 79 million years. It was the final and longest period of the Mesozoic Era and concluded abruptly with the famous asteroid impact that wiped out all non-avian dinosaurs.

Dinosaur Park preserves a rare “bonebed” with animal and plant remains, including:

- Astrodon (Maryland's state dinosaur—a large plant-eating sauropod)
- Priconodon (armored dinosaur remains)
- Acrocanthosaurus (apex predatory Theropod)
- Deinonychus (a feathered Raptor)
- Ornithomimoids (the ostrich-mimic dinosaurs)
- Other animal fossils (crocodiles, turtles, fish, snails, and clams)
- Plant remains (ancient Sequoia relatives, cypress, cycads, and early flowering plants)

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Richard Snowden and other early colonists began mining the iron ore (siderite) in the Muirkirk region. Iron furnaces located throughout the region melted down the ore to produce iron and steel used in construction and manufacturing. In 1858, African American miners working in open pit mines were the first to discover dinosaur fossils in Maryland. These fossils were passed on to Phillip T. Tyson, the Maryland State Agricultural Chemist, while he was visiting the iron mines to produce a geologic map of Maryland.

In 1887, paleontologist Othniel Charles Marsh sent John Bell Hatcher to Maryland to search for more dinosaur remains from the Muirkirk deposits. Hatcher recovered hundreds of fossils, which were eventually transferred to the Smithsonian Institution after Marsh passed away. Arthur Bibbins, a geology professor at Goucher College, was also a prominent collector in the Muirkirk region, although he primarily focused on fossil plants.

In December 1995, the M-NCPPC acquired 22 acres encompassing several sites that expose the Muirkirk deposits. The park protects these sites from development and unrestricted collecting, while also providing an outdoor laboratory for community science. The public is invited to work alongside professional and

amateur paleontologists to help uncover and preserve new fossil discoveries.

The late Dr. Peter Kranz was one of the leading proponents of the site and led efforts to name the *Astrodon Johnstoni* (pictured at left) as the Maryland state dinosaur.

Dinosaur Fossils at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

Along with Dinosaur Park on Contee Road, amateur paleontologist Ray Stanford identified dinosaur tracks in 2012 near a parking lot at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. Dating to over 100 million years ago, the site consists of a large 8'x3' sandstone slab of dinosaur and mammal tracks potentially containing 70 distinct tracks from eight species, including:

- Nodosaurus (heavily armored, four-legged herbivorous dinosaur)
- Sauropods (long-necked plant-eaters)
- Theropods (bipedal carnivores)
- Pterosaurs (flying reptiles)
- a variety of small mammals

“The concentration of mammal tracks is orders of magnitude higher than any other site in the world,” said Martin Lockley, paleontologist with the University of Colorado. “This is the mother lode of Cretaceous mammal tracks” containing 26 distinct mammal footprints. Some of the small tracks are so unusual that scientists named a new ichnospecies (*Sederipes goddardensis*) based on them.

Why This Is Important

These footprints capture a snapshot in time made when animals walked across muddy ground that later hardened and preserved their prints. Because they record behavior (movement) rather than just bones, these fossils are especially valuable to understanding how dinosaurs and early mammals interacted in their environments. The find was formally reported in Scientific Reports in 2018.

So next time you are walking around any stream bed in Laurel or the Patuxent Research Refuge, keep looking down for unusual stone features. You may uncover the next major dinosaur that roamed what we now call Laurel. However, please keep in mind that it is illegal to collect fossils on M-NCPPC property without a permit. If you do come across a fossil on park property, report the find to the M-NCPPC Paleontology Unit at dinosaurpark@pgparks.com.

Dr. Victor Perez, Paleontology Manager, Natural and Historic Resources Division, M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation, contributed to this article.



Mark E. Tomassoni brings 40+ years federal government new business development and has resided in the Montpelier section of Laurel for 33 years. His hobbies are paleontology, volcanology, and evolutionary biology. He holds BA and MA degrees in Speech Communication, MS in Urban Planning, and Ph.D. class in civil engineering (Johns Hopkins).

HISTORY

History Crumbs



BY KEVIN LEONARD

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

1918

In March, the *Leader* reported that “Mayor George W. Waters, Jr., who has been confined to his home with a severe cold for a week, is again able to be out.”

1923

In December, the Laurel Boys’ Fife and Drum Corps was organized under the direction of Walter D. Lanahan. The Corps was composed of boys from every church in Laurel and performed at numerous events in town.

1926

In May, at a meeting of the Laurel Improvement Association, which was formed by concerned citizens to study infrastructure issues and work with the city to resolve them, the following item was discussed, among others: “Particular attention was called to the almost impassable condition of the driveways into the Grove, and it was the consensus of opinion that the colored people are entitled to at least one roadway kept in reasonable condition.”

1936

The first wildlife experiment station in the United States, the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, was established in Laurel. The Center made international headlines with its 51-year effort to breed and train whooping cranes for release. The program was de-funded in 2017.

1952

In March, the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad made its first run in an ambulance donated by Laurel’s American Legion Post 60.

1959

In August, the Laurel Junior-Senior Teen Club held a “Beachcomber” party, consisting of a dance at Laurel High School and then a swim party at the Laurel pool. Teens were encouraged to “dress as you would imagine one would look after living on a desert island.”



1962

In July, Major Lawrence R. Bailey of Greenhill Avenue was released after 17 months as a prisoner of war in Laos after being shot down by anti-aircraft fire. He was found by Communist troops who took him to a primitive field hospital. He was the first official American Prisoner of War in the Vietnam Conflict (which was not yet referred to as a war). Major Bailey was held captive and interrogated almost non-stop for two months. His captors threatened his life at gunpoint, subjected him to days of starvation, and in many other brutal ways tried to force him into denouncing the United States and giving them vital information about U.S. military strength and plans in Laos. While Bailey was recuperating at Walter Reed Army Hospital, President John F. Kennedy visited and pinned a Bronze Star for “meritorious Cold War gallantry” on Bailey in his hospital bed. When Bailey returned home to Laurel, Mayor P.G. Melbourne proclaimed a “Major Lawrence R. Bailey Day,” and the city staged a parade and banquet in his honor.

1965

In February, divers working in 30 feet of icy water in the Rocky Gorge Reservoir found the lost boundary marker between Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties. Observing the operation was President Merl Myers and Vice President Thomas Burton, Jr., from the Patuxent Old Line Organization. This organization was formed by residents of the Brooklyn Bridge Road area when they were threatened with being shifted from Prince George’s County to Montgomery County. The 8-foot stone boundary marker disappeared in 1954 when the area was flooded to form the Rocky Gorge Reservoir. The discovery of the marker meant that the existing boundary lines were correct.

Marker Found By Divers May Fix Boundary Line

By CONRAD SHAMEL

The “lost” boundary marker between Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties was presumably located on Monday by scuba divers working in 30 feet of icy water at the bottom of Rocky Gorge Reservoir. Interested spectators at the diving operation were President Merl D. Myers, Vice President Thomas Burton, Jr., and other members of the Patuxent Old Line Association. This is the organization which was formed several years ago by residents of the Brooklyn Bridge Road area when they were threatened with being shifted from Prince George’s County to Montgomery County. Also on hand was State Senator Gilbert Gude of Montgomery County, Senator Fred L. Wineland of Prince George’s County, and Arthur Dorman, Prince George’s Delegate, assisting area residents to settle the boundary dispute. Senator Gude told reporters that State Marine Police divers who conducted the operation located what probably is the lost marker after going into the reservoir three times. The eight foot stone, marking the northern boundary between the two counties disappeared when the area was flooded to form the Rocky Gorge Reservoir, and the exact boundary between the two counties vanished. Senator Gude said that the stone located on Monday meets all general descriptions of the boundary marker but that the water was too murky to tell for certain if it was the one sought. He said another diving operation will be conducted when more equipment is available to make an exact determination.

1970

In April, the Peoples Court re-convened at the Laurel Armory twice a month. The court, which heard traffic and minor criminal cases, but no civil cases, had not met in Laurel for the previous five months. The Peoples Court had been moved to Bowie, which did not sit well with Laurel Police Chief Robert Kaiser, who told the *Leader*, “when the cases were scheduled for Bowie, it meant that officers would have to be sent out of Laurel to go to court,” incurring more expense.

1974

In February, Laurel Police Officer Warren Frazier saw smoke coming from under a police cruiser at LPD headquarters. He saw an object under the car, which he kicked. Officer Frazier had unknowingly dislodged the fuse, which was a lit cigarette and a book of matches, from a homemade bomb. The next day, LPD arrested three 20-year-old adults and a juvenile, charging them with assault with intent to murder and conspiracy to commit murder with a homemade explosive device. The three adults were from out-of-state and had lived in Laurel (one block from Police Headquarters) for only a few months. Police Chief Robert Kaiser said, “It is the first such incident in the City’s history where a direct attack on Laurel Police by a bomb has been made.”

1981

In September, noted feminist Gloria Steinem participated in a match harness race against Loretta Swit, from the television series *M*A*S*H*, at Freestate Raceway in Savage. Taking no chances, professional drivers were aboard with the celebrities. As Steinem described the race, “We each sat ourselves next to the driver on a plank no bigger than an ironing board that is attached to a superlight rig. The whole thing is more like a coat hanger than the Ben-Hur chariot I envisioned.” The headline in the *Leader* claimed, “Swit nipped by a nose.”

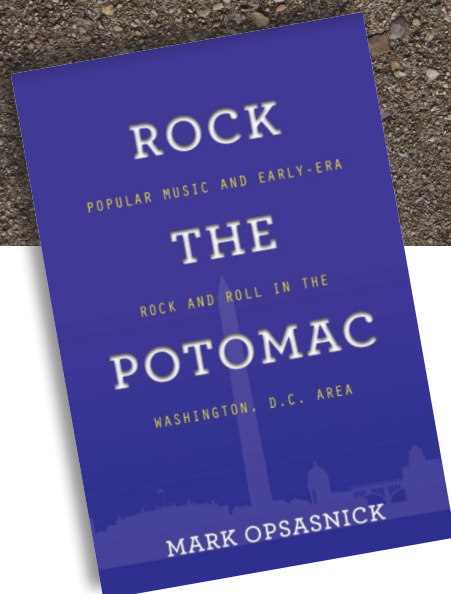
2000

In January, as the clock hit midnight on January 1, 2000, the world breathed a sigh of relief when computers didn’t crash. Leading up to “Y2K,” Sunny’s Surplus on Route 1 experienced booming sales in survival gear, such as battery-powered lanterns, heaters, sleeping bags, propane stoves, and, for some reason, mace. Sunny’s Manager Charles Ostrander said some teens wanted full camouflage suits because they were “getting ready for some kind of Y2K revolution.”

JOHN NEWSHAW



LAUREL HISTORY BOYS COLLECTION



Mark Opsasnick's incredibly researched book, *Rock the Potomac*, is chock-full of stories and biographies of the people and groups who were part of the history of rock 'n roll and country music in the DMV. "Rock the Patuxent" provides excerpts from the book that highlight the greater Laurel area.

Cathy Ponton King, Mark Francis Nickens, and Two Movies Filmed in Laurel



BY MARK OPSASNICK



Cathy Ponton King

Blues singer-guitarist Cathy Ponton King was born in Washington, DC and raised in what was then an Irish community in Hyattsville. Ponton attended high school at St. Anthony's School in Northeast Washington in the early 1970s. In the ensuing years, while attending the University of Maryland, she became a featured performer at the Dubliner in DC, first starting out singing Irish songs from her family's history and then gradually adding songs by Little Feat, Bonnie Raitt, Joni Mitchell, and others. A frequent visitor to the Dubliner was blues guitarist Jimmy Thackery, who would take the stage and play while Ponton sang.

In the late 1970s, she worked at ABC News Radio and also took a position as news director at WLMD, a rock and roll radio station in Laurel. There she hosted an on-air interview program entitled "90 Seconds."

In 1979, Ponton formed her own blues band, the Rhythm Masters. Locally, they performed in DC at such night clubs as Desperado's, Columbia Station, Mr. Henry's Tenley Circle, the Gentry, the Childe Harold and the Wax Museum; in Maryland at the Psyche Delly (Bethesda), the Italian Gardens (College Park), and the Takoma Tap Room (Silver Spring); and in Virginia at Beacon's Backstage (Falls Church) and the Warehouse (Alexandria). The band also embarked on nightclub tours and made festival appearances up and down the East Coast. The Rhythm Masters endured several changes in personnel during their time and remained one of the region's top blues bands until dissolving in 1986.

Ponton married producer-engineer Jeff King in 1986. After a break in the action, she returned to the local music scene in 1990 and began performing under the banner of either "Cathy Ponton King" or "The Cathy Ponton King Band."

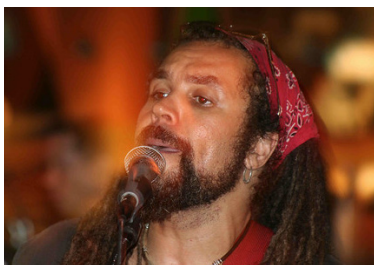
To date, Cathy Ponton King has released a total of four albums: *Lovin' You Right*, *Undertow*, *The Crux*, and *Quartet/Duet*. She currently performs at Madam's Organ in DC; Flanagan's Irish Pub in Bethesda; and at festivals and shows throughout the DC area.

(Opposite page): Radio station WLMD in Laurel, where Cathy Ponton King worked as news director in the late 1970s.

(Right): California Inn hosted many performers in the 1970s and 80s, including Mark Francis Nickens.



LAUREL HISTORY BOYS COLLECTION



Mark Francis Nickens

Nickens moved to Montgomery County and spent the late 1970s attending Albert Einstein High School. In 1980 he became the bassist for a band based in Potomac called the Blues Rockers, which played local parties and Maryland nightclubs.

In 1980, Nickens joined the power trio known as Tsak. The band played heavy rock and roll and covered such artists as the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Frank Marino and Mahogany

Rush, the Scorpions, Led Zeppelin, Van Halen, and Y&T. Nickens remained with Tsak for more than two years, during which time they performed in Maryland at such nightclubs as the Big Dipper (Beltsville), the California Inn (Laurel), the Outside Inn (Rockville), and the Riverside Inn (Riverdale).

In 1986, Nickens put together the first version of Skychurch, a Kensington-based ambient music group that would endure numerous personnel changes and ultimately last for eight years. In addition to working with Skychurch, Nickens became a street musician in 1987 and began busking on streets and Metro stations in DC, an activity he engaged in for more than 20 years.

In the late 1990s, Nickens joined the band Violet Says. The group performed original heavy rock and roll and Jimi Hendrix covers, alternating between the band names Violet Says and Johnny Rushmore.

A high point for the band was its appearance—as Johnny Rushmore—at “Woodstock ’99,” a four-day, 110-act, large-scale music festival held in 1999 on the grounds of the former Griffith Air Force Base in Rome, New York, that attempted to emulate the original Woodstock festival of 1969. Johnny Rushmore performed on the “Emerging Artist Stage” on the festival’s first day in front of an estimated audience of over 80,000.

Nickens has one solo space rock album to his credit, *MSAWBE*.

Two Movies Filmed in Laurel

Species II (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1997)

In this second installment in the *Species* series, a character named Commander Patrick Ross returns from Mars infected with alien DNA that turns him into a tentacle-sprouting creature that prowls for female mates. Mainly shot in Columbia, a lot of filming was done in Prince George’s County: interior scenes of the Pentagon’s Biohazard Level 4 Compound were filmed at the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission on Sweitzer Lane in Laurel; the Pentagon interior scenes were filmed in the auditorium and main conference room of Konterra, also on Sweitzer Lane; and the exterior of Biohazard Level 4 Compound (the outside entrance with the guarded gates) was filmed at the Patuxent Water Filtration Plant on Sandy Spring Road.

New Genesis: Twilight of the Dogs (The Very Big Motion Picture Corporation of America, 1998)

Here’s another local science fiction thriller delivered by producer-director John Ellis. This time around, Ellis created a futuristic tale of a brave ex-pilot, his pet cow Gertrude, and his space-babe girlfriend, who were all trying to save civilization from the clutches of fanatical religious leader Reverend Zerk and his deacon followers. The outdoor desert scenes were filmed on the grounds surrounding Laurel Sand & Gravel on Van Dusen Road; today, this building is occupied by BrightView Landscape Services.

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



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



Jonathan Jessop:

From North Carolina to York, Pennsylvania



BY WAYNE DAVIS

Jonathan Jessop, whose name was given to the town of Jessup in Maryland, was an extraordinary figure. Jessop's life journey took him from North Carolina to York, Pennsylvania, where he made significant contributions to his community, the anti-slavery movement, and early American industry. While he's briefly mentioned in G. Marie Biggs' *The Story of Jessup* as a contractor, his life was rich with achievements beyond that role. Jessop's story is one of innovation, leadership, and quiet dedication to justice.

Jessop was born on September 30, 1770, to Ann Matthews, a well-known Quaker preacher and traveling minister, and Thomas Jessop. The Jessops belonged to the New Garden Monthly Meeting in Guilford County, North Carolina. The Society of Friends would remain a lifetime devotion for the Jessop family. Thomas' farm in North Carolina was the point of action during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in March of 1781, when 10-year-old Jonathan helped the wounded soldiers into his house for treatment. Jonathan also drew one of the detailed maps depicting the battle.

Following his father's death in 1773, his mother relocated the family to York, Pennsylvania, when

Jonathan was just 13 years old. They joined her cousin, Elisha Kirk, who was a clockmaker and Quaker minister. Jessop became Kirk's apprentice, learning the trade and honing his mechanical skills. When Kirk passed away in 1790, Jessop took over the business and began making a name for himself in the York community.

In 1794, Jessop married Susanna Updegraff, the daughter of Joseph Updegraff, a founding member of the York Society of Friends (Quakers). The couple had six children, and Jessop's eldest son, Joseph, joined him in the clockmaking trade. Their daughter, Mary Ann, married into a family that later became involved in the abolitionist movement, continuing a family legacy of social justice.

Jessop's Many Roles in York

Clockmaking wasn't just a job for Jessop—it was a stepping-stone into other fields, including engineering and civic service. His shop became a hub of innovation, and he trained several apprentices, including Phineas Davis, who would go on to build the first coal-burning steam engine used by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

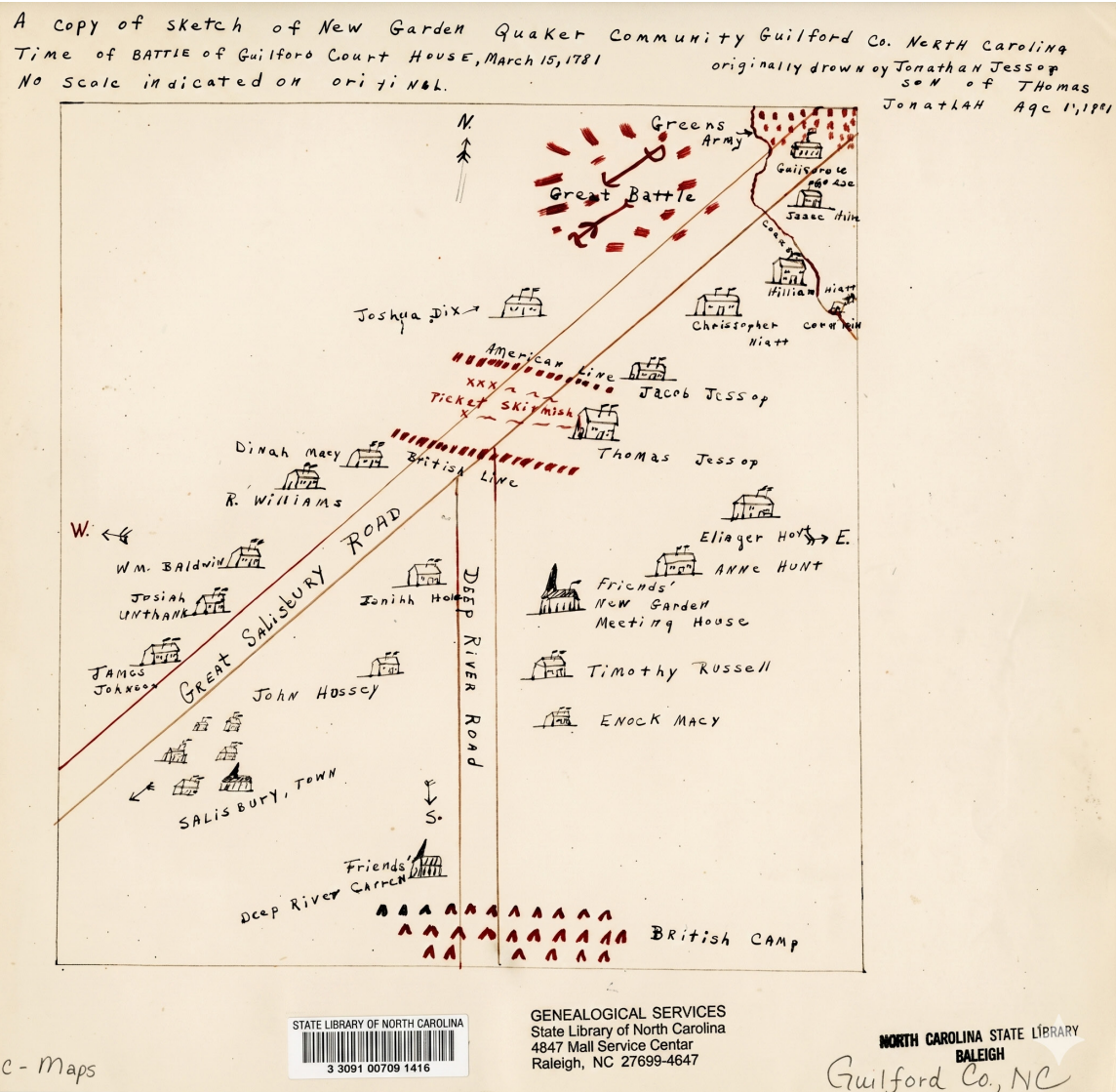
Jessop's ability to transfer mechanical knowledge into larger engineering projects foreshadowed his future contributions to early American infrastructure.

Beyond his business, Jessop played a central role in York's civic life. His involvement with the local fire department, later renamed the York Vigilant Fire Company, demonstrated his leadership and technical expertise. He helped repair essential equipment and served as the fire company's president, a position of significant influence in the growing town.

Jessop also held various public offices. He served as a burgess (like a mayor) and was elected as one of the directors of the York Almshouse, a facility that provided care for the poor. His role in the almshouse aligned with his Quaker values of service and equality, reflecting a deep sense of responsibility for the well-being of his community. These leadership roles solidified his reputation as a man dedicated to both civic duty and public welfare.

Quakerism in Jessop's Life

Jessop's Quaker beliefs guided much of his work and decisions. In 1797, he was appointed as clerk of the



(Opposite and below): A portrait of Jonathan Jessop, the Quaker leader, engineer, and namesake of Jessup, Maryland; a map he drew as a young boy depicting the March 15, 1781 Battle of Guilford Courthouse, fought around his family's North Carolina farm; and the York Imperial apple, a celebrated variety Jessop propagated around 1820. Jessop's remarkable life also included careers as a clockmaker, bridge designer, B&O Railroad superintendent, horticulturist, and a figure closely connected to the early abolitionist movement.

YORK COUNTY HISTORY CENTER



York Meeting of Friends, a role he held for many years. Quakerism, with its emphasis on equality, peace, and social justice, deeply influenced Jessop's approach to both his business ventures and public service. His leadership within the Society of Friends demonstrated his commitment to the values of humility, integrity, and communal support.

Quaker meetings often involved reflections on social issues, including slavery, and Jessop's strong connection to this religious community informed his views on the institution of slavery. Jessop's leadership in the Friends Meeting played an important role in shaping York's social conscience, particularly as the town became involved in the abolitionist movement.

Innovations and Engineering Work

Before his involvement with the B&O Railroad, Jessop was already making strides as an engineer. In 1809, he became the superintendent of the York and Conewago Turnpike, where his mechanical skills came in handy as he oversaw construction and road-building projects. His work in infrastructure expanded in 1811 when he and his business partner, Michael Gardner, patented the

"Balance Bridge." This innovative design was praised for its ability to span large rivers and its durability. The patent described the bridge as "particularly adapted to large spans, from one hundred to three hundred feet," showcasing Jessop's forward-thinking approach to construction and engineering.

The bridge's design and simplicity made it a critical solution for river crossings in the early 19th century. Jessop's foundry produced these bridges, adding to his contributions to local infrastructure and his reputation as a skilled engineer.

Overcoming Setbacks and Turning to Horticulture

In 1817, Jessop's clockmaking business and cotton venture were devastated by a major flood in York. Despite this setback, Jessop rebuilt his clockmaking business and eventually sold it to his son, Joseph, in 1823. This allowed him to pursue one of his greatest passions: horticulture.

In 1820, Jessop propagated what would later become the famous York Imperial Apple, initially called "Jonathan's Fine Winter" for its long-lasting nature. The apple quickly gained popularity due to its ability to survive through the winter without spoiling. By 1855, New York pomologist Charles Downing renamed it the "York Imperial," reflecting both its origins and superior quality. The York Imperial became a top apple variety in the United States and remains a beloved heirloom fruit today.

In 1926, the Pennsylvania Farmer described Jessop as "a figure as significant to Pennsylvania's apple industry as Johnny Appleseed." His legacy in horticulture has endured for over 200 years, and the York Imperial apple remains a symbol of his contributions to agriculture.

The B&O Railroad and Jessop's Involvement

Jessop's contributions to the B&O Railroad are a testament to his ability to innovate and lead. His former apprentice, Phineas Davis, designed "The York," the first coal-burning steam engine used on the railroad. Described as a "grasshopper-style" engine due to its vertical boiler, the engine was a major success, leading to further work for Davis and his team.

After Davis's untimely death in 1835, Jessop stepped in as Superintendent of Machinery for the B&O Railroad. In this role, he oversaw the construction and maintenance of the railroad's engines and cars. He was responsible for ensuring that the engines were always ready for service, managing water stations, depots, and ensuring smooth operations. Jessop's work with the B&O Railroad was critical during a period of rapid expansion and growth for the rail industry, and he held this position until 1839.

Abolition and Underground Railroad Involvement

While there is some debate about the extent of Jessop's direct involvement in the Underground Railroad, there is significant evidence to suggest that he and his family were committed to the anti-slavery cause. Jessop's grandson, Edward Chalfant, was known to distribute abolitionist literature and provide food to enslaved people seeking freedom. Jessop's son-in-law, James Chalfant, reportedly helped transport fugitives to Amos Griest, a Quaker leader in York who was heavily involved in the Underground Railroad.

York, Pennsylvania, was a key stop on the Underground Railroad. According to William Still's *The Underground Railroad*, Quakers like Joel Fisher and Samuel Willis were instrumental in hiding and guiding freedom seekers. Jessop's connections to these figures suggest that he was likely involved in the broader abolitionist network, even if he was not publicly active.

One particularly compelling piece of evidence is a letter written by Yardley Taylor, a Quaker abolitionist from Loudoun County, Virginia. In 1828, Taylor wrote to Jessop asking for his help in assisting a man named Harry, who was trying to escape slavery. Taylor's letter asked Jessop to provide Harry with a "safe private conveyance" and gave detailed instructions for Harry's journey. While Harry was ultimately captured, the fact that Taylor reached out to Jessop for help indicates that Jessop was trusted within the abolitionist community.

York Meeting and the Testimony Against Slavery

The York Meeting of Friends consistently opposed slavery, as reflected in their meeting minutes. In August 1842, they recorded: "Our testimony against slavery is maintained," showing their ongoing commitment to the cause. By the 1850s, the Meeting was actively providing for African Americans in their care, ensuring that they received education and support.

Jessop's close relationships with figures like Joel Fisher and Samuel Willis further suggest that he was involved in abolitionist efforts, even if his contributions were behind the scenes. Dr. Israel Betz, writing in *Friends Intelligencer* in 1913, described Jessop's home as a "beacon light" for fugitives on the road to freedom.

A Lasting Legacy

Jonathan Jessop's life was marked by innovation, leadership, and a deep commitment to justice. From clockmaking and bridge-building to horticulture and his work with the B&O Railroad, Jessop left a lasting impact on York, Pennsylvania, and beyond. His contributions to the York Imperial Apple and his role in helping to develop the country's early rail infrastructure are just two examples of his broad influence.

But perhaps the most important part of Jessop's legacy is his moral integrity. His 1857 obituary praised his "genial disposition" and "freedom from prejudice," noting that he lived "without making a single enemy." His life serves as an enduring example of how moral conviction, community action, and hard work can shape not just a town, but the country itself.

Jonathan Jessop should be remembered not only for his professional achievements but also for his role in the fight for freedom and equality.



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

Hurry Up and Wait: Rare Visit to Nuclear Missile Base



BY JIM CLASH



PHOTOS BY JIM CLASH

Minot, North Dakota (population 50,000) is home to the U.S. Air Force 91st Missile Wing. Buried deep in the ground there are 150 nuclear-tipped missiles, which, if launched, could destroy a good chunk of the world's population.

I traveled to Minot awhile back to visit an underground bunker there, in which two young men sit ready to turn keys to launch those missiles, and the silos where the underground missiles are housed. Both complexes are located on public roads, but you would never know it unless you had been briefed beforehand.

After an hour's drive in a nondescript van from Minot base proper across mostly farmland, we arrived at the Juliett-01 complex. Above ground there are two tan buildings. Seventy feet under those buildings is the isolated bunker where the missileers are on 24-hour alert in the event the U.S. needs to use its nuclear weapons.

At the fortified gate out front, we were immediately met by armed guards. Once our background checks were complete, we were escorted into one of the tan buildings. Surprisingly, there was a kitchen, complete with a chef who provides the missileers and security personnel with sustenance during their shifts. The food is cash only: for \$2.95, I had a cola, burger, and tater tots. There is also a bathroom, a tiny gym, and a pool table.

I was prohibited from bringing any electronic devices into the bunker; my tape recorder, watch, and camera were confiscated. Reporting would be done the old-fashioned way, with pen and paper, and photos would be taken by an Air Force public affairs officer.

To get down to the bunker, four of us piled into a small freight elevator. Guards with machine guns called off as we entered, "One in, two in, three in, four in." Descending was spooky. We were told that the elevator, rickety and installed in the early 60s, sometimes gets stuck. If that happened, we were to wait patiently. If it couldn't be fixed, and that happens sometimes, an escape ladder would be used to return to the surface.

Upon reaching the bottom of the shaft, we were met by two massive steel blast doors—the outside one 11 tons and the inside one 8 tons—which require nine vigorous turns of a wheel-like handle to open. The outside door is opened by us, the inside one by the missileers.

The bunker itself is fairly tight quarters, with a green curtain walling off a small sleeping space. If a serious message comes across the console screens while one

missileer is asleep, he is awakened immediately by the other to do his duty.

And what is that duty? Follow a series of verification codes on the analog screens, then unlock two simple padlocks on a rusted box that holds two launch keys. Each missileer has his own separate key to prevent one of them from rogue-launching.

I sat down with the missileers. The twenty-something, when asked what he would do if he received a direct order from the President to launch, replied, "I would have to follow the orders of our commander-in-chief. We are always ready and prepared, no matter what the situation. There are no politics down here. We don't second guess."

After a half-hour in the stuffy bunker watching live screens, posing for photos, and asking more questions, it was back into the elevator and up to the surface for more paperwork. Once that was completed, we were off via the same van to visit the silos themselves, which are connected to the missileers' bunker by a few miles of electric cable.

Approaching the Juliett-05 silo, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. While we couldn't get into the underground silo itself, I was no more than 100 yards from a nuclear fusion device that, after traveling 15,000 mph into and out of space, could destroy a major city in Russia, China, or North Korea, if not several. The device makes the fission bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of WWII seem like firecrackers.

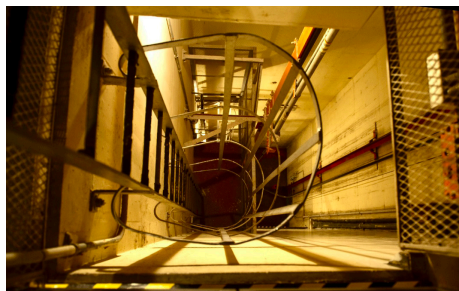
After our visit, it was immediately back to Minot proper to scan the photos taken in the bunker for classified information. Several were discarded, including one where the console screen was reflected in my eyeglasses.

I left Minot that day with mixed feelings. I understand, of course, we need these monsters for deterrence, and I respect the servicemen who bear the responsibility of guarding and potentially launching them. But, like everyone, I worry about ever having to use them.

Hopefully we never will, making the missileers hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait—into eternity. At Minot, hurry up and wait is a good thing.



Jim Clash immerses himself in extreme adventures for Forbes magazine. He graduated from Laurel High School in 1973. His latest book, Amplified: Interviews with Icons of Rock 'n' Roll, is an Amazon best-seller.



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NSA Defectors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

Two Laurel Men Missing From NSA

See Pictures On Page 7)

The disappearance of two "junior" mathematicians of the top-secret National Security Agency at Fort George G. Meade has caused nationwide concern.

Both reside in Laurel. They have been identified by the Defense Department as Bernon F. Mitchell, 31, of 1010 Eighth Street, and William H. Martin, 29, who lived at the Laurel Diner-Motel. The Defense Department said the two had told friends and col-

leagues that they planned to use their vacations starting June 24 motoring first to Mitchell's home at Eureka, Calif., and then to Martin's at Ellensburg, Wash. When the men failed to report back from vacation on July 18, the Defense Department started an investigation which revealed that they had visited neither home.

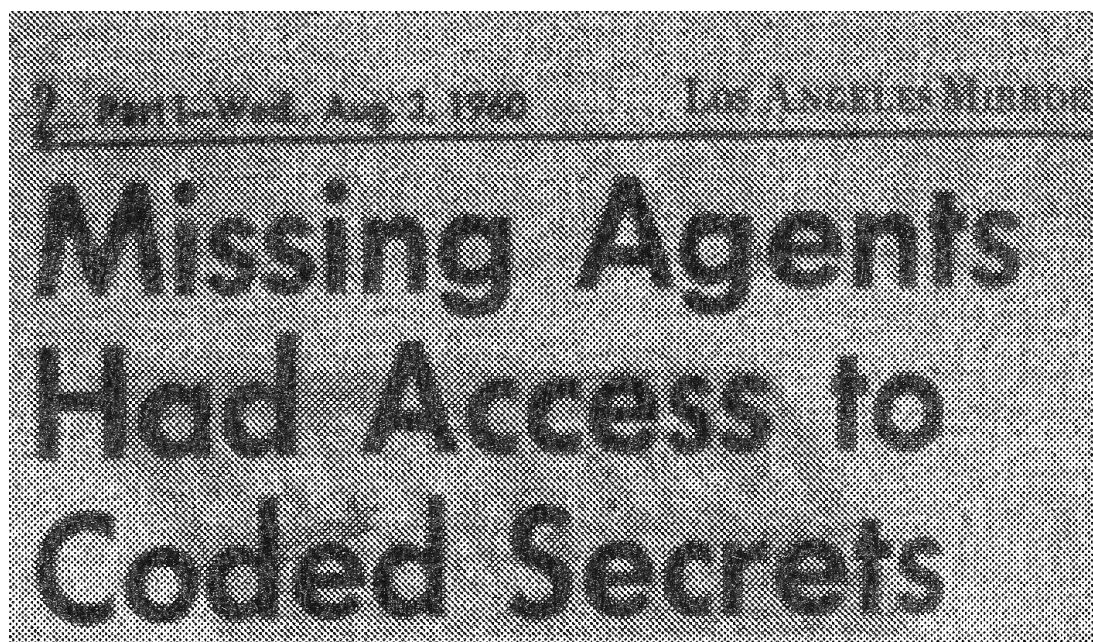
The two were reported to have registered at a Mexico City hotel after booking passage on a plane there June 25, and latest reports were carrying the search to Cuba. No one had any apparent reason for their disappearance.

The Defense spokesman indicated that while some classified material was available to them, they were not high up in the agency staff. They joined the agency in July 1957 after serving together in the Navy, and until recently had lived together. Neither man is married. Martin spent the past academic year doing advance study in mathematics at the University of Illinois.

Laurel Girl Scout Day Camp Opens

Laurel's Girl Scout Day Camp opened at Farmer's Community Club near Laurel August 1 and will continue through August 11.

Mrs. Edith J.



deciphering the secret communications of its own allies. Finally, we objected to the fact that the U.S. Government was willing to go so far as to recruit agents from among the personnel of its allies."

Among other things, NSA had to be concerned with what the two men might know—and pass on to the Russians—about a U-2 spy plane that was shot down by Russia just a few months prior to their defection. The U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers, survived the crash and was still in Russian custody at the time, undergoing extensive interrogation.

Internally, the NSA had a different version, at least after the investigation. In 1963 a study by the agency declared, "Beyond any doubt, no other event has had, or is likely to have in the future, a greater impact on the Agency's security program."

President Dwight Eisenhower called Mitchell and Martin "self-confessed turncoats" and former President Harry Truman said they "should be shot."

In spite of the tremendous publicity victory for the Russians, publicly NSA said, "It is believed that there was very little damage" done to U.S. intelligence efforts. That turned out to be confirmed by ex-KGB agent Mitrokhin, who wrote that "KGB codebreakers were disappointed in the amount of detailed knowledge of NSA cryptanalysis possessed by Mitchell and Martin."

In an article for NSA's *Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series*, David P. Mowry wrote, "Most of the information on organization and operations against the USSR and the PRC was undoubtedly already known to

the Communists. Since cryptosystems cannot usually be replaced quickly, there is no evidence that the revelations concerning NSA's attacks on the systems of U.S. allies had any effect. The Communist spymasters would undoubtedly have preferred Martin and Mitchell to remain in place as moles, since their information was dated as of the moment they left NSA."

Life in the USSR

According to Andrew and Mitrokhin, "Within a few years the [Russians] found both Mitchell and Martin considerably more trouble than they were worth." Both were given jobs and housing, but they soon yearned to be back in the United States.

A month after their news conference, *The Washington Post* reported that Martin had married a 29-year-old Soviet woman. In a Russian interview, Martin said his wife "is a wonderful Soviet girl, an excellent housekeeper, and I am very happy with her." They divorced in 1963.

About 18 months later, Martin ran into a *New York Times* reporter in Leningrad and happily sat down for an interview. He was generally satisfied with life but had some complaints: "His impressions of what it would be like in the USSR had come from USSR and other Soviet propaganda magazines which were overly rosy ... complained [Soviets] had promised he could live anywhere but wouldn't let him leave Leningrad, which he wanted to do because his southern wife got asthma in the damp climate there."

Writing in *Salon.com*, Rick Anderson said, "But as later news reports and NSA files would show, the duo quickly soured on Soviet life, concluding they made a mistake. Over the years, they repeatedly attempted to return to the U.S. if the government wouldn't charge them with a crime (no deal, said the feds). ... In a Soviet newspaper interview, Martin called his defection 'foolhardy,' but said he wasn't ashamed."

Both men were drinking heavily. According to government files, "Martin was described by one source as being 'totally on the skids,' an incurable alcoholic, and surrounded by degenerates and devoted to the practice of sexual perversions."

Their repeated attempts over the ensuing years to return to the U.S. were denied. They had their U.S. citizenship stripped.

By using an Australian passport, Martin went to Mexico, where he died of cancer in 1987. Reportedly he was buried at an unknown location in the United States. Mitchell also married a Soviet woman. Their marriage lasted until his death in 2001. There were no children from either marriage.

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.

OBITUARIES

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

Brian Bennett, 43



City of Laurel employee Brian Bennett died on April 19, 2026, as the result of a car accident. He was the son of Bob and Eileen Bennett, who raised him and his

sister, Diane, in Laurel. He spent most of his life in Laurel and was known for being the quarterback at St. Vincent Pallotti High School. With a lifelong love of football and golf, he remained active in sports long after high school and college, forming lasting friendships through athletic leagues. He often used lessons from sports and competition to offer guidance and reinforce the importance of teamwork and resilience.

Brian joined Laurel's Department of Public Works in 2017 and quickly became a respected, reliable colleague who went above and beyond his duties. Even after being promoted to a supervisory role, he could often be found working alongside his teams or taking on jobs himself. He was known for his professionalism, leadership, and friendly demeanor. Deeply committed to serving the residents of Laurel, Brian was memorialized by Mayor Keith Sydnor, who called his loss "heartbreaking for our city" and praised him for making a "lasting difference in Laurel... in ways that often go unseen but are felt every day."

Director of Public Works Tim Miller added, "Brian was someone you could always count on. He led by example, took pride in his work, and earned the respect of everyone around him. His impact cannot be overstated. More importantly, he was simply a good man. He will be deeply missed."

Beyond his service to the city, Brian was a devoted husband to Elizabeth and a proud father of their daughters, Stevie and Blake. He often shared videos of special family moments with his closest colleagues. His family described him as "the ultimate girl dad, singing along to Taylor Swift and playing princesses." Brian will be remembered for his kind heart, unwavering loyalty, and the genuine care he showed to everyone he met.

Brenda Marie Blitz, 82



Brenda Marie (Souder) Blitz died peacefully on March 23, 2026, at her Laurel home. Brenda's life was marked by compassion, humor, and an unwavering

love for those around her.

A proud Bowie State University graduate, Brenda dedicated her career to shaping young minds as a kindergarten teacher for Glenelg Country School. Her quick wit and loving nature brought warmth to every classroom she entered, leaving an indelible mark on students, parents, and colleagues alike.

Brenda was a member of the Laurel Historical Society, the Laurel Garden Club, and the Rotary Club of Laurel, where she formed lifelong friendships.

She leaves behind her husband of 59 years, Jeffrey Blitz; daughters Rebecca and Janice Blitz; two granddaughters; her sister, Roberta Shaffer (Doug); nephew Steven Fultz (Stacy); and nieces Stephanie Shaffer and Genevieve Shaffer-Zorb (Danny).

Carol May Carkhuff, 92



Carol May Carkhuff of Laurel passed away on April 20, 2026. Born in Kingston, Pennsylvania, she married and moved to Laurel, where she worked as a

food service manager for Prince George's County Public Schools for many years. She retired in 1998 to take care of her grandchildren and great-granddaughter, finding fulfillment in taking care of all her family and volunteering at her church.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Thomas; her six siblings (Gloria Ammerman, Harold Newman, Neil Newman, Raymond Newman, Irene Sorber, and Lee Newman); and a son-in-law, Christopher Jones.

She is survived by four children: Bliss Carkhuff (Kay), Mark Carkhuff (Ann), Sharon Carkhuff, and Carol Ann Dwonzyk (Michael); 14 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandchild; and several nieces and nephews.

Jeffrey Richard Claudy, 43



Jeffrey Richard Claudy of Milton died suddenly on March 23, 2026. He was born in Cheverly, Maryland, grew up in Laurel, and graduated from Atholton High School.

Jeffrey proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy for four years as a submariner aboard the USS Bremerton based out of Bremerton, Washington. During his service years, he lived in Hawaii and San Diego, experiences that fueled his love for travel and exploration. Following his military service, Jeffrey worked as a body shop mechanic known for his skill, dedication, and work ethic. He also worked for six years at Surfing Crab Restaurant in Lewes, Delaware, where he built lasting friendships.

Jeffrey had a passion for life and enjoyed many hobbies, including golf, bowling, and poker. He was an adventurer at heart who loved to travel and had memorable experiences, including time spent in Thailand. He embraced life fully and cherished the moments he spent exploring new places and making memories with those around him.

He is survived by his parents, Michael and Penny Claudy; his siblings, Christopher Douglass (Terri, Bryan Claudy (Regina), and Joseph Claudy (Ashley); nine nieces and nephews; and a great niece.

James Edward Dietsch, 78



Local coaching legend James Edward Dietsch died peacefully on March 31, 2026. Born in Baltimore, he was captain of both the lacrosse and football teams at Baltimore Polytechnic High

School. He was a 1969 alumnus of the University of Maryland, playing lacrosse on three ACC championship teams and the 1967 NCAA national championship team. He served 3 years in the U.S. Army.

While watching Neil Armstrong walk on the moon in 1969, Jim proposed to college sweetheart Barbara Ann Yates. They married in 1970, spent a year in Germany on deployment, then returned to Maryland. After his Army service ended, Jim taught middle school in Montgomery County and then joined the University of Maryland sports program in 1972. There, he served in two coaching roles: as head men's soccer coach from 1975 to 1980, he led the Terps

to the 1976 NCAA Tournament and was named ACC Coach of the Year; and, as assistant men's lacrosse coach from 1973 to 1978, he co-led the 1973 and 1975 NCAA championship teams. From 1981 to 1986, Jim was UM's Assistant Athletic Director in Charge of Academic Affairs. The term "Be the Best" began during his time at UM and remains a motto and mantra for how he lived his life and mentored others, both on and off the field.

Jim then taught industrial arts and physical education at Thomas W. Pyle Middle School for over 20 years. He joined best friend Dave Mintzer in coaching championship lacrosse teams at Catonsville Community College and at numerous high school and youth lacrosse programs throughout Maryland. After retiring from teaching in 2007, he returned to collegiate coaching, first in South Carolina and then at Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina, leading that team to a Conference Carolina Tournament Championship and being named 2008 Coach of the Year. After his second retirement, Jim and Barbara moved to Delaware. They traveled the world together, spent time with family and friends, and Jim—unsurprisingly—founded two local boys' lacrosse programs.

In addition to Barbara, his wife of 56 years, he is survived by daughter Erika Mutchler (Keith) and son Kevin Dietsch (Ioana), as well as three grandchildren.

Roberta Hilt Fancher, 75



Roberta Hilt Fancher of Laurel died on April 15, 2026. Roberta grew up in Kentucky, graduating from Waggoner High School in Louisville in 1969 and earning a bachelor's degree from

Ohio's Kenyon College in 1972. She returned to Kentucky to further her education, earning a master's degree from Murray State College.

Roberta found her calling as a teacher, spending the rest of her life having a positive impact on her students. She taught within the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore and Washington, including at Mackin Catholic High School and Archbishop Carroll High School, before concluding her teaching career at Potomac High School in Oxon Hill.

Roberta's husband, Richard Fancher, preceded her in death. She is survived by her sister, Mary Jo Jacobs, and a nephew, Charles Fancher.

OBITUARIES

Betty Anne Frederick, 92

Betty Anne Frederick passed away on May 22, 2026, at her home. Her husband of 69 years, local car dealership owner S.G. Fred Frederick, died on January 7, just shy of his 95th birthday.

Born and raised in Parsonsburg, Maryland, Betty Anne attended the University of Maryland, College Park, where she was a member of the Alpha Omicron Pi sorority. It was there, on a blind date, that she met Fred. They married six months later and made their home in Laurel, where Fred opened an auto dealership with Betty Anne's support. Together they raised four children, who continue to run the family businesses. Betty Anne and Fred loved Laurel for its old town charm and the great people who became lifelong friends.

Although Fred was widely known in the community as an active civic leader, it was Betty Anne's support that made everything possible. A model of grace and kindness, she was the foundation of the family—committed to raising her children and setting an example of a devoted mother and wife. She was known as an exceptional lady: polite, modest, selfless, and caring.

Betty Anne was an avid gardener and tennis player. She volunteered countless hours at local elementary and junior high schools. She and Fred shared a lifelong passion for the University of Maryland, supporting and attending events there with friends and family for over five decades. Together they cultivated innumerable friendships through celebrations and traditions; they were gifted at bringing people together.

She is survived by four children: Cynthia Frederick, F. Craig Frederick (Helen), Christopher Frederick (Karen), and Jeff Frederick (Janell); nine grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. Betty Anne's kindness and charity will endure through the legacy of the Fred Frederick Family Foundation.

Lauren Michelle Hageage, 43

Lauren Hageage of Laurel passed away in her sleep on April 24, 2026, of undetermined causes, after years of health challenges. Born in Baltimore to Cheryl and Charles

Hageage Sr., Lauren lived her early adult life in Laurel, then moved to Hagerstown and finally to Frederick. She attended St. Mary of the Mills grade school, Pallotti High School, and the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, graduating with a criminology degree.

Lauren loved going to the beach to swim, collect seashells, or fish. She was an excellent cook—her family always talked about the 10-lb. lasagna or fresh salsa she would bring to gatherings. She loved roller coasters, horror movies, books, and traveling, and embraced any new place or thing. She loved animals, including her two rescue cats, the birds at her feeder, squirrels, or from time-to-time a raccoon looking for food. She always had a smile, even for the smallest of things. Fall was her favorite season.

She is survived by her parents and her two cherished brothers, Chas and Ben Hageage, along with many aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends.

William Jay Knisley, Jr., 53

William "Jay" Knisley, Jr., died unexpectedly on March 17, 2026, at his home in Laurel. Known for his passion for helping others, Jay spent the majority

of his professional life in the hospitality industry, working with various restaurant groups and as a dedicated member of the Infiniti HR team. He also loved serving on Work Camp mission trips. He built lasting relationships with coworkers and clients and brought integrity and kindness into everything he did.

Hospitality was not just something Jay practiced—it was who he was. He had a remarkable gift for making people feel welcome, cared for, and valued. Whether hosting friends, supporting family, or simply being present, Jay made everyone feel like they mattered.

Jay was the beloved husband of Christine and the dedicated father of Elizabeth and Julia. He also leaves behind his

mother, Barbara, and stepfather, Russell; parents-in-law Martha and Paul; siblings Donald, Jessica, Stephanie, and Aaron; grandparents Nick, Jean, and Wilbur; eight nieces and nephews; and many "bonus kids," including Sara and Sam.

John Lawall, 71

John Wilson Lawall, Sr., of Savage, died on May 8, 2026. He was born in 1955 to Willard and Jeannette Lawall in Washington, DC. He retired from the Toyota Corporation

in 2009.

John thoroughly enjoyed fast cars, motorcycles, and all gadgets known to man. He was passionate about his audio equipment and had quite the collection. He loved watching NASCAR and funny car races, and he attended many such events over the years. He loved his family dearly, especially his grandchildren.

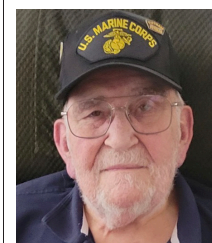
He is survived by his two sons, John Lawall, Jr. and Michael Lawall; his ex-wife, Susan T. Barker; and four grandchildren.

Theresa June Marconi, 93

Theresa "June" Marconi, of Laurel, died on May 5, 2026, in Silver Spring. Born in Gallitzin, Pennsylvania, she moved to Laurel over 60 years ago, where she was a member

of St Mary of the Mills Catholic Church and worked at Hecht's for many years. She later joined the Laurel Senior Friendship Club, the Ladies of Charity, and the Red Hat Society. June was a loyal fan of the Redskins and Nationals and an avid bingo player. She loved to travel, but her greatest joy was spending time with her family.

June was preceded in death by her husband, Bud (Anthony Joseph), and her siblings: William "Jack," Larry, Edna, Rita, Naomi, and Carol. She is survived by daughters Deborah Bowley (Edward) and Sharon Kowal, six granddaughters, and eight great-grandchildren.

Roland Lee Miller, 80

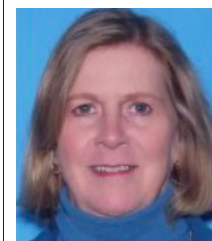
Roland Lee Miller, of Laurel, passed away on June 4, 2026, at Sinai Hospital. Born and raised in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, he served as a helicopter crew chief mechanic in Vietnam from

1967 to 1968 with the U.S. Marine Corps.

He then worked for the General Services Administration as a manager for steam distribution before retiring.

Roland was a devoted family man and an active member of First United Methodist Church in Laurel, where his renowned sausage gravy was a highlight of any church breakfast. He served as a youth leader alongside his wife, Ann Marie. Roland also was a member of the Goshen Bears, a group of volunteers who regularly spent weekends performing routine maintenance and repairs at the Boy Scouts of America Goshen Scout Camp in southern Virginia. He will be remembered as a caring man with a sense of humor and a strong work ethic.

Roland was predeceased by his parents, Amos and Rosella Miller. He is survived by his wife of nearly 58 years, Ann Marie (Foster) Miller; sons Trevor Miller (Kelly) and Brandon Miller (Amy), all of Laurel; four granddaughters; sister Fran Morris; and brother Ted Miller.

Karen Louise O'Brien, 70

Karen Louise O'Brien died in Pensacola, Florida, on Friday, March 20, 2025. Born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, she grew up in Laurel's Montpelier community and

graduated from Laurel High School in 1973. She was a pom-pom girl and worked at the Rustler Restaurant alongside other LHS students.

A 1977 graduate of Marymount University, Karen worked for Neiman Marcus for many years. As an adult, she lived in Maryland, Texas, and Florida. At the time of her passing, she lived in Destin, Florida, and worked at The Logo Place.

Karen was preceded in death by her brother, Lt. Col Francis W. O'Brien Jr (Retd); and her sisters, Patricia Marie O'Brien and Mary A. Morris. She is survived by sister-in-law Sandy O'Brien, a nephew, four nieces, and many great-nieces and -nephews whom she adored.

Thomas Frederick Penn, 95



On March 15, 2026, Thomas Frederick Penn, Jr. entered eternal rest following a long life. Born in Akron, Ohio, he moved to Litchfield Park, Arizona, at age 13.

He considered that era the best part of his life because it's where he began his love of horses and golf.

Tom graduated from Shippensburg State College in Pennsylvania and earned a master's degree in counseling from Penn State University. He retired from the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public School System after 32 years of service. The highlight of Tom's career was coaching the 1964 Springbrook High School golf team to the Maryland State Championship.

Tom attended St. Philips Episcopal Church in Laurel. He was a 42-year member of the American Legion and a 65-year member of the Masons. He enjoyed his "McDonald's Crew" and his Senior Center friends. He was a loving father to his daughter, Mary Penn-Soranno, and a good friend to all.

Nancy Jo Prior, 71



Nancy Jo Prior passed away in Jessup on May 2, 2026. A 1972 graduate of Laurel High School, she lived in Laurel and Savage for many years. She worked for

the Howard County Public School System, retiring in 2014. She also lived for some time in California, both in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. She enjoyed going to the beach, hiking, reading, listening to music, and spending time with friends and family.

Nancy was a brain cancer survivor at the age of 46. Donations can be made in her name to St. Jude Children's Hospital.

Nancy was preceded in death by a son, Raymond Prior, and brothers Tom and Kevin Padgett. She is survived by her husband of 53 years, George Prior; son Alex Prior (Megan); a grandson; five siblings; and many nieces and nephews.

Virginia Ann Russ, 85



Virginia Ann Russ died on April 29, 2026. Born in 1940, Virginia lived a life defined by caring for others, kindness, and dedication to family. A longtime resident of Howard County,

she was a member of the Emmanuel United Methodist Church of Laurel and the Lovely Ladies of Laurel widows club. She served as a trip leader for the Howard County Senior Center for 20 years.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Joseph Russ. She is survived by her three sons—David, Steve and Chris Russ—as well as six grandchildren and her brother, Brian.

Sylvester Eugene Seymore, Jr., 77



Sylvester "Wess" E. Seymore died peacefully on May 30, 2026, after battling Parkinsons disease for over eight years. Wess lived in Laurel for 49 years and attended St.

Mary of the Mills Catholic Church.

A 1966 graduate of Delone Catholic High School in McSherrystown, Pennsylvania, Wess later graduated from the Electronics Institute of Harrisburg and had a 52-year career as a computer technician at Univac/Sperry/Unisys.

Wess was an avid tennis player, competing in both singles and doubles matches in the Maryland and DC area for decades. He also owned a contracting business, remodeling and reselling homes.

He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Janet (Henschke); daughter Anita (Steve) and sons Scott (Debbie) and Jamie (Theresa); his mother, Henrietta; five siblings; four grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews.

Christopher James Shoff, 101



Christopher James "Jim" Shoff died on May 23, 2026, just a few weeks after the passing of his wife, Norma. Born in Boswell, Pennsylvania, he worked at his

parents' grocery store while growing up. He served 2 years in the U.S. Army, then earned a degree in electrical engineering at Penn State. He moved to Laurel for a job at Westinghouse, where he worked until his retirement. He loved photography, travel, and computer technology, and he faithfully followed Penn State football his entire life.

In his seventies, Jim decided to learn ballroom dancing, which is where he met the former Norma Rellosa of Silver Spring. They later married and settled in Laurel, regularly attending the gym and socials at the Laurel Senior Center and dances at the Hollywood Ballroom in Silver Spring. In 2016, The National WW II Museum certified him by unanimous vote to be entered onto its Honor Roll in New Orleans in appreciation for his support as a charter member.

In the ensuing years, Jim and Norma weathered their health challenges together, with help from neighbors, friends, and acquaintances. Norma cared for him 24/7 until he entered hospice care at Sterling Care Hillhaven. Just two weeks later, Norma was hospitalized for surgery; she never fully recovered, and was placed in the same room as Jim at Sterling Care, where she died on April 15, 2026, while he was sleeping.

In addition to Norma, Jim was preceded in death by his older brother, William Donald Shoff; and his first wife, Erma (Beener) Shoff. He is survived by a stepdaughter, Monette Matish (Ted); and a niece, Carol Blough.

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

— FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

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

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