

FREE

WINTER 2026
VOL. 6, NO. 1

VOICES OF LAUREL



A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

A History of Protest in Laurel

*A look back at more than a century
of notable hometown protests*

PAGE 10



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WINTER 2026 | VOL. 6, NO. 1

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Voices of Laurel is published quarterly by The Laurel History Boys, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization utilizing archival preservation, photography, oral history, and presentations to convey the historical experiences of Laurel, Maryland. *Voices of Laurel* is designed to bring together a diverse group of contributors whose common interest is Laurel—whether it be through history, current events, culture, or nostalgia. Contributors are volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the views or opinions of The Laurel History Boys, Inc. If you would like to be a contributor, please contact laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com. Individual stories are welcome, as are recurring columns. Donations help support our work, and are tax deductible. Sponsorship ads are also available. Contact laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com for information about featuring your business with a tax deductible sponsorship ad in *Voices of Laurel*. Learn more at laurelhistory.com, voicesoflaurel.com, and follow us on Facebook.

LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys



Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 25 and join us at Laurel Park for our second Voices of Laurel Day at the Races event! The Laurel History Boys and Voices of Laurel team will be under the tent at trackside—join us to enjoy live racing up close just one week before the Kentucky Derby and three weeks before the Preakness makes its historic debut at Laurel Park. This free event is open to all and provides an opportunity to mingle and learn about horse racing, betting, and the history of Laurel Park, which opened in 1911 and is scheduled to close when the renovations to Pimlico are complete.

Grants and Donations

Thank you to Linda Lemar, Charlie Nickell, Michael Sciscenti, and James Bowman for their monetary donations. Your support means a lot, and helps us cover printing and website expenses.

We also received an interesting item from Joann Robison, who donated some oversized bound copies of the *Laurel Leader* from the 1960s to the 1980s. These are some of the same binders available for public research at the Laurel Museum. It's an interesting story how she came to have them. Years ago, her husband, former Laurel Mayor Joe Robison, saw the binders on the sidewalk outside the *Leader's* offices on Main Street. When he inquired about them, he was told the *Leader* was moving its office to a new location and was discarding these duplicate binders. Joe was having none of that and took them home, where they've been until now. They are already being put to good use, as the cover image of this issue is based on a photo from the October 23, 1969 edition.

Voices of Laurel Collection Addition

Copies of *Voices of Laurel* are now part of the permanent collection at the Hornbake Library at the University of Maryland, College Park.

New Novel from Rick McGill

Rick McGill, who wrote a column about his time as an officer with the Laurel Police Department for *Voices of Laurel* for five years, has released his first novel, *Wait For Me: A Granite Ghost Story*. The book is available on Amazon, which includes this blurb:

When two tourists witness a real ghost at a small Montana museum and hear his story, they're transported back in time to the gritty days of mining.

A young and very Irish Jack Fallon arrives in the 1890s mining town of Granite, Montana. His life takes a sudden turn when he's beaten and robbed. He lands in the local hospital, attended by nurse Jillian Brandt.

They resist their growing feelings. After all, she's happily married to the town doctor. Mostly happily. But love blooms. Their plans to run away are complicated as the great Silver Crash of 1893 disrupts the mine and the town.

Do they stay or do they run?

A real ghost town and unforgettable characters lend unique flavor to a love story that spans centuries.

This story doesn't end when you think it does.

Look for an excerpt from Wait For Me: A Granite Ghost Story in our Spring issue.

More Newspaper Boxes

We have added new *Voices of Laurel* receptacles at the Maryland City at Russett Public Library and the Robert J. DiPietro Community Center. Many thanks to our dedicated

group of volunteers who fill the boxes and, most of all, our growing number of dedicated readers. Currently, the newspaper can be found at the following locations (with more planned for the future):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Food Lion (Sandy Spring Road) | Montpelier Arts Center |
| Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center | North Laurel Community Center |
| Laurel-Beltsville Senior Center | Oliver's Oldtowne Tavern |
| Laurel Library | Robert J. DiPietro Community Center |
| Laurel Museum | Russett Library |
| Laurel Post Office | Savage Library |
| Laurel Train Station | Savage Post Office |

Upcoming Events

- On March 24, Kevin Leonard will present the "History of the Laurel Race Course," a timely topic with the 2026 Preakness being run at Laurel, followed by the presumed demolition of the historic venue. *North Laurel Community Center, 10:30 am. FREE.*
- On Saturday, April 25, join The Laurel History Boys and the *Voices of Laurel* team for our second Day at the Races event at Laurel Park. More details will be shared as the date nears, but plan on enjoying a fun afternoon watching thoroughbred racing up close and learning about the history of the track. *Time TBD. FREE.*

New Endorsements

We are proud to announce that our book, *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*, has been endorsed by both Captain Maryland and Santa and Mrs. Claus. We hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday season. Happy New Year!



City Beat

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



Jeffrey Mills, Kyla Clark, Mayor Keith Sydnor, James Kole, Brencis Smith, and Adrian Simmons during the first Mayor and City Council meeting on November 24, shortly after being sworn in.

Voters Re-elect Familiar Faces to City Council in Intrigue-Filled Election

Most of the five incumbent Laurel City Councilmembers were re-elected in the city's general elections held on November 4. The exception was the At-Large Councilmember race, in which incumbent Christine Johnson was defeated by former Councilmember Brencis Smith. That contest was close enough to require a recount, with Smith ultimately garnering 641 votes over Johnson's 621, with three write-in votes also recorded.

All but one of the five seats were officially uncontested—although some confusion and controversy arose over the Ward 1 ballot. Incumbents James Kole and Adrian Simmons were re-elected with 475 and 547 votes, respectively; 181 votes went to the third person listed on the ballot for Ward 1, Sheila Carroll, who had declared in September that she was withdrawing from the race for personal reasons. The Laurel Board of Elections had posted to social media that voters should disregard Carroll's name on the ballots, which had been printed prior to her withdrawal announcement. Surprisingly, on the morning of early elections, Carroll's signs appeared at the Ward 1 polling site and she posted on social media that she had decided to run, after all. However, official results from the Board of Elections listed Carroll's results as "181 votes (Withdrawn)."

In Ward 2, both Kyla Clark and Jeffrey Mills were re-elected with 493 and 452 votes, respectively; they both ran unopposed.

But what is a Laurel City election without intrigue and drama? Those following the candidates on social media watched as a series of unfortunate events unfolded beginning on October 25, when incumbent Ward 2 Councilmember Mills posted allegations of sign stealing by Ward 1 incumbent James Kole. Showing video evidence that Kole's husband, Joshua, had taken down two signs (one of Mills' and one for Brencis Smith) from a gas station, Mills announced that he had filed criminal charges against both Koles for theft of property valued at less than \$100. For over a week, Mills posted memes of James Kole to dozens of Facebook groups, including many that have nothing to do with Laurel, calling the sign theft a hate crime—although he admitted to *Voices of Laurel* that he knew it wasn't really a hate crime and that he was "just trolling." Notably, the signs were returned to their original locations two days after they were taken; Brencis Smith opted not to comment, other than saying that the incident was bad for the city of Laurel; and James Kole declined comment because of the pending court hearing, originally scheduled for early December but now pushed to February 2026. (For our earlier coverage of the story, see: voicesoflaurel.com/post/once-again-city-elections-embroiled-in-controversy)

Brencis Smith Elected Council President

Shortly after being sworn in on November 24, the new Laurel City Council elected At-Large Councilmember Brencis Smith to be Council President. He in turn selected Ward 1 Councilmember Adrian Simmons as President Pro Tempore.

Smith has previously served as Council President, having been elected to two consecutive terms during his previous tenure on the council.

Two Mayoral Programs Off to a Flying Start

Two initiatives introduced over the summer by Mayor Keith Sydnor are already having a positive community impact. The city's Drone Apprenticeship program accepted three Laurel-area teens into the program, through which they learned the basics of operating drones with a view toward getting certifications that could lead to career opportunities. After completing a 12-week program that involved both online and hands-on training, teens Nelson Paulo, Robyn Wood, and Yusra Ali exhibited their new-found skills to an audience that included Sydnor. All three students were eligible to take the FAA Drone Pilot Exam, and in early December Sydnor announced on social media that Yusra Ali had already taken and passed the exam, earning her an official drone pilot operator's license.

Sydnor also had announced in July an initiative called "Adopt a Senior" and was seeking volunteers to provide toiletry items to senior citizens on a bimonthly basis. Enough volunteers signed up to allow the program to start in November, when the first deliveries began arriving for seniors at Selbourne House and Laurel Lakes Senior Apartments. Volunteers were assigned to specific seniors by program coordinator Giselle Ramirez-Gomez; every other month, she forwards each senior's list of needed supplies to their volunteers, who deliver the items to the building where their "adoptee" lives. There are plans to expand the program to other residences, so volunteers are still needed. Anyone interested in adopting a senior can email laurelmayor@laurel.md.us.

Two New Faces on Economic Development Team

The City of Laurel recently hired Jay Meashey to serve as Director of the Department of Economic and Community Development. A native of Pennsylvania, Meashey holds a bachelor's degree from Salisbury University and has held previous marketing and management positions in both the private and public sectors.

Joining Meashey as Economic Development Coordinator is Naomi Herr, a Prince George's County native and Bowie State University graduate. She also holds a master's degree in Community and Economic Development from Penn State University and previously held an economic development position in New Orleans.

City To Hold Annual Town Hall Meeting in February

The City of Laurel will hold its annual Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, February 22, 2026, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center, 8103 Sandy Spring Road. This is your chance to hear directly from Mayor Sydnor and the City Council about their achievements, projects, and priorities. Everyone is encouraged to attend in person; the event will also be live-streamed through the City of Laurel website and its YouTube channel.

Oldtown

Local news covering the Oldtown area



BY CAITLIN LEWIS | OLDTOWNVOICES@GMAIL.COM



(Above): The former home of Bertha Moore, at 622 Tenth Street. (Right): Ms. Moore, in an undated photo courtesy of The Laurel Historical Society.

A Profile of Bertha Moore

With Black History Month approaching, it seemed fitting to write about one of Laurel's own extraordinary Black women.

When Bertha May Levi Moore died on July 2, 1981, her obituary was printed in *The Washington Post*. While it mentioned her surviving children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, the obituary mentioned very little about her extraordinary life and education.

On July 24, 1885, Bertha was born to former slaves. She was the only child of George and Mary Jane Franklin Levi. While her father escaped slavery at Dr. Water's farm (then located between Savage and the unincorporated area of Guilford) and subsequently enlisted in the Union army, Bertha's paternal grandfather was forced to fight in the Confederate army. They fought on opposite sides at the battle of Gettysburg. George was 19 when the Civil War ended. At the time, Mary Franklin (Bertha's mother) was only five.

The Levis moved to Laurel when Bertha was a young child (some sources say she was four or five, others say 11 months old). Bertha attended the Blacks-only elementary school—School Number Two—located at 803 West Street. The school had a ratio of 55 students to one teacher. Despite having to share

that one teacher with 54 other students spread across seven grades, Bertha felt her teachers were outstanding. She was unable to attend the only high school in Laurel, because even though it was only two blocks from her house, it was for White students only. So Bertha traveled by train and then eventually boarded with a family in Washington, DC while she attended Howard Preparatory School.

After graduating, Bertha was certified to teach, a rare achievement for a Black woman in 1906. She taught in Oxon Hill before returning to Laurel to teach at School Number Two. She taught for five years, and substitute-taught for many years afterwards. After marrying Charles Moore in 1909, she gave birth to 13 children. Bertha's mother helped raise the children while Bertha worked as a domestic.

Remarkably, Charles and Bertha bought land in an area of Laurel not previously inhabited by Black families—essentially “blockbusting” the neighborhood for other Black families to move there, as well. They built the house that is still standing at 622 Tenth Street. When Route 198 was widened, the Moore's house had to be moved to make room.

In her later years, Bertha expressed the hope that someday Black people would be allowed to live wherever they wanted

to in Laurel. She acknowledged, though, that this hope would not be realized in her lifetime. Her husband Charles died in 1971.

In 1976, a large celebration was held in honor of Bertha's 91st birthday. Tickets were sold to the event, and Bertha requested that any proceeds be given to St. Mark's United Methodist Church on Eighth Street. At the celebration, the mayor of Laurel at the time, Leo Wilson, sat next to Bertha and delivered a tribute to her.

When Bertha was interviewed in 1976 for her birthday celebration, she is recorded as saying, “It's been a joyous life.” She went on to celebrate another four birthdays, and died in 1981 at the age of 95, when 9 of her 13 children were still living.

(Thanks to the Laurel Historical Society for contributing research to this article, which is based largely on articles from the Laurel Leader, Laurel Sentinel, and PG County News.)

Dedication Ceremony for Mural of Chandler Robbins

On the afternoon of October 25, Laurel for the Patuxent hosted a dedication for the new mural of Chandler Robbins, painted by Jeff Huntington (“Jahru”) and Julia Gibb. For two hours, attendees enjoyed

refreshments (courtesy of Laurel for the Patuxent), music performed by Michael Walls, and remarks by various speakers, including one of Robbins' daughters. About a hundred were in attendance, including Councilmembers James Kole, Adrian Simmons, and Kyla Clark.

Mike Mondy Launches *I LOVE LAUREL* Newsletter

If you are interested in keeping up-to-date on upcoming events in Laurel, I highly recommend that you subscribe to Mike Mondy's new weekly newsletter, *I Love Laurel*. To subscribe, go to Ilovelaurel.com and enter your email address. Mondy, a realtor who lives in Oldtown, is also the creator and administrator of the Facebook group called *Laurel MD Connect!*, another resource for Laurel residents looking to build community.

New Childcare Facility Opens

According to a November 23 article in *Afro News*, Milestones Enrichment Center opened a new facility at 311 Compton Avenue. The business is owned by Traci Cowen and Valencia Skeeter. Cowen started Milestones Enrichment Center in 2002; the business has expanded to another location in Washington, DC, with a third location in Bethesda pending licensing. The new facility in Laurel can serve up to 90 children, ages 6 months to 12 years.

Upcoming Plays

From January 16 to February 1, the Laurel Mills Playhouse will perform Evan Carrington's debut play, *Save My Black Soul*. The play is directed by Jeremy Keith Hunter and follows the journey of a Black actor, Edward Foster, as he follows his aspirations from Hollywood to New York.

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

North Laurel/Savage

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



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI | HOCOVOICES@GMAIL.COM



INSTAGRAM/KECHYPIZZACO

Kechy Pizza Co., a Baltimore-based restaurant chain, is planning to open in Savage on the former site of Ma's Kettle. It will be the chain's third location—a second is in Westminster.

New Route 1 Corridor Campus Will Benefit Families in North Laurel, Savage, and entire county

In late September 2025, Howard County Executive Calvin Ball and Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC) President Tracy Broccolino broke ground on CAC's U.S. Route 1 corridor campus. Located at 7525 Montevideo Road in Jessup, the campus will feature a co-located 12,000-sq.-ft. food bank and a 6,000-sq.-ft. early childhood education center to serve children six months to pre-K. While the campus will serve residents across Howard County, the new location will increase access to critical services for families in the Elkridge, Jessup, Savage, and North Laurel area—one of the county's highest-need areas, as more than a third of CAC's clients live along Route 1. The new location is set to open in early 2027.

Roadway Resurfacing Coming to North Laurel

Howard County plans to resurface approximately 86 miles of roadway in

2026 to improve safety and infrastructure reliability. Major roadways planned for resurfacing during this project include the following North Laurel roadways: parts of Gorman Road, Johns Hopkins Road, Hammond Parkway, Graeoch Road, and surrounding streets. The county has invested more than \$52 million in road resurfacing over the past five years.

Howard County Food Pantry Offered Extended Hours in Late 2025

The Howard County MultiService Center (MSC) Food Pantry, located at 9900 Washington Boulevard, Suite I, in Laurel, extended its hours of operation in November and December 2025 to meet increased demand stemming largely from the longest-ever federal government shutdown. The MSC offers pre-packaged "grab and go" food bags, diapers, and toiletries. Howard County residents in need can visit the MSC Food Pantry in person or phone during business hours, at 410-313-0220 (voice/relay), to schedule an appointment.

Drama MaMa Bookshop Opens at Historic Savage Mill

Founded by Alisa L. Brock, Drama MaMa invites visitors to explore the art of bookbinding, journaling, and creative expression through hands-on workshops like Wine & Bind and family-friendly crafting sessions. According to their website, "[W]e believe in the written word. Whether these written words come together in order to pass down priceless information or simply to keep us organized as we go about our day, we know that there's magic in every stroke of your pen. So whether you are embarking on a new journey, creating a world that's all your own, planning a better tomorrow or just being mindful of today, [w]e're here right along with you." Visit dramamamabookshop.com for more information.

New Restaurant Coming to Savage

The Business Monthly reported in November 2025 that Kechy Pizza Co., a Baltimore-based restaurant chain that blends Mediterranean flavors with traditional classic pies, will open its third location—in Savage, on the former site of Ma's Kettle. No timeline for opening was given, due to the need for significant kitchen renovations. Samira Shuruk, a spokesperson for Kechy's, was quoted as saying, "The focus at Kechy's is on high-quality ingredients, and our managers become co-owners. The business model encourages healthy, happy employees and customers."

Upcycled Hits Pause Button

The owners of Upcycled in Columbia recently announced plans to cease projects at the end of 2025. A non-profit that opened in 2021, Upcycled converted plastic refuse into usable objects such as picnic tables or benches. The owners indicated on their website that, "While we will not be officially closing, we will be pausing our activities as we take time in the new year to reflect and determine what the future will hold for our organization." The statement went on to say, "Together, we have achieved something remarkable. Since our founding, we have upcycled and donated over 10,000 pounds of plastic into benches, picnic tables, garden beds, and other community resources. Much of this success is thanks

to our incredible partners, including the Community Ecology Institute, the Youth Climate Institute, and the Howard County Public School System—especially the dedicated teachers and students who helped bring our programs into schools and made collections possible." The announcement about the pause included news that Upcycled was set to make its "largest single-site donation to date: eight benches and four picnic tables for Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center."

Emilia's Acrobatics & Gymnastics Athletes Garner Awards in Pan American Championship

Five competitive trios from Emilia's Acrobatics & Gymnastics (EAGC), located on Maier Road in North Laurel, recently competed at the Pan American Acrobatic Gymnastics Club Cup 2025 competition in Puerto Rico. All five excelled at the event, bringing home medals. The results of the competitions, as reported on Facebook, were:

13-19 trio:

Juli, Carmelle, Aubrie: 1st place all around

12-18 trios:

Brooklyn, Maya, and Ayana: 1st in balance, dynamic, and combined

Kerri, Ashlyn, and Natalia: 2nd in dynamic and combined, 3rd in balance

11-16 trios:

Bryanna, Ariana, and Ava: 1st place all-around

Natalie, Layla, Bella: 2nd place all-around

According to EAGC's website, "[a]crobatics, or acro for short, is a complex sport comprised of dance, lifts, throwing/balancing skills, and tumbling elements, all performed to music for about two minutes. This sport has several categories you can compete in, including pairs, trios, and quads."

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



Greater Washington Deliverance Temple, a small church on Locust Grove Drive in Oakcrest, is led by Pastor Karen Rutherford.



involved in various ministry positions starting at age nine—she had sung in choir, served as a candy striper, helped lead Bible study, and then served for a long time as a junior missionary and youth minister. She crossed the

country for college, majoring in speech communications at Portland State in Oregon, and worked as an insurance agent there for a short while before returning to Maryland. At that point, Rutherford began traveling extensively with Ida on evangelism trips. “We went to many states for speaking engagements, and I loved it.”

Then, on a Sunday in September 2009, she was surprised to hear her father proclaim from the pulpit, “In two weeks, I’ll anoint my daughter as pastor of this church.” Rutherford says she was shocked but happily accepted the position. She has led the church ever since, following the example set by her parents, both of whom have now passed on.

“My parents focused on ministering to the whole person, to help people become better people, so that every aspect of our life can reflect the love of Christ,” Rutherford says. “So we tap on the skills in our congregation to help people improve not only their spiritual health, but also their mental health, their financial health, and more.” People “come from all over” to attend services, and the congregation is a multi-generational one. “We have several original members who still attend.”

Second-Generation Minister Leads “Love-Filled” Oakcrest Church

Tucked among homes on Locust Grove Drive in South Laurel’s Oakcrest neighborhood is a church. I used to walk past it daily, many years ago, when my son was still in a stroller and we would take him to a nearby park. At the time, it was a Baptist church and was painted white; recently, I drove past it and noticed that it now said, “Greater Washington Deliverance Temple,” and had new, earth-toned siding. Curious about when the change happened, I contacted Karen Rutherford, pastor of the church, and learned a lot about its history as well as her call to the ministry.

Pastor Rutherford explained that the church was originally the Oakcrest Community Baptist Church. She wasn’t sure who originally founded the church, whose cornerstone lists 1957 as the founding year. However, she told me to research “Reverend Barney” for some background. Reverend Kenneth L. Barney, it turns out, was called to

lead the Oakcrest church in the 1980s, at a time when it only had about seven regular attendees. By reaching out to a wide area, Rev. Barney gradually grew the membership to the point where a bigger facility was needed. Since most attendees were traveling to Laurel from the Baltimore area, he found land in Randallstown, built a new facility over the next few years, and christened it the New Antioch Baptist Church of Randallstown in 1991. He still leads that congregation.

Meanwhile, the Oakcrest facility became home to a new church led by Bishop Robert Simpson, Jr., who had served in ministry since 1957 alongside his wife, Ida. Together they had started a congregation called the Greater Washington Deliverance Temple, which they relocated to Oakcrest in 1988, having purchased the property. They also moved to Laurel, along with their youngest child, the only one who still lived at home—Karen Rutherford.

Rutherford says she felt called to serve at the age of 21, after having been

BARC Receives Funding for 2026

The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, which had been targeted for closure under a U.S. Department of Agriculture reorganization plan, apparently has been given a reprieve. Maryland Senators Chris Van Hollen and Angela Alsobrooks announced in late November that they had procured \$6 million in federal funding for the site through fiscal year 2026: half from congressionally directed spending and half from an appropriations bill enacted in November. For now, at least, BARC will stay in operation and will remain in Beltsville, protecting the livelihood of its 1,000 area employees.

Make Plans for the Montpelier Festival!

Although it might seem far away, April will be here before you know it. So mark your calendar now for April 25, when the annual Festival of Herbs, Tea, and the Arts will take place at the Montpelier House Museum from 10 am to 4 pm. Admission is free.

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

West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



The breakfast tacos (above) and omelette (right) offered at Eggspectation at Burtonsville Crossing, where the food is delicious, the atmosphere pleasant, and the service great.



WLCA Dedicates Garden, Will Sponsor Job Fair

The West Laurel Civic Association (WLCA) will be dedicating a memorial garden to honor Melissa Daston, an active WLCA member who passed away in 2024. The native garden will be located outside the entrance to the Community Building on Brooklyn Bridge Road. Melissa dedicated an enormous amount of time and effort to making West Laurel a great community, and she loved gardens.

The WLCA will hold a job fair in April 2026. For information or to reserve a table, contact Chuck Ciranni at LCCIRANNI@hotmail.com. This event will offer employment opportunities in the private sector or in federal, state, or local government. This will be an excellent opportunity for high school seniors, college students, career-changers, and those who have been impacted by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Additionally, this event will provide mutually beneficial opportunities

for businesses and job-seekers to come together. There will also be an opportunity to have resumes reviewed.

Upcoming West Laurel Recreation Council Activities

The WLRC is sponsoring a CPR class on Sunday, March 15, 9 am - 2 pm, at the Community Building. The class is open to anyone who needs recertification or who is interested in learning CPR. The cost of the class is \$75.00, which includes a two-year Red Cross certification upon completion. For more information, contact Rush Kester at rwkester@aol.com.

The WLRC also will hold an "Eggstravaganza" on Saturday, March 28, from 10 - 11 am at the Community Center. There will be special relays, music, refreshments, and prizes. The Easter Bunny will also make an appearance with golden eggs for the kids. This event is free to children ages 3 - 10. For more information, contact Nancy Whipple at njwhip54@verizon.net.

Little Free Libraries

Some Little Free Libraries (LFLs) have been popping up in West Laurel! They are small structures that hold books so people can drop one off and/or take one to read; donate used books; or exchange books for children, teens, and adults. Normally an LFL will be managed by a steward, but sometimes it is a community-wide, cooperative effort. Look for an LFL in Supplee Park, near the boat ramp.

Update on Burtonsville Crossing: Eggspectation

I do my best to avoid shopping areas on Black Friday because I do not like crowded stores or hunting for parking. This year my husband and I went out to breakfast on Black Friday at the new Eggspectation, at Burtonsville Crossing. I had never been to one of their restaurants before, but now I understand why they are so popular! They have one menu for most of the day, up until 4 pm, and another menu until they close at 9 pm.

Our server was a lovely young lady named April who even laughed at my husband's jokes. (He actually is a funny guy!) Some of the selections looked quite fancy, but I ordered the Southwest Sunrise, which was an omelette with cheese, onions, tomatoes, peppers, and sliced avocado on top. The fried potatoes were wonderful, and the salad that came with it was delicious. My husband ordered breakfast tacos, which included three tacos, each with a different type of meat. The food was delicious, the atmosphere was pleasant, and the service was great. I definitely will go back again.

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



BRENDA ZEIGLER-RILEY

A new public playground has opened near the community pool in Russett.

New Playground Opens in Russett

Congratulations to Russett resident Felicia Bond—a wife, mother of two, and an assistant principal—and to the members of the Russett Amenities Committee for bringing the concept of a new playground to fruition! As the only member of the committee with young children, Felicia recognized the need and spearheaded efforts for the playground.

While there are currently two playgrounds in Russett, the new one is the first to be built in many years. It is located near the community pool and is now ready for enjoyment. Felicia and the committee suggested that location because it provides an opportunity for more residents to access the playground.

Born in Chicago, Felicia says she considers Russett to be her home. She's lived in various areas of Russett since 2000 and attended school in the area before moving away to attend college.

After graduation and marriage, she shared, "It was important for me to return to Russett after getting married. I appreciated the fact that it was a family-centered neighborhood and I wanted my children to have that experience." Felicia currently lives on the same street as her parents.

When asked if there are plans for additional playgrounds, Felicia said no; however, a project is currently underway for a pavilion-type structure to be built adjacent to the playground, which will provide a shaded area for residents to enjoy.

Residents React to Plans to Close Laurel Park Racetrack

In case you didn't know, the historic Laurel Park thoroughbred racing track is scheduled to close after 115 years of racing history. There had been much speculation about the future of Laurel Park, and now it is evident that it will be closed down

in the next few years. Currently, Pimlico Racecourse in Baltimore is undergoing renovations and the annual Preakness Stakes normally held there will be moved to Laurel Park in May 2026. After the renovation of Pimlico is complete, Laurel Park will close and the land will be available for development.

While I'm not a horse racing enthusiast, I've attended a few horse races at Laurel Park. I was impressed! It was exciting to sit in the grandstand, watching the horses gallop down the track as the jockeys maneuvered them to a possible win.

The thought of the track no longer being in the neighborhood hit me when I saw a sign announcing the proposed development of housing on the site. It got me to thinking about how others in the neighborhood felt about such a monumental loss. Following are a few reactions from residents (identified by their initials) when I asked their feelings on the closing of the park and the Preakness coming to Laurel. As you'll see, reactions were mixed.

- **CA:** So, it will have one last hurrah! I don't have an issue with [the track]. Lots of traffic for a short period of time. No, I don't plan to attend the Preakness.
- **RR:** Plans for additional housing will add to traffic. Possibly there will be a need for additional schools and infrastructure upgrades. Any benefits from the racetrack will be lost.
- **DH:** I am not happy with the fact that the Laurel racetrack will be closed for racing once Pimlico renovations are complete. The racetrack has been a staple in the community for decades. It's unfortunate that it will no longer exist in a couple of years. I'm happy that the Preakness will be held here and yes, I do plan to attend.
- **DL:** I haven't kept up with the pros and cons of it hosting Preakness or its subsequent closing. I don't plan to attend Preakness.
- **KW:** I think the future development of the Laurel Racetrack could potentially have a positive impact on this part of the county, Anne Arundel, if planned thoughtfully. I would like to see an upscale arts and entertainment venue, also a 55+ housing community. Consideration, of course,

would be traffic flow and pedestrian safety during Preakness.

Russett Library Highlights

Did you know that the Maryland City at Russett Library offers a variety of puzzles, board games, and card games that you can play right there? Just ask a staff member to see a list of available games. There is also a game and puzzle exchange cart where patrons can drop off gently used board games or puzzles and find new ones to take home.

A few upcoming activities at the library are listed below. For the full list, visit the library's website at aacpl.net/events/happenings-newsletter or call 410-222-1070 to register and for additional information.

January 24, 2-3 pm: An adult art activity called Relax with Reverse Coloring can help you shake the post-holiday blues. Relax, have a cup of tea, and doodle on pages of colorful, abstract shapes.

February 14, 2:30-4 pm: A houseplant swap and tea for ages 11 and up.

February 21, 10:30 am-12 pm: Saturday Morning Paint with Coffee. Paint on canvas, using coffee! All supplies provided. Registration begins February 7.

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

PHOTOS BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE



A History of Protests in Laurel



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE AND ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

The nationwide protests that made headlines throughout 2025 might have brought back memories from the 1960s and 70s for many Laurel residents—some of whom brushed off their sign-making skills from 60 years ago and took to the sidewalks along Talbott Avenue by the library this past year. This was not the first time protestors exercised their Constitutionally protected freedoms of speech and assembly in Laurel, which has seen its share of protests and rallies over the years. Here's a look back at some of the notable protest events and eras.

1914: Laurel High School Principal Fiasco

When the Prince George's County School Board made a personnel change at Laurel High School in 1913, controversy ensued. Principal Roger Manning was informed in June 1913 that he would not be retained for the following school year, which would have been his 14th in that role. A man from Kentucky, Kirtley Morris, was hired a month later to replace Manning. However, Manning appealed his firing and the State Board of

Education overruled the county's decision, ordering that Manning be reinstated; his return was put on hold for months, though, while a series of countersuits ensued. During that time, students and parents had grown fond of new principal Morris, and were upset to learn of a Maryland Court of Appeals ruling that Manning be reinstated in March 1914. When he arrived at the high school on March 31, he was met by 100 students and parents protesting outside, with about half the student body refusing to attend classes in further protest. More back-and-forth hearings occurred, questioning which governing body had the authority to fire Manning. Ultimately, he finished out that school year but then resigned; he was replaced by Herbert Mitchell from Philadelphia, and Manning's original replacement, Morris, was appointed principal for the newly built Hyattsville High School.

1960s–1975: The Vietnam War Era

As the war in Vietnam dragged on, public sentiment turned against U.S. involvement to the point of violence

at protests and anti-war rallies. Although no evidence was found that any large protests occurred in Laurel, news items show that Laurel residents and high school students participated in the October 15, 1969 “Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam,” a nationwide event that included a massive protest in Washington, DC as well as walk-outs and “teach-ins” at schools. The *Laurel Leader* ran a photo (see cover) of about 20 people marching with signs in the historic district, as well as a statement of support for student activism from Laurel High School Principal Lloyd K. Hoover. “If we are smart enough to listen to what some of these students are saying,” Hoover said, “we might be able to build a better educational system and a better society.” Hoover announced that, in lieu of regular classes and as an alternative to walk-outs, a teach-in would be held on the afternoon of the moratorium, as well as a moment of silence for the victims of the war. A home football game was played as scheduled, and study halls were a third option for students.

A few months later, Laurel natives and residents almost certainly were among the thousands who took to the University of Maryland campus in College Park during the first week of May 1970 to protest at what *The Washington Post* called “the largest and most violent in the university’s history.” For three days, protesters threw bricks and rocks, slashed tires, blocked traffic on Route 1, vandalized the ROTC buildings, and set fire to an administrative building. This led to Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel declaring a state of emergency and sending the National Guard to campus, where they remained for five weeks, armed with M16 rifles that reportedly were never loaded. The protests eventually fizzled out, but similar springtime protests occurred at UMD in each of the next two years. Following a May 1971 memorial service for students killed at Kent State University in Ohio, participants blocked traffic, leading once again to a National Guard deployment to College Park, a campus-wide curfew, and the arrest of over 70 people over a 12-day span. The next year, UMD students marched on the ROTC building to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Kent State and once again the National Guard was deployed, along with over 100 state troopers.

One of the most influential anti-war groups of the Vietnam War era, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), actually had a regional office in Laurel from the late 1960s until about 1976. A national anti-war, non-profit group, VVAW formed in 1967 to oppose U.S. policies regarding Vietnam. The Laurel office was located on the upper floor of a white building that still stands today, between Green Point Wellness and the former Attic Books along southbound Route 1. The Laurel VVAW branch helped organize local and regional protests, including a famous four-day event in April 1971 at which more than 800 veterans tossed their medals onto the steps of the Capitol.

Like most VVAW branches, the Laurel office was under FBI surveillance and shows up repeatedly in the volumes of FBI reports about VVAW eventually made available through the Freedom of Information Act. The reports listed names and descriptions of VVAW members, visitors, and activities. One report noted, “[The Laurel branch] helps publicize many

(Opposite page): An original artwork of the preamble to the Constitution, created for the We Are America march by artist Lucy Larkin, displayed at Laurel Presbyterian Church on September 17. Marchers and supporters were invited to sign the canvas artwork.

demonstrations and rallies...and hosts pot-luck dinners at [its] office.” Another entry, from 1974, reports that veterans and civilian members of the Laurel VVAW branch joined a picket line outside the Giant grocery store to show support for the striking Retail Store Employees Union Local 400 (now known as United Food & Commercial Workers Local 400).

2017–2019: Marches on Washington

On January 21, 2017, the largest U.S. protest since the Vietnam era took place. The “Women’s March on Washington” saw almost 500,000 people march in DC and an estimated 7 million people participate in marches held simultaneously at more than 500 locations around the world. Many of the marchers wore hand-crafted pink “pussyhats” as a visual statement to advocate for women’s rights and in protest against what they perceived as misogynistic rhetoric and unjust policies by the newly inaugurated Donald Trump.

Laurel resident Amy Knox was one of many Laurelites who participated in that event. Shortly afterwards, she saw one of her neighbors wearing a pink hat; the two began to commiserate about their concerns. “We were still passionate about the march,” Amy says, “but we wondered, what can we do now that the march is over?” That conversation led to the formation of “the Historic Laurel Huddle,” because, as Knox explained, “First we march, now we huddle.” The advocacy group started with about 25 people in February 2017, began to grow, and rebranded as Laurel Resist. Group members participated in several subsequent marches and protests that same year, usually carpooling to Washington, DC. They rallied against the “Muslim ban” and took part in the “March for Science.”

In March 2018, Laurel Resist members were among the hundreds of thousands who demonstrated in DC for stricter gun-control legislation in the “March for our Lives,” a youth-led event organized by survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Parkland, Florida. “That one was really powerful,” Knox said. “It was inspiring to us as a group to keep going.” In conjunction with the march, school students across the country staged walkouts—including at Laurel High School, where hundreds of students walked out of the building onto the parking lot holding signs saying, “No more gun violence” and “We stand with Parkland.” The walkout lasted 17 minutes—one for each student fatally shot in Parkland—and was carried out with school approval. Then-Mayor Craig Moe spoke at the event, saying that the students were doing something important and that he hoped their message reached Congress.

2020: Black Lives Matter

In early June 2020, a 17-year-old Laurel High School student organized a large protest march in response

Laurel Residents Host Marchers Along Multi-state, 160-mile March in September

An idea hatched in March of 2025 seemed impossible at first. The We Are America founders, Maggie Bohara and MJ Tune, met at an anti-fascism tailgate, where they talked about Maggie’s idea for a march from Philadelphia to the U.S. Capitol. They were unsure if such an undertaking would be possible, but when one other friend joined the discussion they decided that “three people is all we need to start a movement,” according to MJ. So they took their idea and marched with it, reaching out through their networks and flooding social media platforms with the plan. They soon began hearing from many helpful advocacy and activist groups—including Laurel Resist and Indivisible of Howard County—that stepped in to help plan overnight stays and connect organizers to contacts in each area. Churches and homeowners along the proposed route offered space for sleeping and in some cases meals, activities, and community goodwill. The premise of the march, the tag line of which was “Creating Community and Defending Democracy,” was that a group of ordinary Americans can show Congress, the world, and each other how important democracy is by creating a “river of people” marching to halls of power to hand over various copies of the United States Constitution, which included an oversized We the People sign.

Much of the route was through rural Maryland, and the organizers weren’t sure what type of reception they would receive, but were pleasantly surprised by the positive response. “Maryland really came through for us,” said MJ. “The whole thing came together largely because of the Marylanders who stepped up to help.” MJ noted that people along the route were “generally supportive, although we have had a few hecklers along the way. But that’s okay: they can holler at us. It’s their right. We’ll holler louder when we reach the Capitol.”

The We Are America March began on September 6 from Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and ended on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, DC September 19. Over the course of those 14 days, approximately 400 marchers from all over the country participated in one or more days, or partial days, and about 50 made the entire trip.

Their website noted, “Over 400 patriots marched, with almost 50 marchers covering every mile of the 160-mile route, carrying a copy of the Constitution to hand directly to Congress. Anyone could join for a block, a day, or the whole way. At each stop along the march route, from yoga and singing in Delaware to a concert and camping in Cecil County, a flotilla in Havre de Grace—potlucks and potlucks and even more potlucks—we found a country united, resilient and yearning for connection and community. Each mile proved that brave Americans who value education, equality, diversity, freedom of speech, science, bodily autonomy, plain old compassion and empathy—we are everywhere. We are strong. We are united. We Are America.”

The March Comes to Laurel

On Constitution Day, September 17, the march route traveled through Columbia and to Laurel. The group stopped at Lake Elkhorn for a picnic lunch and a group photograph. Members of the Howard County “Indivisible” group came out to show their support and would greet the marchers again on the I-95-Gorman Road overpass. Additional marchers joined for this leg of the journey.

In Laurel, community members brought together by Laurel Resist waited for almost an hour to greet the marchers, huddling under a shelter at Alice B. McCullough Field on Montgomery Street to get out of the chilly drizzle that had started to fall. There were many handmade signs of support and American flags on hand.

Finally, the group of marchers was seen, escorted by a Laurel Police car. The Laurel contingent cheered and waved their signs as the marchers walked by, looking weary but seemingly energized by the support of the greeters. The group took a left onto Sandy Spring Road and arrived at their stop for the night: Laurel Presbyterian Church, where a giant scroll of the “We the People” preamble to the U.S. Constitution was on display. The artwork was created specifically for the March for America by an artist named Lucy Larkin. Part of the canvas scroll extended out onto the grass, and people were encouraged to add their signatures to hundreds of others who had met the marchers at previous stops.

Inside the church was a veritable feast, donated by community members and organizations and placed on tables that stretched the length of the hallway. The march participants joined community members for the potluck meal, which included local produce, vegan offerings, homemade side dishes and desserts. Then it was time to roll out sleeping bags and rest up for the next day’s journey.





COURTESY OF LAUREL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT



BY CARREEN KOUBEK AND MIKE SELLNER

LVFD Recognizes Members at Annual Banquet

The Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) recognized the outstanding work of its volunteers at its 123rd Annual Awards Banquet on October 11, 2025. LVFD was privileged to have the Honorable C. Philip Nichols as their Master of Ceremony to guide us through this memorable evening.

Notable guests recognized by President Vic Whipple were Laurel Mayor Keith R. Sydnor; City Councilmembers Christine Johnson, James Kole, Adrian Simmons, and Jeffrey Mills; 1st Vice President of the Prince George's County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Fire Association, Donald Wells; Susanne Jones from the Maryland EMSC Child Passenger Safety Project; and Maryland State Firefighters Association President, Charles Simpson.

Secretary Mike Sellner announced the banquet was dedicated to President Vic Whipple for his years of service to the Laurel Community and Prince George's County. We were pleased to have Vic's family in attendance to help us honor his service to our community. President Whipple was given a gift of an engraved wooden fire axe as thanks for his leadership and work for Station 10 from the administrative officers.

The Memorial Service presented flowers in memory of those members we lost this past year: Robert "Bob" Coulson, Robert "Pop" Grant, and Gail North, a member of the Auxiliary. A member was called up to

place a blue flower in memory of Firefighter Frank Gray, who was killed in the line of duty while serving overseas in Vietnam in April 1968.

Chief Cox was presented a Lego Firefighter with a Company 10 fire helmet from the operational officers for his leadership of the LVFD membership.

The LVFD Auxiliary, which raises funds throughout the year to help support the station, presented a donation check to the LVFD membership in the amount of \$10,000. Mission BBQ presented a \$717.00 check in donations that will help us to continue the volunteer work we do to embody our motto, "Service For Others."

LVFD then presented the Awards of Service to our dedicated volunteers:

- **The President's Award:** Brad Lovell for his work as Chief Engineer, Vice Chair and multiple committees.
- **The Chief's Award:** Mike Falanga for his dedication to his fellow firefighters and unending assistance to Chief Cox.
- **Rookie Firefighter of the Year:** Ki'Aire Rounds, who just became a member in April 2025, has already completed his EMT training, and was turned over as a qualified Emergency Medical Technician in September 2025.
- **Maryland EMSC Child Passenger Safety Project:** Dove Robison received recognition for her work to promote "best practice" child passenger safety and ensure that parents and caregivers are doing the

most they can to keep children safe.

- **50 Years of Service:** President Vic Whipple was presented with a resolution and a plaque for his 50 Years of Service, along with a badge and certificate from the Maryland State Firefighters Association President, Charles Simpson.
- **Laurel Volunteer Auxiliary Years of Service:** Sharon Hall Mitchell (15 years), Winnie Heltibridle (30 years), Cathy Thaxton (35 years), and Kristi Harmon (35 years) were recognized for their years of dedication to the members of the Auxiliary and the LVFD fire station.
- **Laurel Light Award:** Auxiliary President Rosa Maher received the Laurel History Boys' "Laurel Light Award" for her volunteer work and support with several community organizations in the Laurel area.
- **Top Hours of Service:** The following members were recognized for the time they have given to the Laurel community since the last banquet:

#1 - Jim Codespote - 1,273	#9 - Mike Falanga
#2 - Elliot Paisner - 945	#10 - Ki'aire Rounds
#3 - Simone McCumber - 769	#11 - Jason Carcione
#4 - Greg Masenheimer	#12 - Abby Castro
#5 - Brad Lovell	#13 - Robin Brady
#6 - David Pierce	#14 - Lesly Mendez
#7 - Allan Bille	#15 - Riley Law
#8 - Willie McCluney	

- **Firefighter of the Year Award:** EMT Simone McCumber was announced, to a standing ovation, as this year's recipient by Mayor Keith Sydnor for her dedication and strong work ethic with the LVFD.

LVFD members are an integral part of a professional volunteer department that has the trust of its community. We take that title seriously, as we provide efficient emergency services in a cost-effective manner to ensure we are there for the Laurel community during their time of need and to live up to our motto, "Service For Others."

Thank you to all our hard-working volunteers and to our Laurel community for your continued support throughout the years. And congratulations to all our well-deserving 2025 award recipients!

2025 Fire Prevention Week and Open House

The LVFD recognized the theme of this year's 2025 Fire Prevention Week, October 5th–11th, "Charge into Fire Safety: Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home!" From phones to power tools, members of the LVFD urge residents to know of the risks of lithium-ion batteries in your home. LVFD is teaming up with the National Fire Prevention Association to highlight how important it is to buy, charge, and recycle these types of batteries properly:

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

The LVFD held its Annual Fire Prevention Month Open House on October 19 at the LVFD fire station. The open house was a fun learning experience for kids and had information about volunteering from our firefighters and EMTs who were on hand to talk with interested parties. We also had interactive kids' activities from Cub Scout Troop 602, and our apparatus, equipment, and more were available for viewing!

For more information about battery and fire safety, please call 301-776-3600 or visit our web site at www.LaurelVFD.org. Be sure to follow us on our Facebook page, @LaurelVFD, for LVFD activities and information!

Become a Member

We are always looking to grow our membership 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!

Rosa Maher is Newest Recipient of the Laurel Light Award



Rosa Maher accepts the 2025 Voices of Laurel Laurel Light Award at the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department's Annual Banquet on October 11. (From left to right): John Maher, Rosa Maher, Mike Sellner, and Chief Brian Cox.

BY VOICES OF LAUREL STAFF

The staff of *Voices of Laurel* is pleased to announce Rosa Maher as the 2025 recipient of the Laurel Light Award.

Rosa has served the Laurel community for over 50 years as an active member of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) Auxiliary and is currently the President of the Fire Service Auxiliaries of the County and State. Over the years, she has held every office in the LVFD Auxiliary. She also is a Life Member of the Fire Department.

Rosa was nominated by her husband, John, for the outstanding care, outreach, and commitment to serving firefighters and their families in Laurel for 50 years. Rosa is the living embodiment of the LVFD motto of "Service for Others."

Among Rosa's many volunteer activities, she is currently the President of the LVFD Auxiliary, the Treasurer of the LVFD, and she supports the LVFD President. For the past few years, Rosa has worked for the Maryland State Firefighters Association during Maryland State Legislative sessions at the state office.

She shows no sign of slowing down. In fact, she began volunteering a few days a week at the Craig A. Moe Multiservice Center.

Rosa has also been involved with the City of Laurel Canteen project. This unit is used at most of the city's public events, and it is also used on emergency scenes for fire, police, and whatever the City Emergency Preparedness office needs, for the City of Laurel.

Voices of Laurel congratulates Rosa, whose tremendous community support serves as a true beacon of light for the Laurel community.

Previous Laurel Light Award winners:

Ruth Walls, Patrons for Peace
Cheryl Poulos, Laurel Woman's Club
Stillborn and Infant Loss Support (SAILS)



HEATHER WIDENER

50 Years of Memories



BY CAROL FRIEND

My friend Paula Pressley—“Tina,” as many know her by—had a birthday on Christmas Day. I met her in 1978 when my family moved into her building at Steward Manor Apartments. The Pressleys—Tina, her daughter Audrey, and her identical twin sons Rodney and Ronald—had been living in their second floor unit for about three years by the time we moved there. Her children went to the same school and were in the same grades as my son, Richie, and niece, Jenny, and they forged lasting friendships instantly.

Tina turned 78 on her big day, and 2025 marked another milestone for her—she has lived in that same apartment for 50 years now.

A lot has certainly changed since the Pressley family moved in on June 7, 1975. For starters, monthly rent for their three-bedroom apartment was a mere \$240, with utilities included. Tina didn’t need a car, as everything was within short walking distance: Safeway for groceries, Dart Drug for odds and ends, Zayre and Laurel Shopping Center for just about anything else.

Tina worked hard to raise her three kids as a single parent in that apartment—Audrey was five years old and the twins were only three when they moved in. A half century is a long time, but 50 years goes by a lot faster than any of us would’ve believed. It seems like just yesterday we were watching our kids running up and down Woodland Court; and today, our children are older than we were in those days.

On December 12th, Southern Management (the company that owns Steward Manor) threw a party for Tina to mark the occasion. They really went all out, decorating the office with banners and balloons, providing treats and refreshments, and with many representatives of the company on hand to say thank you. Tina also received a free month of rent, which means a lot in today’s tough economy.

It’s nice to see Southern Management do something extra special to make their residents feel appreciated, especially when most communities are only concerned about raising prices. I can remember Steward Manor always being good about celebrating milestones like this, even decades ago. And it’s just amazing to think that Tina is now the resident who’s lived there the longest.

Tina is a friendly person and has always done whatever she could to help others. After all these years that she has lived there, she can tell you many stories about Laurel, and about Steward Manor in particular. You couldn’t begin to count all the neighbors she’s met over the decades. Some became very close to her and her family, which makes for lasting memories.

Although we moved away many years ago, she still fills me in regularly about what’s happening in the neighborhood and the surrounding area. I feel like I’m right back there in Laurel when I hear her stories.

I believe everyone who has ever met Tina genuinely likes her. She’s a hard worker and a good soul. She is a true friend to many people and I’m glad to be counted as one of them.

I wish you all good things, Tina—happy birthday to you, and congratulations! As Steward Manor’s lovely Facebook tribute said, you really are the heart of that community. You always have been.



Carol Friend, now a Northern Virginia resident, lived in Laurel from 1977 to 2007.

(Top): Southern Management hosts a party for resident Tina Pressley, who has lived at Steward Manor Apartments since 1975.

(Below): Tina’s daughter Audrey and twin sons Rodney and Ronald in front of her apartment building in the late 1970s.

(Bottom): Carol Friend and Tina Pressley at the 2010 Steward Manor Reunion—a gathering of former and current residents.



How to Share Your Voice at City Council Meetings



BY COUNCILMAN ADRIAN G. SIMMONS

The “public hearing” component of council meetings is the most important, in my opinion, because it’s the opportunity for you to share your voice. But unless you’ve done it before, it can be a big question mark of how to actually accomplish it.

There’s no need to be nervous, however. Here are tips I like to share with folks to help get them comfortable:

The meeting cycle for the City Council typically follows the monthly pattern of (a) 1st Wednesday, a work session, (b) 2nd Monday, a regular council meeting, and (c) 4th Monday, a second regular council meeting. Occasionally there are adjustments for holidays or other situations, but you can check the city’s meeting page to confirm.

I mention the monthly pattern, because “public hearing” components do not usually occur in the work session, but do occur at the “regular” council meetings on the 2nd and 4th Mondays.

“Public hearing” components usually take one of two forms: Either (a) you sign up to speak about a specific agenda item when it’s arrived at, or (b) you sign up to speak during the “General Public Hearing” agenda item, where you can share on any topic you’d like even if it’s not on that night’s agenda.

Since the council meetings that take place on the 2nd Monday of the month are typically held via Zoom, signing up to speak requires that you email the Clerk to the Council no later than 2 pm on the day of the meeting (“clerk@laurel.md.us”).

And since the council meetings that take place on the 4th Monday of each month are typically held in-person at the Municipal Center (8103 Sandy Spring Road), you can simply add your name to the physical sign-up list just inside the council chamber doors when you arrive. Often as the Council President comes to various agenda items, they’ll also confirm if anyone present wants to speak, though this is not required.

Once it comes your turn, you’ll have 3 minutes to share your thoughts. At first glance, that can seem a short time, but in practice it’s usually very adequate to make the points you want to mention. Of course, having a few bulleted notes for yourself will help you avoid forgetting something in the moment.

Pro tip: With a change to council rules last fall, if five or more attendees are present for the same topic and wanted to join together as a group, they can designate a spokesperson who will then have 5 minutes instead of the normal 3 minutes.

I hope the above is helpful in demystifying how to share your voice at council meetings, and please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. One of my deepest satisfactions comes from helping equip people to participate in the political process, as it is ultimately a treasure for all of us to hold dear.



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



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laurelhistory.com
voicesoflaurel.com
The Laurel History Boys, Inc.
P.O. Box 759
Laurel, MD 20725



PHOTOS BY TOM BURKHARDT

LHS Class of 1975 Holds 50-Year Reunion



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS

The Laurel High School Class of 1975 always knew how to have a good time, and on October 3 we proved that spirit was still alive when 73 LHS alumni and guests rocked at the Savage Fire Department to celebrate 50 years since graduation! Some classmates had come from as far away as Las Vegas, Alaska, and Scotland, while others were still relatively local; most of us needed no convincing at all to make the decision to attend such a milestone event.

LHS Tour

The reunion festivities started Friday with a tour of Laurel High School, led by Social Studies Department Chair Brian Wenk. Principal Mike Dinkins also greeted the alumni. The first stop on the tour was the auditorium; although the paint and tables were different, class members said the room felt the same to them. Class members were impressed by the new stadium behind the school, with an artificial turf field, great press box, and a very special welcome to the Class of 75 on the electronic scoreboard. The group also walked over to the newest addition on the site where Margaret Edmonston Elementary School had been—another school some of the class members had attended.

We Thought We Might Never Pass This Way Again—But We Did!

Alumni and guests enjoyed food, danced to music played by LHS Class of 1973 alum DJ Bobby Walters, selected door prizes—which included copies of

Lost Laurel by Richard Friend—and viewed a slide show to the music of the class prom theme, “We May Never Pass This Way Again.” We spent time catching up with old friends and getting acquainted with new ones—in a class of more than 400 there is no way anyone could have been close to every classmate during high school. At every reunion I have attended, I have had the opportunity to hold a significant conversation with someone in the class I had never talked to before, because after 50 years there is no such thing as a clique. We also had an opportunity to honor the memory of class members who had passed away, with an “In Memoriam” book. It was very humbling to learn how many of our peers were already gone.

Multi-Class Gathering at Oliver’s

Saturday evening, we gathered with our classmates and members of other LHS classes in a more intimate setting at Oliver’s, where an annual multi-class reunion takes place the first weekend of October. LHS alumni from several classes reminisced and marveled at what everyone had accomplished since graduation. Some people looked exactly the same, but I had to identify others by discreetly peeking at their nametags!



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.



(Top): All class of 1975 members in attendance at the reunion. (Middle): Class members received a tour of Laurel High School, where they enjoyed seeing what had changed (and what hadn't) in 50 years. (Bottom): The reunion committee minus Sue Keadle Slebodnik at Oliver's: Ken Smallwood, Debbie Coleman Smith, Ginny May Geis, Cheryl Meehan Simmons, & Terri Koontz Cohen

Tom Downs Plans Ahead

Long-Time Local Lawyer Reflects on a Full Career and His Own Next Steps



BY CAITLIN LEWIS

When first meeting Tom Downs, he hardly seems like the type of person who talks often about death. Jovial and light-hearted though he may be, he possesses decades of experience planning for our inevitable end. Downs Law Firm, which specializes in estate planning, has been a fixture in Laurel since 2002.

Raised in Greenbelt, Downs graduated a year early from high school. Without overly specific plans for his future, he enrolled in Prince George's Community College with an idea of going into social work. His grades at community college were higher than he anticipated, so he decided to become a lawyer, feeling that practicing law would be a type of social work in itself.

Upon graduation, Downs clerked for a judge for a year (a common practice for newly graduated law school students). A lawyer friend of his became ill, and the secretary of this friend began calling Downs regularly for legal advice. Downs eventually realized that the secretary was doing the majority of legal work for that office, regularly taking papers to the hospital to be signed by the ill lawyer. Upon the death of that lawyer, Downs took over the firm in 1982, embarking on the unusual path of owning a firm directly after a year of clerking.

He recalls the experience as a course in the importance of organization. The inherited law firm often had files with limited information, costing him hours in tracking down what, if anything, he needed to do with them. Downs noted that even among lawyers, there's often a lack of planning for succession in their own firms.

However, Downs didn't immediately focus solely on estate planning. A year after taking over the firm, Downs joined it with another established firm and found himself practicing primarily divorce law. Because lawyers often have to sell the house of a divorcing couple for them, Downs was selling 40 to 50 houses a year and was not emotionally satisfied with his legal focus.

Eventually, Downs shifted to estate planning, a subset of law with far higher job satisfaction than divorce law. He looks at what he does now as "scaring somebody in a nice way," or taking the unpleasant thing we avoid thinking about (death) and making someone look at it long enough to plan for the future dispersal of his or her belongings. He officially limited his practice to this focus in 1995.

After moving his firm to Main Street in 2002, Downs noticed that he wasn't attracting the older generation of Laurel residents; he credits the influence of Laurel resident Jim McCeney for eventually attracting that demographic to the firm. Downs and his wife, Margie, moved their family to Laurel in 2004. The Downs have three children—who are now adults—and attend St. Mary of the Mills Catholic Church.

Downs enjoys estate law and used to be a frequent public speaker on the topic. Musing on what he's learned over the years, Downs explained that childhood sibling rivalries tend to reemerge after the death of a parent. Often there's the need for a neutral party to assist with decision-making and move the family out of entrenched opposing ideas. He often tells the clients who come to him for estate planning, "It's not for you," explaining that estate planning is for those left to sort out another person's affairs after death. Downs also sees it as important that his firm not only helps with the initial planning (making wills, establishing a trust, etc.), but also continues to see the distribution process through after the client dies.

When asked if any particular cases from his career stood out in his mind, he laughed and said that the ones he remembers most are the difficult cases. He relayed a particular case involving an elderly lady who decided to put both her children (a son and a daughter) in charge of her estate. (Downs does not recommend doing this.) The daughter decided that her own daughter, who was mentally ill, should live with Downs' elderly client (the young lady's grandmother). The son didn't like this, but the granddaughter moved in anyway. Eventually, the granddaughter killed her

grandmother, leaving her children at odds about the use of inheritance: the son didn't want his mother's money used to defend her killer; the daughter wanted to keep her child out of jail.

After over forty years of practicing law, Tom Downs is now putting in place a succession plan of his own. While not fully retiring, he's transitioning to working three days a week and training two younger lawyers, Stephen Wallace and Justin Wedgewood. Downs plans to retire completely in a few years. For now, though, he's preparing his firm for when he fully steps into the next phase of life. His decision to prepare for a smooth transition is indicative of a life spent helping others leave their affairs in order. After all, planning ahead is what he does.

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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, and currently works at home raising her four children and writing her column.



COURTESY OF TOM DOWNS

UberShane: Tips and a Review



BY SHANE WALKER

You may remember that I stand outside Laurel Elementary and wave at passing cars in the morning. My primary job is a school librarian, but I wanted to write about my second job: UberEats. This is not an opinion piece on the food. I actually haven't eaten from most of the places I have picked up from, but as an Uber driver I have had some interesting insights around Laurel eateries (a few honorable mentions outside Laurel), and I'd like to pass them on to you.

The first thing is a flex: I park in parking spots. How often have I seen fellow deliverers parking in the fire lanes and blocking roads so they could save themselves the one minute it takes to follow the law? If you deliver in Baltimore, DC, or downtown Silver Spring, there is some justification for this since there isn't reasonable parking close to the popular pickup sites, but Laurel is an excellent city for parking near restaurants. The worst I've had to do is park in the garage next to the Buffalo Wild Wings to pick up from Thai in Laurel, but that's hardly complaint-worthy. What do you think: is double-parking and fire-lane standing excusable for drivers or not?

The second thing is the opposite of a flex: I got lost in Fort Meade once. I had a delivery that took me past the security stop late one night, but after I delivered the food, Uber's directions to get out kept sending me to blocked or closed exits. I spent nearly 45 minutes trying to find the actual way out until a Good Samaritan finally was able to direct me. But the absolute worst part of that whole experience was that Fort Meade was my first delivery of two that I had picked up (you can pick up a max of three at a time, if they are near each other). So here is my public apology to whoever's snow crab legs I had to deliver next near the Laurel Walmart. Yikes!

The third thing is some tips (not those kinds, but appreciated!):

- Make sure that in your app, you have helpful instructions to help drivers reach you. If your apartment has a locked lobby, you will need to meet us in the lobby, or else help us figure out how to get through the lock.
- Rate us! I've delivered over 850 deliveries so far, and only 10% of people have given me feedback. When I do badly, I want to know how I could have done it better (sorry again, snow crab guy) but when I do a good job, it is nice to hear that too.
- If you see a restaurant on the app that you don't recognize, it might be a virtual kitchen, or a ghost kitchen. Denny's is Laurel's most prolific ghost kitchen site: on the app, The Meltdown, The Burger Den, and Banda Burritos are all actually Denny's serving online menu items not on the Denny's brick-and-mortar menu. Is this clever business or mischievous: what do you think?

Finally, I wanted to review some of Laurel's eateries based on an Uber driver's perspective. I've kept it positive—we don't need any more negativity toward the places working for us. I hope you enjoy, and if you ever happen to order on UberEats, it would be my pleasure to serve you.

Orders are always ready when I arrive:

Famous Dave's
Mid-Atlantic Seafood
Hip-Hop Fish and Chicken
Negril
Quickway

Open late at night:

Wingstop
Hip-Hop Fish and Chicken
Taco Bell
Wendy's

Longest distance records:

Pho Viet 75
Famous Dave's
King's Way
Sprouts (for grocery deliveries)

Date-worthy environment:

La Curva
Bella's Italian and Indian
Ms. Toya's Southern Kitchen
Centrado Cafe Shop

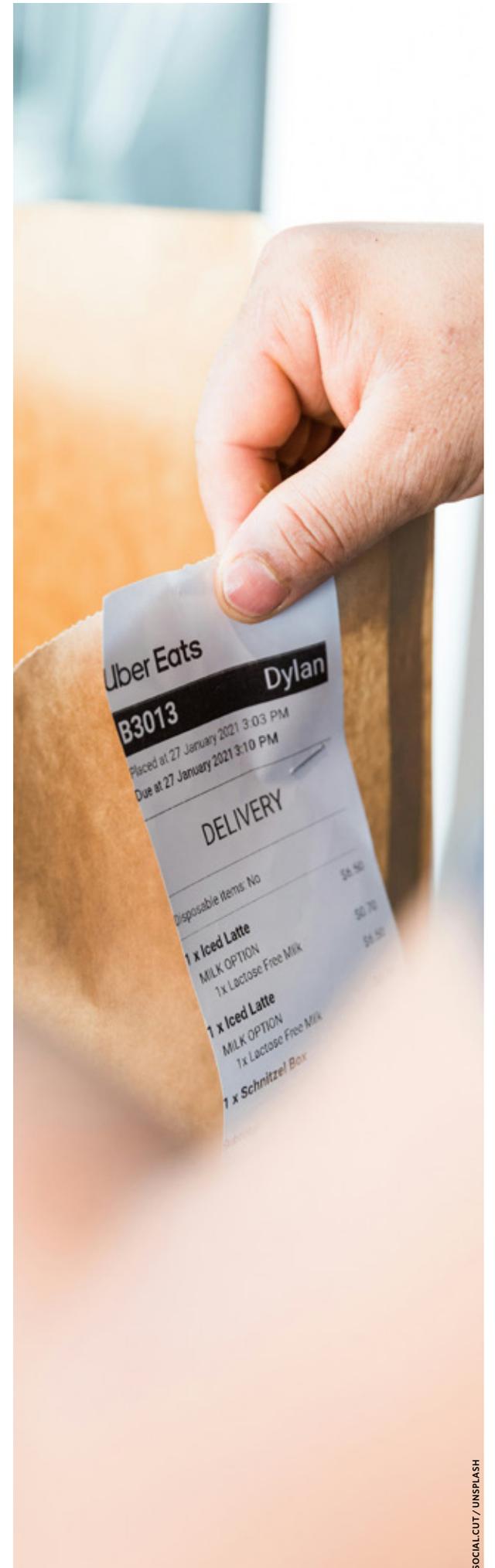
I didn't know about until Ubering:

The Hunger Tamer
Prime Grill
The Big Greek Cafe
& pizza

Friendly and polite:

Firehouse Subs
Panera
Shah's Halal
Chick-Fil-A (both)
BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse

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.



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*.

1907

In June, the *Leader* ran the photo of Laurel's military band shown above.

1918

In March, "Rev. and Mrs. H.C. Bird recently entertained 85 soldiers from Camp Laurel. Later Mr. and Mrs. E.L. Pettit entertained 75 soldiers. At both homes, coffee, cake, and sandwiches were served. There is no scarcity of musical talent in the different companies, and the soldiers have proved themselves most able entertainers by their singing and playing."

In May, a notice was published "To All Tutons" stating that "All Females Over 14 years Old Must Register." In the hyper-patriotic times of World War I, "All natives, citizens, denizens or subjects of the German Empire or of the Imperial German Government, being females of the age of 14 years and upwards, who are within the United States, and not actually naturalized as American citizens, are required to register as alien enemies at the Post Office from which they receive mail."

1919

In July, the town celebrated the first Fourth of July since the end of World War I with a "Grand Victory Celebration" at the Laurel Racetrack. Residents were invited to "Come Greet Our Returned Soldiers and Sailors," and enjoy a "Military and Civic Parade to be Led by Military Band." The celebration also featured "Racing, Aeroplanes, Tanks, Music, Dancing, and Other Amusements." All residents who owned an automobile were encouraged to join the parade.

Also in July, millions of hand grenades made by the War Department for use during World War I "to bomb the Huns to destruction" were emptied of explosives and made into banks for children. "The grenade banks are of considerable value and will be splendid souvenirs of the Great War," claimed the *Leader*.

In August, mention was made in the *Leader* about Laurel's first library, which occupied "two rooms on the floor above the Postoffice [sic]."

1926

In May, Rev. L.E.S. Nash, "pastor of the local colored church," passed away in his home on Eighth Street. His funeral was "attended by many white persons of the

town," according to the *Leader*. "Under his leadership a very pretty church was erected, societies were formed, and the colored population of Laurel and vicinity became law abiding and more respectable citizens." His death was viewed as a loss for Laurel. "He had the respect and confidence of the white people of the community."

1930

In November, the Laurel Elementary School PTA sponsored a play titled *Aunt Lucia* that featured a cast of 150 local residents. The play, described as "a burlesque comedy of American college life," featured numerous prominent Laurel businessmen in roles as women. The *Leader* claimed the play "has numerous hilarious comedy spots."



1947

In March, the Laurel Chamber of Commerce was founded, with George Barkman as President. The first meeting, with 41 members, was held at the Laurel Diner. In addition to adopting community projects such as improving street lighting and the water works, the chamber went on record as unanimously opposing the parking meters in town.

1955

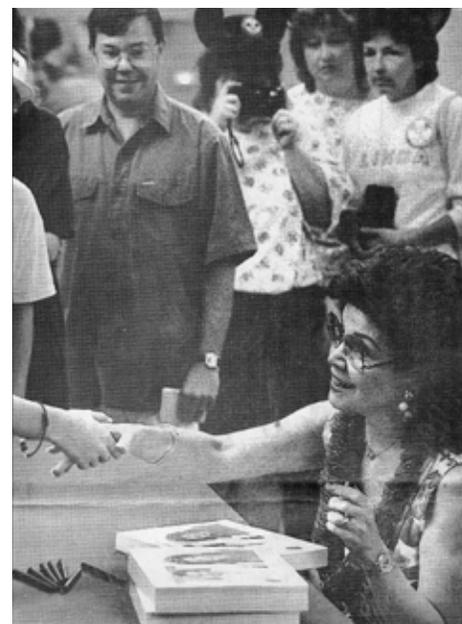
In November, the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel opened for traffic. The \$130 million project was, at the time, the longest double tunnel in the world. It took 1,350 laborers, engineers, and technicians to complete the tunnel, with two workers killed in the process.

1968

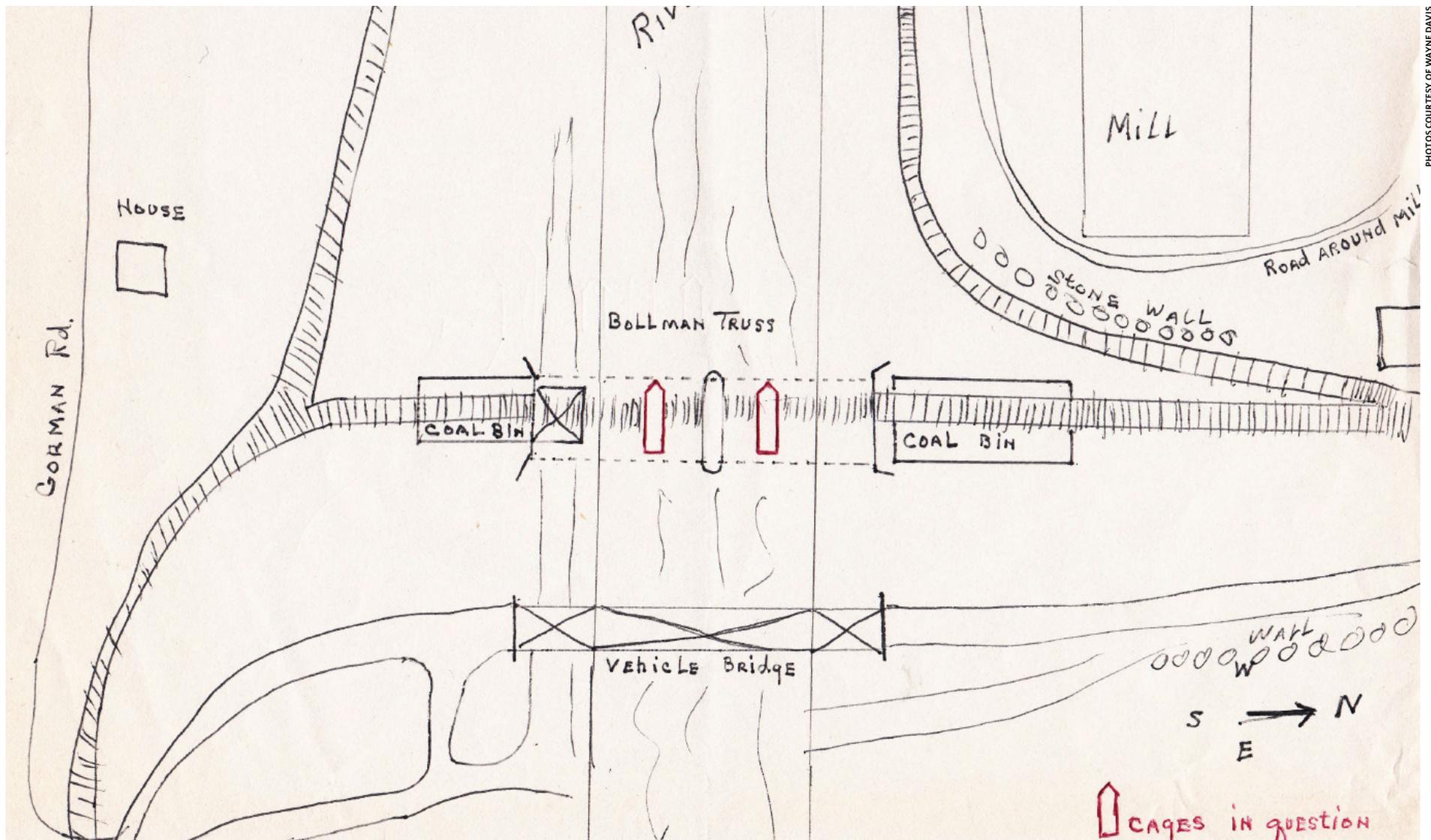
In August, the Mayor's Civic Center Committee presented their recommendations to the City Council. Mayor Merrill Harrison appointed members to the committee five months earlier to explore the feasibility of building a municipal civic center in Laurel. The committee recommended that the 18-acre site where the Avondale Mill was located be used to build such a facility, which would allow the municipal offices to move from Montgomery Street, with the remainder of the proposed civic center to house a convention hall with multiple meeting rooms and kitchens. There was no mention in the *Leader* if the Avondale Mill was to be torn down or left as is. Obviously, the plans never came to fruition.

1991

In July, the Grand Re-opening Celebration of Laurel Centre Mall featured appearances by Fabian and Annette Funicello (shown below).



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



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WAYNE DAVIS

The Savage Rail Road and the Lost Bridge



BY WAYNE DAVIS

The Washington Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad, which opened in 1835, was routed to pass near the Savage Factory and its nearby granite quarries. This proximity was an opportunity for Amos A. Williams, who was a director of both the B&O and the Savage Manufacturing Company, to promote his business interests. He saw the railroad as a reliable and efficient way to transport the company's products. Amos had already fabricated thousands of rail chairs, used to secure the rails to the sleepers (or ties), in the company's foundry under contract to the B&O. He also planned to build a furnace to make pig iron needed by the foundry, as well as a second cotton mill; only the furnace was built, but it was hardly used.

To reach the Washington Branch a little over a mile away would require crossing the usually shallow Little Patuxent River, the source of the waterpower for Savage Factory, through a ford across a shallow point of the river immediately downstream of the factory. Wagons carried the goods for many years, and Amos' brother, George, expected that practice to continue. Amos planned a railroad to be built on the south side of the river to meet the Washington Branch and proposed building a bridge across the river that the Savage Manufacturing Company would pay for, in addition to paying a charge for the service.

The plan for a railroad from the Savage Factory caused a family squabble. Upon hearing about Amos' plan, George wrote to him on February 4, 1835,

and expressed his anger about the proposal. George admonished Amos for "building a costly bridge at an expense of 2,500 or 3,000 dollars" and for planning to build a "Lateral Rail Road." He was particularly upset that Amos had pledged the Savage Manufacturing Company to pay six percent per annum for the project.

Seeing what he felt was Amos' careless use of the company's funds, George continued that "I can suffer no longer and must throw myself upon my legal right and protest that not for myself as well as my children bear one cent of the expense of this bridge or enter into any such engagements as you contemplate with this rail road company."



Wooden “pier cribs” that were likely part of the original railroad bridge. These wooden structures were on the river bottom under the Bollman Bridge and seen during low flow conditions.

Incorporation of the Rail Road

Despite George’s legal threats, Amos proceeded with the project. Just one month after George’s letter, in March 1835, the Maryland General Assembly approved “An Act to Incorporate the Savage Rail Road Company,” which granted authority to build a railway from the mill to the B&O’s Washington Branch. The charter’s language was broad enough to permit extensions of up to six miles from the mill, such as to the Guilford quarries. The September 1835 *Baltimore Gazette* and *Daily Advertiser* wrote that, “As soon as the route of the rail road to Washington had been definitely settled, it was immediately perceived that a short branch extended to the Savage Factory, and then to an extensive range of quarries of the finest granite [at Guilford], could be constructed at a very moderate expense.” This short branch was the Savage Rail Road, which became the Patuxent Branch of the B&O in 1887, and was extended to Guilford in 1902.

The charter appointed several commissioners to secure subscriptions for the company’s stock, including Amos A. Williams, Roger Brooke, Jonathan Waters, Larkin Dorsey, Charles G. Worthington, Richard Stockett, and George Cooke. While there is no evidence that the Savage Factory itself used enslaved labor, some of these investors were certainly slaveholders. The 1830 census shows that while Williams and Brooke did not enslave people, Waters enslaved 10, Dorsey enslaved 23, Worthington enslaved 14, Stockett enslaved 3, and Cooke enslaved 20. The wealth of these men, which contributed to their ability to invest in the railroad, was supported by slavery. It is important to note, however, that there is no evidence to suggest the Williams family or John Savage enslaved anyone or directly benefited from slavery when establishing the Savage Factory.

Savage Rail Road Operations

The Savage Rail Road Company operated from about April 1836 through July 1844, using horse-drawn railway to pull B&O freight cars from the factory to the connection with the Washington Branch called “Savage Switch” and, at times, “Savage Factory” station.

The railway facilitated two-way transport of goods. It carried inbound raw materials like cotton, coal, timber, and machinery parts, and outbound finished goods such as textiles and castings. Items transported also included flour, wool, iron ore, limestone, foundry supplies, agricultural equipment castings, and oyster shells shipped from Baltimore. The inclusion of oyster shells was used in the blast furnace as a “flux” material necessary to remove impurities (like silica and alumina) from the iron ore.

Demise and Re-Discovery

The Savage Factory railroad bridge was washed away during the great floods of October 1847, which also destroyed the second dam upstream. There is no evidence that the bridge was rebuilt or that rail operations resumed during the time of the Williams brothers’ ownership. In January 1849, it was noted that there was a pedestrian bridge and a usable ford across the river. It isn’t known when, or if, a replacement bridge was built before the upgrades of William H. Baldwin in 1881, which placed the current Bollman Bridge at that location. The passenger and freight station at Savage Switch remained in operation. It is possible the ford across the river below the bridge was used for the duration or that a replacement was built—it just is not known at this time.

Over 100 years passed until the ruins of the Savage Rail Road Bridge caught researchers’ attention. Local Savage resident and historian Bob Gillette Skaggs was researching just about everything about Savage, including the railroad. When corresponding with Smithsonian Institution Curator and Bollman Bridge expert Robert Vogel, Skaggs was told about wooden “pier cribs” that were likely part of the original railroad bridge. These wooden structures were on the river bottom under the Bollman Bridge and seen during low flow conditions. Skaggs sought assistance of Donald Shomette with the Underwater Archaeology Society of Maryland to conduct a study of the pier cribs and associated archaeology. Their study was approved by HoCo Rec and Parks, the property owners of Bollman

Bridge, and they received the appropriate permits from the State of Maryland to divert the river’s flow to isolate the pier cribs to be able to better study them.

In May 1985, Bob Skaggs and members of the Underwater Archaeological Society of Maryland conducted a two-weekend excavation beneath the Bollman Truss Bridge in Savage. After creating a temporary work area in the river using a water diversion system, the team made several significant discoveries:

- Timber cribbing aligned parallel to the river’s flow, which is consistent with 19th-century pier construction.
- Cut nails and wrought spikes, which provided clues that dated the structure to before 1850.
- Mortise-and-tenon joinery, indicating an engineered assembly rather than a makeshift riverbank support.

The location of these cribs directly under the center of the Bollman bridge confirmed that they were not part of the later 1869 iron bridge but were instead the remnants of an earlier structure. Researchers concluded that these were likely from the original Savage Rail Road bridge, which was washed out in the 1847 flood and never fully replaced.

The Saga Continues

There is so much lost and hidden history involving Savage Mill that is still yet to be seen. A new and surprising story will appear in the next issue of *Voices of Laurel* about the Williams family and the origin of Savage Mill. We will further correct and update the history of this amazing area.

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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.

The Killer Professor at Fort Meade in WWII



BY KEVIN LEONARD

In May 1942 a group of young U.S. Army Rangers on a field in Fort Meade stood at rapt attention as their 5'5"-tall, 136-pound instructor ordered a trainee to charge at him with his rifle and bayonet.

"Come on, boy, like you mean business!" shouted the bald instructor, who held a short length of rope between his hands.

The soldier did as ordered and lunged at the instructor. But in just a few seconds, the soldier lay flat on his back, tied up with the rope. Even though the instructor's elbow was dripping blood, he continued his lecture to the awe-struck soldiers.

A reporter for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* who observed the demonstration wrote, "His speed and skill seem magical."

The "Little Professor"

Francois d'Eliscu, who rose to the rank of Army Lieutenant Colonel, was a fascinating individual. He was born in New York City in 1895 to his French father, Frank Eliscu, and his mother, a Romanian immigrant. His younger brother, Edward Eliscu, was a Broadway and Hollywood songwriter. During college, Francois added the "d'" to his name, cultivating a mysterious European image.

Writer Patrick J. Kiger gave a full account of d'Eliscu in an article for *MHQ—The Quarterly Journal of Military History*.

He enlisted in the Army during World War I and organized sporting events, such as boxing and wrestling, at Fort Gordon in Georgia. He also provided bayonet instruction to soldiers, but he never saw combat in the first world war.

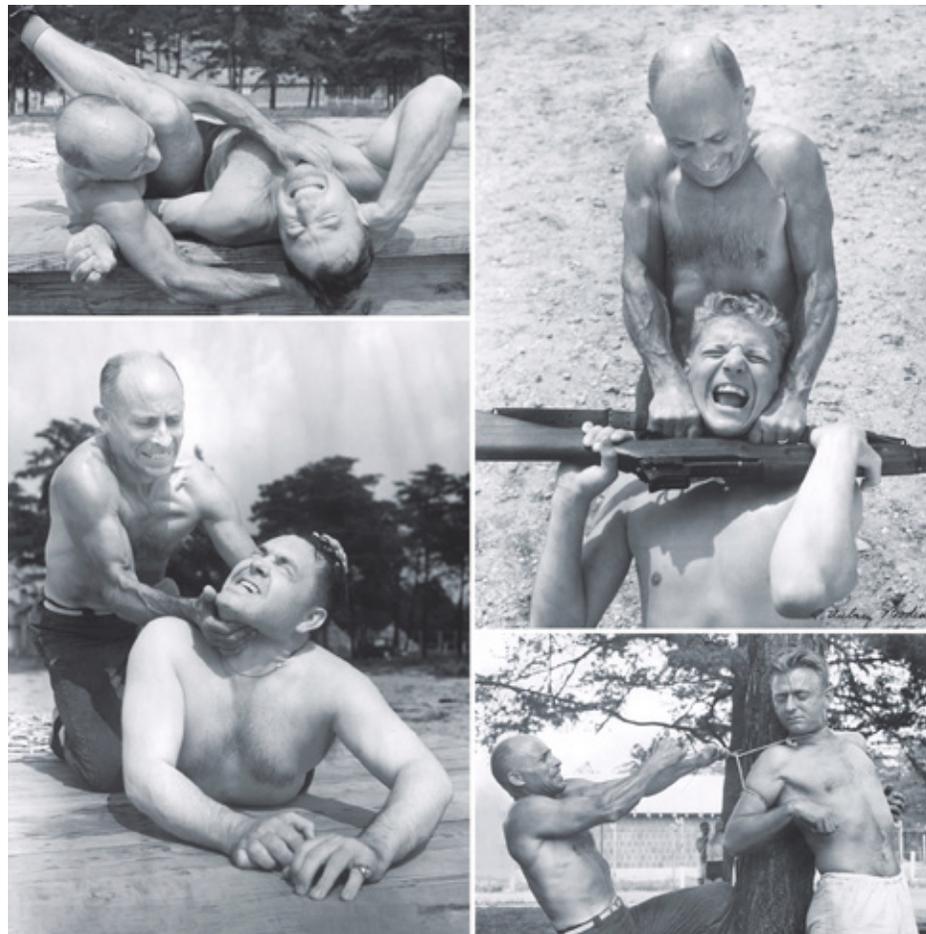
After the war, d'Eliscu was an academic, earning a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, another master's degree in science from Columbia University, and a doctorate degree from New York University. His focus on athletics continued during this period as he coached several teams at New York University, including wrestling and football. He also became a "professor of fishing" at Columbia Teachers College and, in fishing circles, was a nationally known expert on making lures.

In the early 1920s he also hosted exercise programs on a Philadelphia radio station and did some sportscasting. But sometime in the late 1920s d'Eliscu relocated to Hawaii and expanded his sports endeavors. In addition to being the athletic director at the University of Hawaii, he wrote a sports column for a local newspaper, organized boxing matches, and, incredibly, managed the U.S. Olympic swim team, which featured Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weissmuller, both of whom would later star as Tarzan in films. Crabbe also starred as Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers in serials and films.

Then, in the early 1930s, d'Eliscu was hired by the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine as its athletic director, track coach, and instructor in public health.

Along the way in his academic and athletic career, he became a master of jujitsu and judo and created an astonishing array of lethal techniques that was just what the Army needed. As Kiger wrote, "D'Eliscu was just one of the many martial artists the United States had pressed into service during World War II to hone the hand-to-hand combat abilities of American soldiers. According to Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth's *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, various service branches turned to experts ranging from boxing champion Jack Dempsey, who trained Coast Guard cadets, to Marine Corps knife-fighting expert J. Drexel Biddle, who popularized the Ka-Bar knife, and even professional wrestlers such as Charles "Dirty Dick" Raines and "Man Mountain Dean" (the ring name of Frank Simmons Leavitt), who taught their holds to Army soldiers. The U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA, had its own hand-to-hand fighting system, designed by British expert William E. Fairbairn, which emphasized techniques such as palm strikes and knee-to-groin attacks."

D'Eliscu—called the "Little Professor" by his intimidated soldiers behind his back—



developed an array of killing techniques and an exhaustive fitness regimen for the Ranger and Combat Training Schools that he ran during WWII at a number of Army installations, including Fort Shafter in Hawaii, Fort Bragg in North Carolina, and Fort Meade. While at Fort Shafter in 1942, the Army produced a training film about d'Eliscu for Rangers.

While at Fort Meade, he also found time to develop and teach the Army's first Aquatic Testing and Instruction Program, which taught Rangers how to safely abandon ship and cross treacherous rivers.

Toughest Obstacle Course in the World

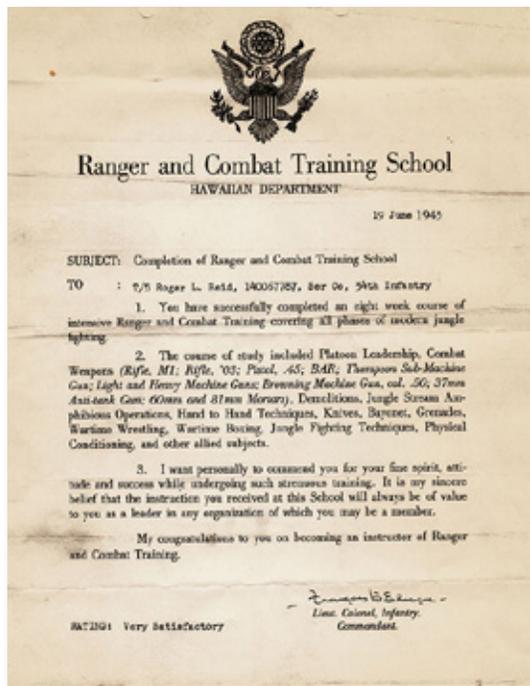
In 1942, *Yank* magazine described the combat training course at Fort Meade designed by D'Eliscu:

"Maj. d'Eliscu is one of the toughest men alive. He can kill with a flick of his elbow—maim with a pinch of his fingers. He imparts this toughness into the course he gave to the 76th Division instructors and to the Special Service officers from the other divisions.

Every day, Maj. d'Eliscu began the sessions with a two-mile run, to warm the men up. This provoked a wave of nausea and vomiting at first, but the major mercilessly kept the men running. Another regular fixture was Maj. d'Eliscu's deluxe, 600-yard obstacle course, which reigns undisputed as the toughest in the world. It features a fifteen-foot-deep bear trap with smooth sides, from which the men have to clamber as best they can. 'If they can't get out,' said d'Eliscu, 'Let 'em stay there. Sooner or later they find a way.' One captain is reported to have been stuck in the bear trap for more than five hours."

The magazine also described his series of training exercises:

- "Alertness drills," in which the men had to freeze into position on command or hang from the limbs of trees.
- Physical tests, like pull-ups, chin-ups, etc.; then simple combatives—boxing, wrestling, tugs-of-war. After that the rulebook was tossed out the window.
- Dirty wrestling—with everything thrown in from the ripping off of ears, to the stuffing of fists down the throat.
- Boxing without gloves. At this point the Medical Corps officers standing by were extremely busy attending to abrasions and missing teeth.



- Rough and tumble games, 60 of which have now been collected by Maj. d'Eliscu and made into an official Army manual.
- Disarming practice—in which the men learned murderous ways of relieving an opponent of a knife, pistol, rifle, bayonet, tommy gun, and machete.
- Specific Ranger problems—one of which involved carrying bound prisoners a mile or so through heavy undergrowth.
- Elementary and advanced Judo. This taught the men every conceivable method of strangling and killing by applying pressure to the proper parts of the anatomy.
- Tree and bush fighting. The men were required to stay in the limbs of trees for as much as ten hours at a time. This section of the course was emphasized more than any other. Snipers were suddenly going to find their skulls bashed in by camouflaged American GIs sneaking down on them from above.
- Trench and fox-hole fighting—concentrating on tumbling away from an enemy's blows. Before getting his diploma from the Ranger and Combat School, each man was required to duel with naked bayonets.

D'Eliscu put his methods to the test in November 1943 when he saw action as the Army and Marines landed in the Japanese-held Gilbert Islands in the Pacific. As Kiger described it:

“As the men in his patrol made their way inland, they were pinned down by sniper fire and had to take cover. D'Eliscu was walking behind a tall lieutenant who was suddenly hit in the arm by a sniper in a tree. ... D'Eliscu fired on the sniper and hit him, causing him to fall to the ground. ... D'Eliscu rushed to the Japanese soldier, used the disarming techniques he'd taught at Fort Meade and in Hawaii to take the man's rifle and knife away, and quickly killed him. That heroic act led to d'Eliscu being awarded the Silver Star three months later.”

After the War

D'Eliscu also served in the Korean War, continuing his brand of lethal training at posts in the U.S. and around the world.

He died in 1972 in Sarasota, Florida, where he had been teaching power boating safety courses in his retirement.

In a memoir published in 2001, his brother, Edward, wrote that d'Eliscu was “the leading authority on military fitness, a triple Rambo—with a life like a jigsaw puzzle only he could have put together.”



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.

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PHOTOS BY JIM CLASH

In the Eye of the Storm, Literally



BY JIM CLASH

Intermittent lightning flashes near our U.S. Air Force C-130 aircraft. The odd smell of ozone from the outside electric interaction with air in the atmosphere is noticeable in the plane.

But the wind is eerily calm now, here in the Eye, a far cry from just minutes ago when we passed through the final part of the menacing Eye-wall of Hurricane Dorian. Stars are visible overhead out of the cockpit window. When we entered the storm earlier, it was classified Category 4, with winds of over 150 mph. Now it is teetering on Category 5. We just saw 167 mph on the plane radar gauge.

I try to enjoy the calmness and the beauty. The stacked white cloud formation

surrounding the Eye, an oval of sorts, resembles an immense structure from the center of a football field. It's known by storm chasers as "The Stadium Effect." The serenity in the Eye makes it hard to imagine the destructive violence in the seemingly peaceful clouds we had just traversed, and on the ground below.

Why am I here? In 1972, powerful Hurricane Agnes ravaged the East Coast of the U.S., doing \$3.1 billion of damage and destroying part of the town I grew up in: Laurel, Maryland. It took years to repair all the damage from Agnes.

So, when I was invited by the world-famous Hurricane Hunters of the 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squad at Keesler AFB in Biloxi, Mississippi, I was in. My pilot, Lt. Col.



Sean Cross, has penetrated hurricanes more than 165 times, so I felt relatively safe.

To be clear, this was not a joyride. During the flight, we would be gathering data important to predicting the strength and direction of the storm, including wind speed, barometric pressure, temperature, and humidity. Such information can potentially save billions of dollars in property damage, as well as countless lives.

The Hurricane Hunters have a long and storied history. Formed in 1943 as a barroom dare, the intrepid group has been active at Keesler since 1973, flying a myriad of weather reconnaissance missions. They are even more critical now, given cuts to NOAA and other government weather services by the current administration.

Like many hurricanes, Dorian started as a small tropical depression in the Caribbean Sea. As warm water and high humidity fueled its growth, the storm began to take on historic proportions. It is one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to have developed on the Atlantic Ocean side of the United States.

Coming into the Eye was no picnic. First, we had to travel three-and-a-half hours over the Gulf of Mexico and Florida to reach the storm. That part of the ride was fairly uneventful as we sat, belts fastened along the side of the fuselage, like you might see when military parachutists are waiting to jump. There was a toilet in the plane surrounded by a curtain. Occasionally, the crew would launch a radiosonde out of the back of the aircraft to measure atmospheric and water dynamics as it fell into the sea, some 10,000 feet below.

But as soon as we hit the Eye-wall, about five miles from the Eye, or hurricane's center, the ride became very, very bumpy. For me, the gyrations made it difficult to take photos but wasn't turbulent enough to make me sick. We each had a barf bag, of course, just in case.

In the end, we crisscrossed the monster storm several times collecting data, with four passes through the Eye. The last pass was the most violent, as the hurricane hit Category 5 status with winds over 185 mph.

The entire flight had taken 12 hours, 30 minutes: five hours in the storm itself, 30 minutes in the Eye, and seven hours traveling back and forth. The brave airmen on our flight do this kind of mission on a regular basis. Cross, for example, was going back out in a few days.

Where did Dorian land? It first devastated the Bahamas, as it pretty much stalled over them. The death toll six years later, including missing persons, is estimated to be at least 600, with property damage of \$3.4 billion.

Luckily, Dorian stayed out in the Atlantic, not hitting the U.S. mainland directly but snaking up the coast into eastern Canada, still doing damage and eventually petering out. Cross says that the missions conducted by the Hurricane Hunters improve forecast accuracy by as much as 25 percent. Hopefully our flight contributed to that percentage. It's at least one number to feel good about.



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

Signs, Signs



BY PETE LEWNES

The year was 1971, and I can vividly recall cruising Laurel Shopping Center in my '66 Chevy Impala from Mid-City Chevrolet while listening to the song "Signs" by the Five Man Electrical Band. Little did I know then that some 50 years later, my wife Martha and I would own a few from Laurel.

Signs are indeed everywhere. They become part of the landscape that we sometimes take for granted, not missing them until they're changed or simply gone. I was reminded of this recently when the iconic Arby's sign on Route 1 was removed.

When a business closes, its signs usually disappear quickly. More often than not, they're scrapped with the building or its contents. Not all signs hold any real resale value the way a vintage neon advertising sign might; but when it comes from a particularly special place or time, it can be a powerful memory trigger of bygone days.



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



PHOTOS BY RICHARD FRIEND





PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

LAUREL POLICE DEPARTMENT
Incident Report
Continuation/Narrative

Case Number: 00-001477

Type of Incident: Missing Person

Date and Time Occurred: 1/11-8/7 1519-1639

Date and Time Reported: 8/7/00 @ 1639

Location of Incident: [Redacted] 20707

Narrative of Incident: Missing Person, last seen at LPD in January 2000

LAUREL NOIR LAUREL NOIR

2000

Whatever Happened to Winifred?

Winifred Matronia disappeared without a trace in January 2000, leaving everything behind.

Laurel Noir is a series focused on historic crimes and the darker underside of our hometown.



BY RICHARD FRIEND

The Avondale apartment building on Ashford Boulevard has been in the news over the past few months, with tenants seeking help from City officials for an ongoing rodent infestation that has forced several families to move. It's surprising and unsettling, given the building's pleasing appearance—built in 1987, the 11-story highrise sits behind a gated entrance and was fully renovated in recent years. It's not the type of place you'd typically expect to have such a problem.

When I heard about the rat issue, I remembered a story that former Laurel Police Captain Carl DeWalt

had mentioned to me over a decade ago. It wasn't about rodents, but about a former resident of the Avondale who'd mysteriously disappeared. The case had made such an impression on DeWalt that he'd written down the details for future reference.

The details were sparse, but fascinating. Very little about the case was available online, either. In short, a 56-year-old woman named Winifred Matronia had last been seen on January 1, 2000—the day of the new millennium. However, she wasn't reported missing until several months later; and when police checked her

apartment at the Avondale, they found no signs of foul play. Her car was still parked there, her bank accounts hadn't been touched, and all of her important documents were present. It was as though she'd simply vanished, but family members insisted that disappearing without any kind of notice just wasn't in character for Winifred. Nonetheless, they speculated that she could perhaps have gone to Florida or the Caribbean.

Winifred, who lived alone in apartment 220, had recently retired from C&P Telephone Company. She'd never married and didn't have children. She was said

ANCESTRY.COM



Yearbook photos from 1960 and 1961 (left and center) provide clearer images of Winifred Joan Matronia than the low-resolution, heavily pixelated photo that was circulated at the time of her disappearance in 2000 (right).

to have had a heart condition of some kind, which escalated the search status for her to a missing and endangered person. At the time of her disappearance, Winifred was listed as White, approximately 5'9 and 140 pounds, and with a particularly distinct characteristic—her left eye was blue and her right eye was brown.

Over the years, there have been no reported sightings of, messages from, or banking activity associated with Winifred. Nor has a body ever been identified.

A Mysterious Christmas Card

Through a Freedom of Information Act request, I was able to obtain a number of pages from the Laurel Police Department's case file. While the new information did not contain a proverbial smoking gun, it did provide some intriguing new details.

First, it corrected the date of her disappearance. Winifred was actually last seen on January 11, 2000—by police officers, no less—when she visited the Laurel Police Department (at that time still located on C Street) to report a suspicious letter. Something about a Christmas card she'd received had unnerved her, because she didn't recognize the signature of the person who'd mailed it and didn't know who it was from. There was nothing sinister about the card according to the officers who interviewed her that afternoon; and by her own admission, Winifred couldn't think of anyone who might want to harm her. The officers, who had no cause for concern when Winifred left the police station that day, had no way of knowing it would be the last time anyone would see or hear from her again.

A Strange Odor

Just over two months later, Laurel Police received a phone call on March 26 from a manager at the Avondale. She was calling to report "a strange odor" coming from Winifred's apartment and stated that she had been unable to contact the tenant. Former Laurel Police Sergeant (and *Voices of Laurel* columnist) Rick McGill was one of the officers who investigated that day. They found the apartment to be secure, and no odor was detected. The Avondale manager who had made the complaint concurred.

McGill's report stated that the apartment "contained a few items of furniture and some other items of property still in boxes, but did not appear to have been lived in at all." The telephone was working, which McGill noted indicated that the service was still being paid—although a former C&P Telephone Company employee I spoke to shared that many colleagues received free service "in case they needed to be reached at any given time."

The electricity was another matter, however, and had been turned off. There was spoiled food in the freezer, which may have been the source of the earlier odor.

The next Laurel Police Department involvement came on July 25, when Winifred's aunt phoned to request a wellness check on her niece, whom she had been unable to reach. Officers visited Matronia's apartment again that day, and after gaining access from the property manager, they found the home to be in identical condition as when they'd last checked it in March: the power was off, food was rotting in the refrigerator, and there was nothing to indicate any foul play. Nor were there any clues as to where Winifred might have gone.

The property manager, who had not seen Matronia for several months, vaguely remembered having had a conversation with her in which Winifred had stated an intention to travel in recent weeks, but unfortunately she could not recall any specific details.

On August 7, Winifred's aunt visited the apartment once more. There was still no sign that Winifred—or anyone—had been there. She stated to police that Winifred had a younger sister named Linda in Oregon who would be able to provide more information for a missing persons report, which she did that afternoon by telephone. Linda explained that she'd received a letter from Winifred in January, and that was the last contact she'd had with her.

A Person of Interest

Linda provided police with an interesting story about a man from Winifred's past that she had reconnected with at a recent high school reunion. According to both Linda and her aunt, the man had convinced Winifred to invest the bulk of her retirement money—a lump sum payment she'd received from C&P Telephone Company

of approximately \$124,000—in a computer company that he owned. Both relatives advised her against it, but Winifred had assured them that she knew what she was doing. Linda made it clear that she suspected that this man had played some role in her sister's disappearance, one way or another. She reiterated that it was very out of character for Winifred to go without communicating for any length of time, and she voiced concern for her sister's safety.

Laurel Police detectives had their work cut out for them. Aside from Winifred's complaint about the mysterious Christmas card, they had little to go on. Their records did show, however, that her car had been towed on July 19 from 14902 Fourth Street. Showing expired tags, it had been reported as an abandoned vehicle by property management. That location is interesting in that it's *behind* the Avondale building, and not in the gated primary lot where a resident would typically park. It raises the question of whether or not Winifred was the person who last parked it. After being towed, the car sat unclaimed in the impound lot of Hofmann Brothers Towing, where police waited in hopes that someone might eventually inquire about it. No one ever did.

More than three years passed with no reported sightings of or contact from Winifred. On October 6, 2003, Linda spoke with police and revealed that she had recently been in Maryland and confronted the suspect herself, letting him know that she held him responsible for her sister's disappearance. He denied any involvement, and only said that he hoped Winifred was "having a good time wherever she was" before abruptly ending the conversation.

A Dead End

By August 2005, the case had been transferred to another LPD investigator. In 2009, police briefly lost contact with Linda, who had moved across the country without forwarding her new information. She resumed contact in January 2010 as the case reached its 10-year milestone. After a full decade and vigorous re-examinations of the case, police were sadly still no closer to learning what had happened to Winifred. There had been no contact, no sightings, no financial activity, and no unidentified body matches.

The last page of the LPD case file contains only three sentences, and they hit like the ending of a mystery novel that misses the mark and makes you want to throw the book across the room:

In February of 2012, the missing person in this case, Winifred Matronia, was declared legally deceased. This case was previously suspended, as the only known offender, (name redacted), died in February of 2011. A copy of this report will be forwarded to communications for the purposes of removing Matronia from NCIC as a missing person.

There are no details about any investigation into the "only known offender," but evidently his death was a significant enough event to suspend the case and declare Winifred Matronia legally deceased. I can't imagine that it brought her family much closure, however, as it still doesn't answer the questions of what actually happened:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

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.

Karen Beavers, 77

Karen Marjorie Beavers peacefully passed away on October 20, 2025, with her husband at her bedside. Born on November 2, 1947, to James Walter McQuaid

and Marjorie Lois Fullerton, Karen lived her entire life in Laurel. She was a member of St Philip's Episcopal Church, graduated from Laurel High School and the University of Maryland with a degree in psychology, and studied pastoral counseling at Loyola University.

Karen served as a volunteer domestic violence counselor at HopeWorks in Columbia, Maryland. She also volunteered as an art teacher at her son's elementary school.

Karen loved writing poetry and received many awards for her work, which was published in several anthologies. She also authored eight children's books, published in both English and Spanish—two which were featured in the December 2017 issue of *The New York Review of Books*. In addition, Karen was a member of ASCAP and wrote and produced two gospel songs, "Overwhelming Love" and "He is Ever Near."

Through her own trials living with fibromyalgia, Karen became an advocate for fibromyalgia patients, lobbying former Governor Parris Glendening and the Maryland legislature to designate May 12, 2002, as State Fibromyalgia Awareness Day. She also convinced former Laurel Mayor Craig A. Moe to establish a City of Laurel Fibromyalgia Awareness Day.

She is survived by her husband of almost 35 years, Edd George Beavers, Jr.; sons William Andrew Kowalski, Charles Alexander Kowalski, and Edward James Kowalski; granddaughters Lily, Kendall, and Marley; grandsons Hunter, Andrew, Zachary, and Noah; and great-grandsons Cameron and Axle. She was preceded in death by stepson Edward Beavers, III.

Deborah Carr, 65

Deborah Marie Carr passed away at her home in Laurel, surrounded by loved ones, on November 26, 2025. Born on June 13, 1960, to Joseph and Alice Kohlman

in Baltimore, Deborah graduated from Towson University in 1985. She began her occupational therapy career with the Prince George's County Public Schools that same year, and dedicated 30 years to helping children with disabilities.

Deborah loved to travel, especially to Switzerland. She also enjoyed yearly trips to Swallow Falls and the beach. She had a great sense of humor and could often be found laughing. Deborah enjoyed helping others, celebrating Christmas with her family, and, most of all, being a nana to, and going on adventures with, her grandchildren.

Deborah will be remembered as the most loving wife, mom, nana, aunt, sister, daughter, and friend.

She is survived by Matthew Cody Carr, her husband of 39 years; children Josh, Amy, and Jacob; son-in-law Muhammad; grandchildren Mira, Logan, and Elijah; and brother Joseph Kohlman. She was preceded in death by her parents and her sister, Karin Evans.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the American Cancer Society.

Grace Elaine Catchings, 82

Grace Elaine Catchings quietly and peacefully departed this earthly life on September 21, 2025. She born on December 21, 1942, in Milledgeville, GA, to the late Magdalene

and Samuel O'Neal Saulsbury, Jr. After high school, Grace completed three years of nursing training at Winston-Salem University in North Carolina, then studied at Morris Brown for a year. Grace moved

to Detroit, MI, where she worked as a ward clerk at Grace Memorial Hospital and then as a Head Start teacher at Holy Redeemer of the St. Bernard's Catholic School in Detroit, after earning a B.A. in Education from Wayne State University in 1968.

While attending Wayne State, Grace met Robert Catchings, a graduate student in physics. One semester, Grace was struggling with physical sciences course, so she looked up Robert to ask for help after hearing about a "brother" teaching a section of the course. They married in August 1970, the same year Robert obtained his Ph.D. in Physics.

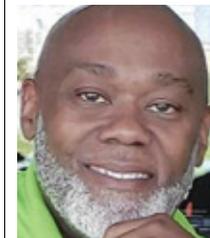
When Robert was hired as an assistant professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Howard University, the couple moved to Maryland. Grace began what eventually became a career of over 3 decades as a teacher in the Prince George's County Public School System. She first taught at Rogers Heights Elementary School in Bladensburg, then later worked at three other county schools: James McHenry Elementary in Lanham; Yorktown Elementary in Bowie; and Bond Mill Elementary in Laurel. Grace continued her own education by completing about 30 hours of post-graduate studies at Bowie State University.

The couple moved to Laurel in 1975, shortly after their first son, Robert IV, was born. Their other son, Gregory, was born in 1981. The boys were introduced to organized sports at an early age and were involved with the Laurel Boys and Girls Club, playing baseball, basketball and soccer. The family attended St. Mark's United Methodist Church, where Grace ensured the boys attended Sunday school and participated in children's church programs. The boys also were active in Cub Scouts, played sports in high school, and excelled academically.

Grace served in many community organizations over the years, often holding leadership positions. She joined the Librans, Jack and Jill of America, and the Columbia Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She served as chairperson for the Scholarship Committee for Maryland State Delegate Brian Moe and worked with Laurel's Side by Side organization to promote children's success in the classroom. Grace was also very active at St. Mark's, serving as Superintendent of Christian Education and Director of Vacation Bible School. She organized several Debonair Ball activities, participated in the senior choir, and was a devoted member of the United Women of Faith. She became known as the "Mother of the Church," having made a major impact on its children.

Grace also became known as the "Mother of Bond Mill," where she was lauded as an exceptional and outstanding teacher. She received the Prince George's County Outstanding Educator Award for her positive influence on not only the students, but also the teachers, staff, and parents of Bond Mill Elementary. She was known for her dynamic personality, her bright and beautiful smile, and her gentle, patient, and kind manner. She made every child feel special and cherished, motivated even the most challenging student to succeed, and found ways to help children who were experiencing academic or social challenges. She mentored student teachers and newly hired teachers, participated in (and often organized) school-wide academics and social projects, served as Social Studies Coordinator and grade-level chairperson, and worked with multicultural educational activities as a Diversity and Equity Liaison.

She leaves behind to cherish her memory her husband of 55 years, Robert M. Catchings III; sons Robert IV (Nicole) and Gregory Catchings; grandsons Robert V (Khamoy) and Donovan (Ana); brothers Willie Saulsbury and Joseph Saulsbury (Beverly); sister-in-law Cheryl Catchings; three great-grandsons; cousins Wylene Jones, Janet Pargo, Eddie Butts, Jerome Watts, and Brenda Jackson; nephews, nieces, and a host of other relatives and friends.

Laurence Dash, 60

Laurence Kwabena Dash passed away in Laurel, Maryland on September 3, 2025.

He was born in Georgetown, Guyana, in April 1965. He went to high school in

Brooklyn, NY, and then enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he served for several years before an honorable discharge. After his military service, Laurence joined the federal government as a civil servant, retiring from the National Science Foundation as a lead cost analyst in 2021. Laurence earned degrees in accounting and divinity and delivered sermons as a guest preacher at churches in the region. Laurence also loved painting and drawing, traveling, taking care of his cats, and spending time with family and friends.

Laurence is survived by his mother, Sheila Dash; his sister, Michele Dash-Pauls; his nephews, Marcus Pauls and Eric Pauls; his brother-in-law, Barry Pauls; and many extended family members and friends.

Leroy Dodgson, 74



Leroy G. Dodgson, of Maryland City, left his loving family and friends on October 19, 2025.

He was born on December 28, 1950, to Leroy and Blanche Dodgson.

He graduated from Anne Arundel High School in 1968 and received an Associate Degree of Criminal Justice at Anne Arundel Community College in 1985. He joined the Navy and served from 1971 to 1974, receiving a National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Star, and a Combat Action Ribbon; he departed with an honorable discharge. Leroy then served in a 26-year career the National Security Agency (NSA), continuing his service there part-time for 14 years after retirement.

Leroy was a member of American Legion Post 60, the Elk Lodge, the Moose Lodge, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW). He was a great supporter of the Wounded Warrior Project. He was a member of the Anne Arundel Community College Alumni Association.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his brother, James “Jimmy” Dodgson. Leroy is survived by daughter Amanda (Denver) Nance; son Charles Dodgson (Kara Mabe); and seven grandkids to whom he was “Pawpaw Butch”: Mackenzie, Logan, Jesse Ray, Abigail, Isabell, Austin, and Landon Nance. He also leaves behind many friends and fellow members of American Legion Post 60.

Patricia “Pat” Irene Elliott, 87



Patricia “Pat” Irene Elliott, a lifelong Laurel resident, passed away in hospice care on October 31. Pat was predeceased by her parents,

Benjamin Elliott Sr and Marguerite (King) Elliott; her brother, Benjamin Elliott Jr, and sister-in-law Jane Elliott. Pat is survived by her sister, Marguerite Duke (John), of Salisbury, MD; nephew Steve Elliott, of Frederick, MD; niece Kim Elliott (Don), of Laurel, MD; nephew John Elliott (Amy), of New York; nephew Chris Duke (Bronwyn), of Pennsylvania; niece Lauren Lasch (Brian), of California; and great-nieces and -nephews Delaney, Quinlyn, Madeline,

Elliott, Parker, James, Reese, and Charlotte.

Pat was born in Annapolis, MD, and lived in Laurel her entire life. She attended Laurel Elementary School and graduated from Laurel High School in 1956. After graduation, Pat pursued a career with the Washington, D.C., Government Department of Health and Human Services, before retiring in 1993.

Pat was a lifelong active member of First United Methodist Church of Laurel, where she taught Sunday school, served on the Altar Guild and Memorials Committee, and sang in the Chancel Choir. Pat was also dedicated to serving the Pythian Sisters as a member and held many offices within the charity. She was a lifetime member of the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad Auxiliary and firmly believed contributing to the community was very important. Pat enjoyed many hobbies, including crafts, crocheting, and playing piano.

Pat enjoyed remarkable, loving relationships with her entire family and will be remembered for her passion for giving back to the community and her constant kindness toward others, including family, friends, and church family.

A memorial service was held at First United Church of Laurel on November 4, followed by interment at Meadowridge Memorial Park, in Elkridge, MD.

S.G. Fred Frederick, 94



S.G. “Fred” Frederick Jr., 94, passed away on January 7, 2026. He was born on February 4, 1931.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Betty

Anne Frederick; his children, Cynthia Frederick, F. Craig Frederick Sr. (Helen), Christopher Frederick (Karen), and Jeff Frederick (Janell); and his grandchildren, F. Craig Frederick Jr. (Kelsey), Allison Frederick (RJ), Samantha Frederick, Hunter Frederick, Brooke Frederick, Jenna Frederick, Jackson Frederick, Jayci Frederick, and Jillian Frederick. He is also survived by his great-grandchildren, Harlan, McKinnley, Rhett, and Levi.

Born and raised in Coldwater, Michigan, Fred attended Michigan State University before enlisting in the United States Marine Corps. Following an honorable discharge as a sergeant, he settled in Hyattsville, Maryland, where he developed an interest in the automotive industry—first as a mechanic and later as a salesman.

While working at Lustine Chevrolet, Fred met Betty Anne Jackson, a student at the University of Maryland. They married in 1956 and made their home in Laurel, Maryland.

In 1959, Fred opened a DeSoto-Plymouth dealership that would later become Fred Frederick Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram, which continues to operate today. Fred and Betty Anne raised their four children while becoming deeply involved in numerous local organizations and civic causes.

Over his 94 years, Fred touched countless lives—friends, employees, customers, and associates alike. His achievements and recognitions were many. Among them, he was named Time Magazine Dealer of the Year in 1995, Prince George’s County Civic Federation Man of the Year, Prince George’s County Journal Man of the Year, and recipient of the 1999 Northwood University Dealer Education Award.

Fred’s memberships and leadership roles reflected his deep commitment to community, education, and service. These included the Hyattsville and Laurel Lions Clubs; Hyattsville and Laurel Chambers of Commerce (President); Laurel Board of Trade (Chairman); University of Maryland Terrapin Club (President); University of Maryland M Club; University of Maryland Education Foundation; Governor’s Executive Advisory Board; Laurel Federal Savings Board; Citizens Financial Board; Columbia Country Club; Greater Laurel Hospital Board (Chairman); Chrysler National Dealer Council (Chairman); Republican Senatorial Inner Circle; and the Washington Auto Show Board (Chairman).

Fred and Betty Anne shared a lifelong passion for the University of Maryland, serving as football and basketball season ticket holders and donors for more than 60 years. Fred also held a deep affection for Old Town Laurel, which he supported through sustained activism and leadership.

While family was central to their lives, Fred and Betty Anne also fostered enduring friendships and joyful traditions. From the Kentucky Derby and Fourth of July celebrations to ACC tailgates, the Fredericks brought people together and made every occasion memorable.

Fred Frederick was a principled son, brother, husband, father, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend. His commitment and loyalty were unsurpassed and will endure through the legacy established by the Frederick Family Foundation. While he will be deeply missed, his influence, stories, memories, and life philosophies will remain with all who knew him.

Sherry Frost, 63



Sherry Frost of Laurel passed away peacefully on October 2, 2025, leaving behind a legacy of love, kindness, and creativity. Born on March 7, 1962, in

Pella, Iowa, to Henry and Donna Rooda, Sherry was a devoted daughter, sister, and mother, cherished by family and friends.

Sherry is survived by her beloved son, Eric Frost, her fiancé, Dennis Lynn, her sister, Laura Rooda Dunsbergen, and her brother, Greg Rooda. She was a guiding light in their lives, always ready to lend a helping hand or offer a listening ear.

Growing up in Pella, Sherry developed a passion for nurturing and caring for others, which she carried throughout her life. She spent a significant part of her journey in Siler City, North Carolina, where she worked as a manager at “Three Springs,” a camp for troubled teens. There, she became a motherly figure to many young boys, providing them with comfort, support, and a warm meal. Her nurturing spirit extended beyond the camp, as she was always ready to assist neighborhood children, ensuring they felt loved and cared for.

In 1999, Sherry moved to Maryland, where she continued to cultivate her artistic talents. She became a skilled florist, working at Flowers Extraordinaire by Stephen in Linthicum Heights for several years. She was also an event planner, using her creativity to bring joy to others through beautifully crafted events. Her love for crafting and planning dinners was matched only by her desire to ensure that everyone around her was happy and enjoying themselves.

Sherry’s warmth and generosity touched the lives of many, and her legacy will live on in the hearts of those she helped and inspired. She was a beacon of light, always ready to share her love and kindness with the world. Her memory will be cherished by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to a charity of your choice in Sherry’s name, continuing her legacy of compassion and care for those in need.

OBITUARIES

Shirley Haywood, 85

Shirley Haywood died on November 14, 2025 in Laurel. Born on February 3, 1940, in Westernport, MD, she was the daughter of John Salesky and Florence

(Montgomery) Salesky. She met the love of her life, Richard, while growing up in Westernport; together they shared a lifetime of adventure.

The couple moved to Laurel, where Shirley worked for C&P Telephone for over 30 years before retiring in 2000. A woman of a deep and abiding faith, she was a longtime member of St. Mary of the Mills Church in Laurel, MD. She lived her beliefs with quiet strength and deep devotion, offering kindness to others in ways big and small.

She especially loved college basketball and cheered faithfully for the University of Maryland Men's and Women's basketball teams. She and Richard loved to travel. Together they explored over 20 countries, often finding joy in the unexpected. On one unforgettable trip to Scotland, she even crossed paths with Queen Elizabeth in a small bookstore.

Karen's greatest joy was her family. She leaves behind her two daughters, Penny and Danielle, who will forever carry her love and example in their hearts; her cherished grandchildren, Michael, Joey, Elisabeth, Sam and Nick; and her sons-in-law, Jerry Burke and Tommy Huber, whom she adored.

Shirley was preceded in death by her husband, parents, and siblings Ralph, Don, Carl, William, and Mary.

Craig Heist, 66

Craig Brian Heist of Laurel passed away October 10, 2025. He was born in 1959 to Charles Heist and Arlene Mickolite Heist in Baltimore, Maryland. He was a graduate of Kenwood

High School and Salisbury University.

Craig worked at WKHI in Ocean City and later moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked for Radio Martí, WTOP, and WJFK. He covered sports in the greater Baltimore-Washington area for local radio stations and networks such as SiriusXM and ESPN Radio. When not covering sports, he enjoyed watching

sports, watching movies, and spending time with friends and family.

He is survived by his wife Suzanne, his sister Susan Robertson-Starr, three nieces (Samantha, Christina, and Claire), and his nephew Chuckie.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his three brothers: Harold, Marty, and Chuck.

Memorial donations can be made to LUNGEvity Foundation and the American Diabetes Association.

Dora Long, 94

Dora Jo Long passed away in Laurel, Maryland, according to an obituary posted online dated September 2, 2025. She was born on April 18, 1931, in Chattanooga,

Tennessee, daughter of Rodgers and Mary Tidwell. She lived in many cities including Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Panama Canal Zone, and Fort Meade, Maryland. She worked as a childcare provider in her home for many years before retiring.

Dora was a member of the Community United Methodist Church, the Laurel Senior Friendship Club, the Red Hats and the Ladies Auxiliary at Maryland City Volunteer Fire Department. She enjoyed bowling in leagues and traveled to many states to participate in tournaments. Dora traveled on many bus trips all over the U.S. and Canada. Her interests were playing bingo and playing cards with her friends. She had a great love of animals and always had four or five pets at a time.

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

Ruth Ann Miles, 83

On December 22, 2025, Ruth Ann Miles (née Wachter) passed away at Casey House in Rockville, MD. She was born on May 28, 1942 in Frederick, Maryland to her now late

parents Bruce Wachter and Louise Wachter (née Baker).

Ruth Ann worked alongside her husband, William "Bill" Miles, Jr., for many years, as they owned and operated the Laurel Meat Market on Main Street in Laurel. She always had a smile on her face and a warm welcome to all who came to the market.

Ruth Ann was preceded in death by her late husband, William "Bill" Miles, Jr., and her son Christopher Scott Miles. She is survived by her loving son Brian L. Miles Sr. and daughter-in-law Melinda Miles, she was a loving grandmother to Tricia Wills; Tony & Mayra Kreuger, Brian Miles Jr., Zack Miles and Christopher Miles. She was a loving sister to Bonnie Krammer (Chuck), Brucie Lindsey (Bruce), Mary Sue Patton (Tom), Norma Lee Fleming (and her late husband Howard).

Ruth Ann was the matriarch with a big heart and caregiver to all. She was a devoted wife and mother who loved her family.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a contribution in Ruth Ann's memory to Casey House Hospice 6001 Muncaster Mill Rd, Rockville, MD 20855

Mesame Cynthia Ndape, 37

Mesame Cynthia Ndape of Laurel passed away peacefully on September 18, 2025. Born on March 15, 1988, in Tiko, Cameroon, Cynthia was the beloved

daughter of Isaac Etube and Pisang Maureen Mbwo. Cynthia graduated from Presbyterian High School in Kumba, Cameroon, and later earned a finance degree from Cambridge University in Buea, Cameroon.

Cynthia worked as an accountant for the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon from 2010 to 2019. In pursuit of new opportunities, she migrated to the United States in 2019. She joined the U.S. Army National Guard in 2020 and balanced various jobs while studying for her Cybersecurity certification. Her dedication led her to a successful career as a cybersecurity analyst with ICS Nett, where she worked until her passing.

A devoted Christian, Cynthia found joy in traveling, singing, dancing, and spending time with loved ones. Her warmth, resilience, and vibrant spirit touched many lives. She is survived by her mother, two brothers, cousins, and a host of dear friends. She was preceded in death by her father and her grandmother, Mispah Njume.

Clifton Shipe, 74

Clifton Bryant Shipe, affectionately known as Cliff, departed from this world on October 31, 2025, leaving behind a tapestry of cherished memories woven through decades

spent in the sunlit corridors of life. Born on March 4, 1951, in the verdant embrace of Maryland, Cliff's journey was marked by unwavering dedication and a warmth that enveloped everyone fortunate enough to know him.

As a trusted clerk at the Laurel Post Office, Cliff stood at the heart of the community, a steady presence whose gentle smile and kind words often brightened the days of those around him. His commitment to service extended beyond his profession, resonating in the lives he touched daily. Cliff understood the value of connection, building friendships that

blossomed throughout his life. He became a familiar face, a listening ear, and a guiding hand for many.

Educated at Laurel High School, Cliff's formative years laid the foundation for a strong character imbued with resilience and compassion. These traits were magnified as he navigated the intricacies of family life with his beloved wife, Deborah Shipe. Together, they cultivated a nurturing home, rich with laughter and love—a sanctuary against the ebb and flow of life's trials.

Cliff is mourned by Deborah, who remains a steadfast companion in the echo of their shared dreams and aspirations. His legacy continues through the lessons he imparted and the love he freely gave. He joins his father, Charles Warren Shipe, and his mother, Margaret Juanita Rose Shipe, in a realm beyond this earthly tapestry, where families reunite, and the bonds of love are eternally celebrated.

A visitation to honor Cliff's life was held at Donaldson Funeral Home on November 14, 2025. Cliff's friends and family gathered to share stories, embrace memories, and find solace together in the shared light of a life well-lived.

In a world that can sometimes feel chaotic, Clifton Shipe was a beacon of consistency and joy, reminding us all that kindness and connection are the true currencies of a life fully realized. As we bid farewell, we embrace the legacy left behind—a legacy illuminated by love, laughter, and the indelible mark of one man's spirit.

In lieu of flowers, a donation may be made in Clifton Shipe's memory to The American Heart Association or American Sphingomyelia Association.

Francis Werle, 68



Francis Michael Werle, known affectionately as “Frank” to his friends and loved ones, passed away on November 22, 2025. He was a loving and proud father, grandfather, and brother who filled his family's lives with love, laughter, and countless memories.

Frank was born in Washington, DC on October 17, 1957, to George and Roberta Werle. He is survived by brothers and sisters Steve Werle (Lynn), Sue Falls (Cy), Kathy Mellott (Michael), Karen Berger (Ed), Jodi Sawyer (Walt), Tom Werle (Paola) and Rebecca Beruete (Brian). His siblings shared a close bond, spending holidays and summer vacations together. Frank enjoyed a successful career in sales, where his outgoing nature and easy conversation could brighten anyone's day. He spent decades forming connections and taking pride in a career that allowed him to meet people from all walks of life.

Frank's family was the center of his universe. He is survived by his five daughters: Lisa Klein, Jessica Gray Neal (Justin), Kristy Gast (Gregg), Chelsea Donaldson (Cullen), and Cassidy Werle (Larry). He was also a proud grandfather to eight grandchildren. He loved nothing more than a day at the beach, good music, and a Redskins win. He will be remembered for his fun-loving spirit, his humor, and his deep love for the people he cared about. His joy was a gift his family will carry with them always.

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

History of Protests

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Carlos Hinojosa told the *Baltimore Sun* that he and his friends were upset over the killing and “wanted to do something.” They came up with the idea to organize a peaceful community march. Working with Laurel city officials, Hinojosa obtained a permit, spread the word on social media, and just 4 days later the event took place. Participants walked and biked around Laurel Lake carrying signs and chanting “Black Lives Matter” and “We demand change!” They paraded down Cherry Lane past Laurel High School, then returned to the Granville Gude Park. Some of the student organizers spoke to the crowd, sharing their personal stories and their views on racism. A few city officials also spoke, including then-mayor Craig Moe and then-Council President Keith Sydnor, who succeeded Moe in 2023. Laurel Police Chief Russ Hamill estimated that over 2,000 people participated in the march, which raised over \$2,000 for the George Floyd Memorial Fund.

2025: The “No Kings” Era Begins

Monthly nationwide protests against the policies of the second Trump Administration began shortly after he was inaugurated in January 2025. Most were small and locally based at first, but a coalition of various organizations—veterans groups, civil rights organizations, women’s groups, LGBTQ+ advocates, and more—formed around the goal of organizing nation-wide demonstrations, the first of which took place on April 5 and was titled “Hands Off.” At more than 1,400 locations across the country, an estimated 3–5 million protestors held signs saying things like, “Hands Off my Social Security benefits!” and “Hands Off our national parks!” to protest drastic cuts to federally funded programs. Many Laurel participants were among the 100,000 protestors in Washington, DC that day.

More importantly, a handful of Laurel residents who didn’t want to go to DC protested outside the U.S. Post Office on Main Street, which led to a renaissance of sorts for Laurel Resist. The group had not engaged in protesting for a few years, but had sponsored candidate town hall meetings in every city election since 2017 and partnered with Laurel Pride on several fundraising and community events. Sensing a growing passion in Laurel for activism, Laurel Resist joined with national-level coalitions to organize protests. The first held in Laurel was the “No Kings” rally on June 14, 2025. Knox says the No Kings organizers at first were reluctant to accept Laurel as an official location, suggesting that Laurel residents go to Washington, DC or Columbia instead. But Knox pushed back, stressing that “Laurel and Columbia are not the same, and we have a growing movement here.” Laurel was added to the official map, and an estimated 320 people gathered along Talbot Avenue by the library for the rally. “The enthusiasm really exceeded our expectations,” Knox said. “Everyone was so positive and it was a peaceful event, which is our goal.”

Following the success of No Kings, Laurel Resist went all-in, organizing local rallies in conjunction with nationwide events. A “Good Trouble” rally was held on July 17, commemorating the birthday of the late Congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis. There was a “Workers over Billionaires” protest on Labor Day, followed a few weeks later by the “We Are America” march which made a stopover in Laurel. The biggest Laurel event of the year, though, was the “No Kings 2” rally on October 18. Knox estimates that over 560 people participated at the Laurel library in that event, joining with over 7 million people countrywide.

October 18, 2025, marked the second nationwide No Kings protests, with over 60 planned rallies in Maryland alone and 2,700 nationwide. Local organizers again publicized, planned, and coordinated these events with local officials. In Laurel, the number of people who registered for the rally was four times greater than for the first No Kings event in June, according to Knox. She noted that organizers ran out of posterboard for a pre-rally poster-making opportunity at Emancipation Park Amphitheatre, which alone drew about 75 people.

In nearby Columbia, Indivisible of Howard County organized a pre-sign-wave rally at the Chrysalis in Symphony Woods, featuring music and speakers, including headliner U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen. The senator stressed the importance of events like the No Kings protests, which he credited with helping to create community, letting people who are feeling isolated know they are not alone, and reinforcing the power of “We the People” by speaking out against authoritarian power grabs. Also speaking at the rally were Congresswoman Sarah Elfreth of the 3rd Congressional District and six individuals who had lost their federal jobs or faced uncertain futures because of the administration’s actions.

Following the rally, protesters marched to Governor Warfield Parkway and lined the street, stretching in both directions and filling the designated intersection for the sign wave. In addition to the prolific American Flags and signs, there were drums, tambourines, and boomboxes playing protest songs and dance music as well as a number of people in inflatable animal costumes. Organizers reported that at least 6,500 people participated in one or both of the Columbia events—which, as in Laurel, marked an large increase from the first No Kings rally in June.

Shortly afterward, Knox was already planning for the next rally in Laurel. She had heard from a lot of senior citizens with limited mobility living in the River Court Apartments and Selborne House who wanted to participate but needed transportation with their wheelchairs. She mused, “We will need to think about rides for the next one of these events.”

“This is Why We March”

At the series of nationally organized protests held throughout 2025, local participants often would break into chants of “This is what Democracy looks like!” and “This is why we march!” While covering events in Laurel and Columbia, Voices of Laurel’s Angela Kozlowski and Diane Mezzanotte spoke to many of the demonstrators, asking them why they were protesting. Their responses revealed a wide variety of backgrounds, political persuasions, and platforms for which they were demonstrating. Below is a sampling of what they told us, in their own words. Because many participants feared being “doxxed” or potentially targeted with violence, most quote attributions are by first name only.

“No Kings 2” Participants

Darleen said, “I don’t want to see [our] democracy fall. I was behind the Iron Curtain when there was an Iron Curtain.” She explained that, in the 1986-1987 timeframe, she had the chance to enter East Berlin while her husband was deployed to Germany. She went in with the chaplain from the U.S. military base. “It was sobering,” she said. “There were uniformed officers in front of every government building [in East Berlin]. There were a lot of government buildings.”

Mike was attending his first protest. Like others interviewed, he felt compelled to do something to support people being impacted. “I’m on [the social media platform] Bluesky, like everyone else. When I see what’s happening, I get emotional.” He said he’s not really impacted because he’s “a White guy.”

Dawn was out with her sister and son protesting on behalf family members who are federal employees. “I’m a registered Republican, but Independent-minded. They are breaking laws, Constitutional Laws.” Dressed as a green M&M to “bring joy and fun to the protest and as a nod to the inflatable green frog” [which has become a sign of resistance stemming from the wide use of inflatables, particularly frogs, in Portland, Oregon], she carried a basket of candy for rallygoers to enjoy.

Also among the 600 or so protesters was **Raul Midon**, a North Laurel resident and Grammy-nominated singer, songwriter, and musician. He was at the protest because, he said, “When all is said and done, I want to be on the right side of history.”

Jeffrey—a Black, disabled veteran, whose wife was currently deployed, and who was furloughed from his federal job with the Air Force—was attending the protest “for the two of us.”

Sister Mark, a Columbia resident, chose to come to the Laurel event “to help the town. Because small towns have a bigger impact. It’s breadth and depth, you know?”

Bridgett, who was at her second protest, said she was protesting to show that, “we do not approve of all this...what’s going on.” And she said, “[I] feel like I need to do something—continue to do something, like get involved with voter registration.” With her and holding up a sign made by a friend, also smiling and waving at the cars passing by, was **Belvey**. She was unhappy about “how the President is putting unqualified people

in all the jobs where we need government experts—it's like Covid. Covid was the example...I'm done with this. I am against what's going on." Belvey continued, "I'm the first person in my family [to be] born with full voting rights. My father was born in 1945 in Alabama. He did not have voting rights when he was born."

Lynn, born and raised in Laurel but currently living in Columbia, is a veteran protester and came out to protest in Laurel because, she said, "I'm sick of it. I'm pissed off." She planned to also attend the Howard County No Kings 2.0 event in Columbia later that day.

Amy Knox, leader of Laurel Resist, said, "The country belongs to 'We the People,' right? If you think the administration has gone too far, this is the place for you."

Christine and her adult daughter, **Alison**, both first-time protesters, came to the Columbia sign-waving protest at the intersection of Broken Land Parkway and Governor Warfield Parkway. Christine said, "After seeing and hearing of the great turnout for the first rally in June, I decided to attend in October and was encouraged by my friends. We met [up] as a group, which helped to build a feeling of camaraderie." Her impressions of the protest? She said, with a laugh, "I will definitely have to make a better sign for the next event! The sheer number of people, with their signs and flags, was very uplifting. There was such a positive vibe." She said she plans to participate in future events, "with much improved props [and] hopefully with [all of] my adult children."

The We Are America March

During a lunch stop at Lake Elkhorn in Columbia, several of the "We Are America" marchers—who walked from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. in September—told us why they joined the walk, what it meant to them, and what they hoped would be achieved.

A woman named **Toni**, from Seattle, used all her vacation hours to join the march because of her "alarm" over things that are dividing the country. "I saw police brutality as a kid. I saw race riots, assassinations. We've come so far and now we're back at square one. I saw an article about this march, and I thought, 'It's time to get up and get out again.'" Toni was marching with a stress fracture, incurred early on the journey; she said she walks for a while, then rides in one of the accompanying vans for a while, but she had no plans to quit. She praised the organizers. "They have worked tirelessly to keep us safe and keep us fed." She said she was making friends among the marchers, and had found several examples of the "six degrees of separation" phenomenon. She also was starting to feel a reawakening of the faith she was brought up in. "For years, I shut all of that out. But I've met so many people of faith on this journey—generous people, from churches, opening their homes to total strangers—and things make so much more sense now."

Among the marchers who heeded the call was a **mother-and-son** duo from the mid-West, ages 80 and 40, respectively, who wanted to remain anonymous. She wanted to do the march as soon as she heard about it, and began doing daily exercises to build strength and

endurance. Inspired by his mother, the son went on a diet to lose weight so that he, too, would be healthier for the march.

Jim, from New Jersey, was wearing a Coast Guard hat. He said he had served many years in the Coast Guard reserve. "I'm walking because I believe in the rule of law and due process—neither of which is happening in our country right now. The President is violating the law and ignoring policies." Acknowledging the country's deep divides along political lines, Jim expressed hope that the march could influence "people in the middle" because "it's all we can do between now and [the 2028 election]."

Carly from Philadelphia had lived abroad in London and Dubai for several years, and said that she was "watching from afar" as politics in the United States took what she thought was a dangerous turn. "I felt disconnected and powerless to do anything other than call my representatives." Once back in Philadelphia, though, she "found ways to join the fight." She said she realized that the only way to change things back would be for "micro-level" organizers to step up. Since she was between jobs, childfree, and with good insurance through her husband, she felt "a responsibility to be on the front line of things," so she became a full-time activist. "I feel like I'm walking in solidarity with [the other marchers], walking side-by-side with people of like mind."

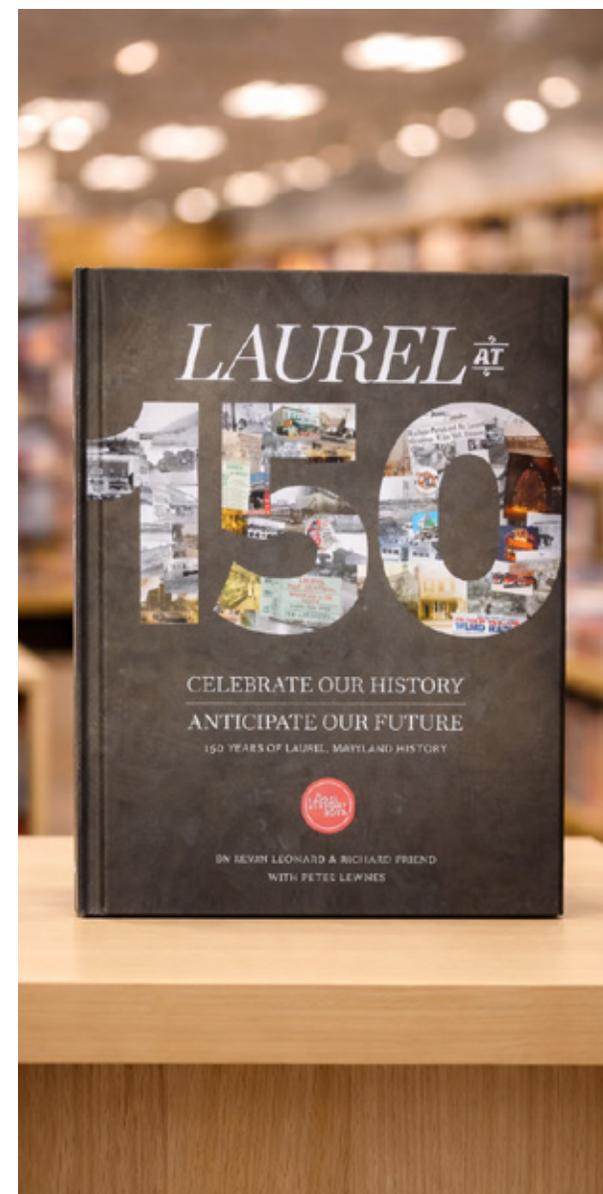
A local man, **Jacob**, from Howard County, said he was marching "because since the 2024 election, things are objectively awful." Alongside his sister and her husband, Jacob had joined the marchers for the leg between Columbia and Laurel. He said that he had been protesting in Washington, D.C. at earlier rallies, but "I no longer feel safe there."

As the lunch break ended, co-founder **Maggie** picked up a bullhorn and welcomed the day marchers to the group. She went over some of the ground rules, most of which focused on safety: medics with backpacks and security personnel were wearing neon-colored vests; group leaders holding poles with orange flags would be at the front and back of the group; a van was available if anyone needed to stop walking. Above all, she said, "We are a peaceful community march. We keep each other safe. Stay aware of what's happening around you."

A few hours later, a group of Laurel Resist members awaited the marchers' arrival, huddled under a shelter at McCullough Field along Montgomery Street to escape the drizzle. Among them was a senior citizen named **Toni**, who said she had joined in many protests over the years, starting in college. "One that comes to mind is the 99-percenters who marched from New York to D.C. during the Occupy Wall Street protests," she said. "I was very inspired by those marchers, and so when they got to Maryland, I clocked out of work and left for the day. People asked me why I was leaving, which wasn't like me, and I said 'I have to go show my support!' So I drove down Route 1 until I saw them in Elkridge, and I got out to cheer them on."

Toni continued, "People need to get involved. People have all kinds of excuses why they don't. But look at me! I'm out here in the rain, and I'm no spring chicken."

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Winifred Matronia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

where did she go? How did she disappear? Why has her body never been located?

Mystery Man

Despite the redactions in the police reports, identifying the man from Winifred's class reunion wasn't difficult. In one instance, the black box used to cover his name didn't fully obscure it; it afforded just enough detail to show the number of characters in his first and last names, as well as a hint to key letterforms including straight and rounded strokes. Using her 1961 Bladensburg High School yearbook, I combed through the seniors section and narrowed down to two possible names which fit the criteria. A quick search revealed that one of them—just like the suspect—had passed away in February 2011.

As he was never charged with a crime, I'm not going to name him here. What little I've found about him thus far shows that he was a career Navy man who'd served two tours in Vietnam, and at the time of his death he'd been married for 39 years. I also don't yet know the circumstances of his death, but he was only 68 years old. Curiously, his wife died at age 62 less than four months before he passed away. Both are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Whatever connection he may have had with Winifred's disappearance is likely buried, as well.

Another Winifred Matronia?

The name "Winifred Matronia" appears in the November 12, 1980 issue of the *Florida Today* newspaper. It's a story as odd and memorable as this one, but it's not the same person—it was her mother.

The elder Winifred was 64 years old at the time and not only survived what was described as a catastrophic accident in which the 1951 Studebaker truck she was driving "flipped end over end several times, landed upside down, and caught fire," she was unscathed. The good samaritan who pulled her from the truck before the flames could reach her even had to physically restrain her from running back to the burning truck. "She was having a fit," he said. "She wanted to go back and get her purse."

Winifred's mother eventually passed away in 1987, and her father, John, a decade later. They're buried at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

Winifred's disappearance in 2000 came just over three years after the February 1997 death of her father, and her parents' connection to Florida could explain the belief that she may have been planning to travel there. Of course, it doesn't explain why she may have chosen to leave everything behind.

So Many Questions

So, what could have happened to Winifred Matronia? Did she make a conscious decision to disappear? And if so, why?

In the pre-9/11 era, before airport security was exponentially increased, it was certainly easier to do so. She could presumably have taken a taxi to the airport and paid cash for a one-way ticket somewhere to start

a new life anonymously. The \$124,000 retirement package she had at the time was equivalent to \$233,293 in today's economy. Assuming she had ample cash on hand, it's possible that she could have voluntarily left. But according to her relatives, it would have been very much out of character. Her bank and credit card accounts were also reportedly untouched, which makes it less likely that she could have pocketed enough cash to fund and sustain a new identity.

Also, did she still even have a substantial nest egg? Her relatives claimed that the man from her class reunion had "convinced her to invest the bulk of her retirement money in a computer company which he owned."

Did this man kill Winifred? And if so, for what reason? Did things go badly after she invested? Was there more to their relationship that perhaps threatened his marriage? We can only speculate.

I keep going back to the last reported sighting of Winifred—her trip to the Laurel Police Department to complain about that "suspicious" Christmas card. Something about that just seems abnormal. It suggests to me a degree of paranoia—it's very unusual to go to the police because you received a Christmas card from someone you didn't recognize. I'm not judging—just observing. It strikes me as a possible sign of a mental health issue that went unnoticed.

How she disappeared is only part of the question; the bigger question is where is she *now*? If she's alive, she would be 81 years old. If she's dead—and authorities did declare her legally deceased in 2012—why hasn't her body been found?

In 2009, her dental records were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), a national centralized database for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases. NamUs helps investigators match long-term missing persons with unidentified remains to resolve cases and bring resolution to families. Of the many Jane Doe victims that have been recovered, none match Winifred.

Does the Building Hold the Answer?

Whether she was killed, took her own life, died by accident, or from natural causes, the idea of Winifred just having vanished is what's most unsettling about this case.

The recent news about the rodent infestation at the Avondale apartments likely has no bearing on this at all, but I can't help being reminded of the disturbing story of Elisa Lam from a few years ago.

Elisa was a young Canadian tourist staying at the former Cecil Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. She had gone missing on February 8, 2013, and in an effort to locate her, police released security camera footage from a hotel elevator which showed her behaving erratically—appearing to be hiding from an unseen pursuer while making unusual body movements. It's easily one of the most disturbing pieces of video footage you'll see, especially with it being the last known sighting of the missing woman.



RICHARD FRIEND



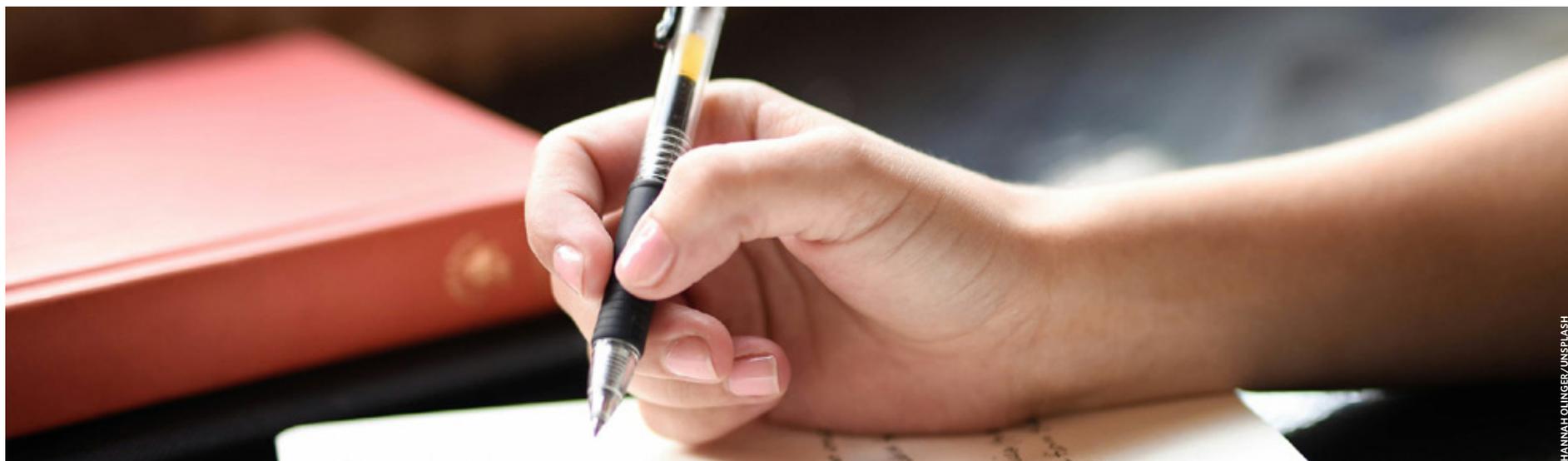
The Avondale apartment where Winifred Matronia was last known to reside 25 years ago as it appears today.

Later that week, hotel guests began complaining about a drop in water pressure, as well as the water being discolored and having an unusual taste. On February 19, a hotel maintenance worker made the grisly discovery—Elisa's body was found floating in one of the 1,000-gallon water tanks on the roof of the hotel. It was later determined that Lam, who suffered from bipolar disorder and had skipped her medication, had somehow crawled into the tank herself, where she accidentally drowned. The case was the subject of the 2021 Netflix documentary series, *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*.

Again, it's highly doubtful that a current rodent problem would be indicative of the presence of a dead body from a quarter of a century ago. But it does beg the question of just how thoroughly the sprawling Avondale high rise has been checked over these years—in all the nooks and crannies, behind the walls, in the elevator shafts... It's a disturbing thought, but what if Winifred Matronia never actually left the building after all?

==

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



HANNAHOLINGER/UNSPASH

Three Writings About Life



BY LENDA DINCER

Spectrum of Life is about having purpose and staying connected. *Thank You* is about being grateful and showing gratitude for our lives and our previous and future generations. (*OSDIA as My Extended Family*: OSDIA stands for the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America, the largest and oldest Italian-American organization in the United States. The questions are how they have become our extended family. The purpose is to generate and maintain conversations about being mindful and grateful in honoring people who matter to us and influence us. This includes the legacies of people who are alive, deceased, and future generations.

Spectrum of Life

*How interesting it is to realize we're all on the same spectrum of life.
Sometimes we're happy. Sometimes we're sad.
At times we laugh. Other times we cry.
Our paths may be clear and peaceful one moment.
Then filled with confusion and chaos the next.
With all of life's challenges—twists and turns, joys and sorrows—a great mystery remains at our core.
There's a deep resonance in us all.
We want so much to be seen and to be heard and yet we're afraid of getting hurt.
"What if nobody listens to me?"
"What if nobody understands me?"
"What if nobody cares...about me?"
We send a message to the universe as we cast a small pebble into a sea of dreams.
We watch as the glimmering lights of hope ripple and sustain our gaze.
And patiently we wait as we're transformed to a hypnotic state.
As the circles travel and expand they take on a life of their own
Reminding us of our destiny.
On that journey, I never left your side.
And you never left mine.*

Thank You

*How do I say "thank you" for everything you've given me?
Your collection of tears have become my souvenirs.
When I look in the mirror, what do I see? I can't see me without seeing you and everyone before you.
I wouldn't be here without you, but I also need to know who will be here after me?
How do I say "thank you?"*

Shall I start at the beginning ... it's usually a good place to start. Where my story ends and where your story begins is unclear. There's no boundaries—there's no limits. There is courage. It starts with a feeling, at first we can't quite put it into words. All we know is there's a shift happening inside of us. We feel awake. Afterwards we're not the same.

From my past, to now, and to my future I am proud to honor you and everyone before you who dreamed big and never let go of their vision. Who took the risks despite their struggles to achieve insurmountable challenges for a chance for a better life.

For never giving up when the only clear roads looked like more pain and disappointment.

For listening to whispers paving the way only to more unclarity and more uncertainty.

I will proudly share my stories, my hopes, my fears, overcoming obstacles, my dreams, and of course ... my recipes.

This is my gift to you. This is how I will thank you. This is how I will honor your memory and legacy.

Like a symphony without a conductor your courage took flight. In turn, you became my conductor. And because of you, I will soar.

OSDIA As My Extended Family

- A) What do I have now that I did not or could not have before?
- B) What do I want to pass on to my children, grandchildren, and future generations?
- C) What keeps me going and why? This connects to identity, pride, and being proud, gratitude, and legacy.
 - 1) Why is this important?
 - 2) Why does it matter? (This puts a more personal, cultural, historical value, religious/spiritual touch.)
 - 3) What have I lost and / or could lose?
 - 4) What obstacles have I overcome?
 - 5) What have I gained and / or could gain?
 - 6) How do I and / or would I like to envision myself?
 - 7) What can I still have? (all is not lost—what remains? and how can I build on this)?
 - 8) How can I honor people who matter to me? People who are deceased, alive, and future generations?

Laurel resident Lenda Dincer is a social worker with a background in mental health. She has published poems in Brainline Military Magazine about post-traumatic stress disorder and brain injuries.



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Laurel, MD 20725



Celebrating 10 Years of Bringing History to *You!*

LAURELHISTORY.COM



LAURELPARK JANUARY EVENTS 2026



WINTER MEET OPENING WEEKEND

JANUARY 9 & 10 - FIRST RACE 12:00PM

SAT • JAN 17 STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE JENNINGS STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE GEISHA STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE FIRE PLUG STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE WHAT A SUMMER STAKES

SAT • JAN 31 STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE XTRA HEAT STAKES

\$100,000 GUARANTEED

THE SPECTACULAR BID STAKES

 LAURELPARK

2026 CALENDAR GIVEAWAY

JANUARY 9 & 10



FREE!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

ELEANOR ALBERT, STAKES COORDINATOR

P: 800.638.1859 E: ELEANOR.ALBERT@MARYLANDRACING.COM