

# VOICES OF LAUREL



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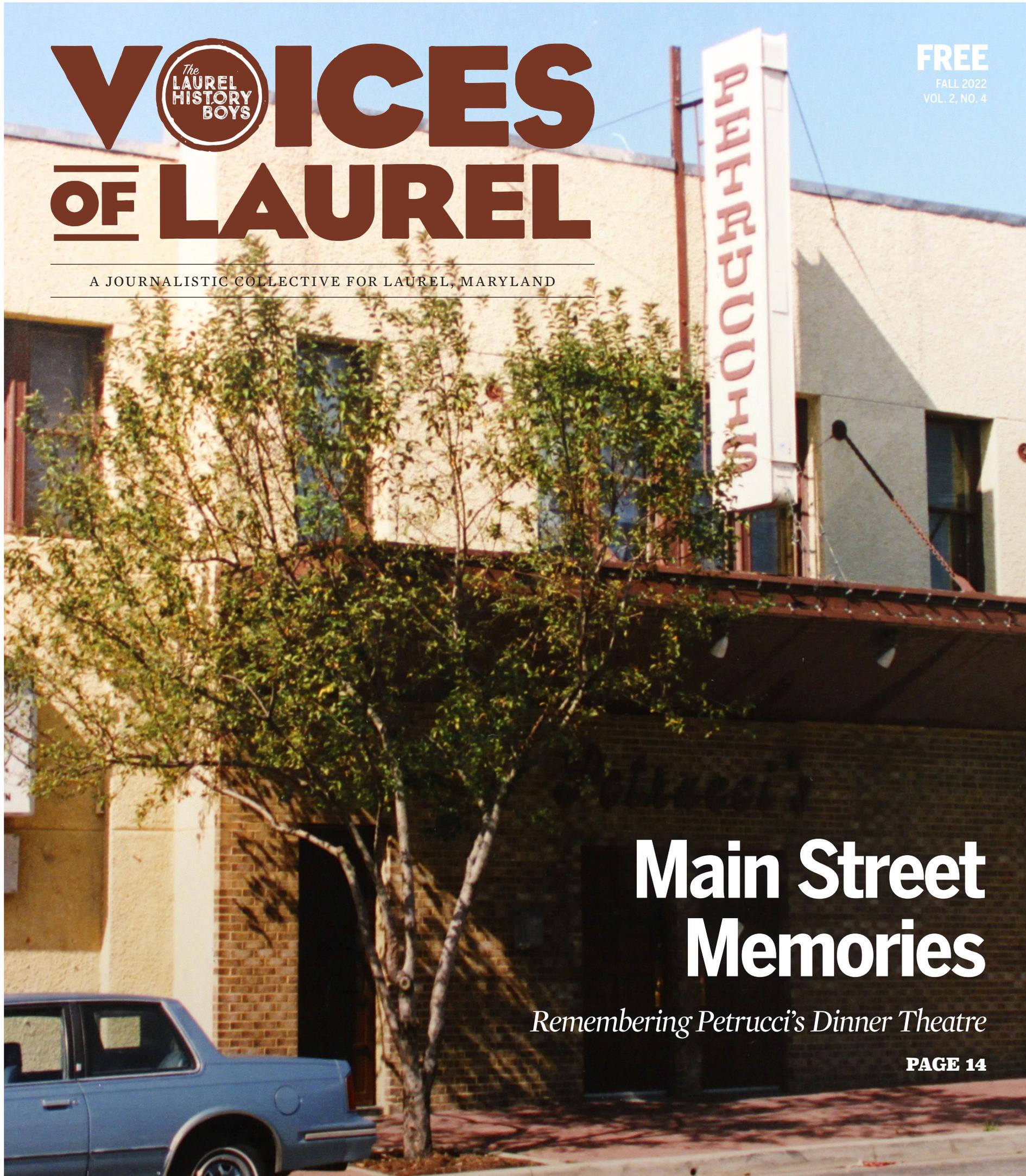
FALL 2022  
VOL. 2, NO. 4

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

## Main Street Memories

*Remembering Petrucci's Dinner Theatre*

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# VOICES OF LAUREL



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FALL 2022 | VOL. 2, NO. 4

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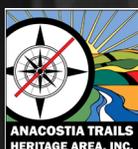
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*Voices of Laurel* is published quarterly by The Laurel History Boys, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization utilizing archival preservation, photography, oral history, and presentations to convey the historical experiences of Laurel, Maryland. *Voices of Laurel* is designed to bring together a diverse group of contributors whose common interest is Laurel—whether it be through history, current events, culture, or nostalgia. Contributors are Laurel residents past and present from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. All submissions are voluntary. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the views or opinions of The Laurel History Boys, Inc. If you would like to be a contributor, please contact [laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com) for information about featuring your business with a tax deductible sponsorship ad in *Voices of Laurel*. Learn more at [laurelhistory.com](http://laurelhistory.com).

## LEAD STORIES

# What's New With The Laurel History Boys

BY KEVIN LEONARD AND RICHARD FRIEND

## Governor's Citation

The Laurel History Boys have received, for a second time, a Governor's Citation from Governor Larry Hogan that recognizes both *Voices of Laurel* and our book, *Laurel at 150*, for our "mission to preserve and share Laurel history." We were previously honored with a Governor's Citation in 2019 upon the publication of *Laurel at 150* for our "endeavor to honor the anniversary of the City of Laurel." We are greatly honored.

## 1982 Stefanie Watson Murder Featured on New Episode of A&E's "Cold Case Files"

Richard was contacted by producers of the show who had seen his 2012 LostLaurel.com story marking the 30th anniversary of the Stefanie Watson murder. Rich's work ended up having a role in the solving of the cold case. In late May, he was invited to film an interview for an upcoming episode and provided archival material about the case to producers. The episode is scheduled to air on Saturday, November 5th at 9pm.

## Grants and Donations

This is the second issue of *Voices of Laurel* that is funded in part by a rocket grant from Anacostia Trails Heritage Area and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. We thank you for the support, and for the wonderful work you do! Visit [anacostiatrials.org](http://anacostiatrials.org) for more information.

Thank you to Scarlett Wirt for her monetary donation to *Voices of Laurel*. We are grateful.

A big thank you to our readers who donate items for our collection and, possibly, the subjects for future articles:

- Janet Marton Willis, a lifelong Laurel resident, sent us a package of items that included the 1925 Laurel High School yearbook and some fantastic programs created by the class of 1925, along with some items from her own class of 1964. She passed on some incredible family history: "We are direct descendants of Issac Burton, the founder of Burtonsville. My Dad, W. Everett Marton, was on the Planning Commission for the Fairlawn housing project. Marton Street is named for him. He was also a member of the Laurel City Council for many years. He graduated from LHS in 1925."
- Rick McCrumb was kind enough to lend us his original 1969 Laurel Pop Festival program so we could scan it for our collection.

## We Met Some Interesting Folks with Stories

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

- Former Laurel Police Chief Roy Gilmore shared a story with us about his experiences in the Vietnam war. He also invited us to attend a reunion of his fellow veterans that were all decorated for their



achievements. Look for the complete story of these heroes in the next issue of *Voices of Laurel*.

## Main Street Festival

Due to inclement weather, the return of the Main Street Festival was postponed to October 15th. Hope to see you at our table in front of Oliver's Old Towne Tavern, where we will have our books, *Laurel at 150* and *Postmark Laurel* for sale. It'll be a great chance to pick them up as early stocking stuffers! Be sure to stop by and say hi!

## Presentations

We're teaming up once again with the Laurel Historical Society for "Takeout Time Machine: The Restaurants of Laurel Past." Hosted by Rich, this fun and engaging presentation will be broadcast live online via Zoom on October 6th at 7PM. Visit [laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://laurelhistoricalsociety.org) for more information. If you miss the live event, a recording of the full presentation will be available later at [laurelhistory.com](http://laurelhistory.com) and on our Facebook page.

Kevin gave a presentation at the Laurel-Beltsville

Senior Activity Center on a 1963 murder that went unsolved for over five decades. "Who Killed Carol Replane" covers the shocking death of a local teacher and the discovery he made in the FBI case files. Visit our website for more info on our free presentations.

## A Day in the Life of a Local Newspaper

Producing *Voices of Laurel* is a labor of love for us, but coordinating stories with writers, editing copy, and designing each issue does require a tremendous amount of time and effort in order to create a quarterly journal that we know Laurel residents enjoy—a publication that is truly filled with interesting local content. And to do it on a shoestring budget with no actual support staff and nearly nonexistent advertising revenue is an even bigger challenge.

We're considering a future story (or possibly a video) that gives you a peek behind the curtain at how an issue of *Voices of Laurel* is made from start to finish. You might be amazed at what it actually takes to create this publication; and more importantly, we hope you'll see how *your* voice could be part of the process. Stay tuned—there's much more to come!

# City Beat

A roundup of local events and announcements, compiled by The Laurel History Boys

## City Hall Joe Robison Update

In January 2021, The Laurel History Boys requested that the Mayor and City Council consider naming the Laurel Municipal Center in honor of former Mayor Joseph R. Robison. We believe the accomplishments and commitment to Laurel displayed by Joe Robison—mayor, city councilman, fire chief, rescue squad, and more—should be honored with his name on City Hall, joining the numerous other city-owned structures named for prominent citizens (see box below). We received a letter in reply from Mayor Moe just three weeks after our first inquiry in 2021. We were pleased and encouraged by the swift reply, especially when we read that the Mayor supported the request. To quote Mayor Moe:

*“I have always been one that believes in the naming of buildings and rooms after those that have given so much to their community and Mayor Robison would fit into that criteria. As one that travelled many miles with Joe, it would be an honor to see action taken by the City Council to make this a reality.”*

In May 2021 we sent another letter to the Mayor and City Council and said, “it appears that in the four months since we heard from Mayor Moe, nothing has happened to make this a reality. The matter has been brought up before the Council but with no discussion or resolution that we are aware of.”

We followed up with a second request directed to Audrey Barnes, who runs the City’s Public Information Office, asking for an update. In our letter we said, “It’s now been almost a year and a half since we have heard anything from the City. We are aware that new regulations were proposed after our request pertaining to the renaming of City structures, but we have heard nothing more about that, either.”

We are still waiting for an answer.

## Current City Structures Named After Prominent People:

Alice B. McCullough Field  
Anderson & Murphy Community Center  
Barkman-Kaiser Public Safety Complex  
Casula Point  
Dr. Bruce Morley Dog Playground  
Duniho-Nigh Community Park  
Fairall Foundry Public Works Complex  
Granville Gude Park & Lakehouse  
Gude Mansion  
Larry T. Smith Memorial Park  
Leo E. Wilson Community Park  
Robert F. Burton Memorial Stage  
Robert J. DiPietro Community Center  
Roland B. Sweitzer Community Park  
Stephen P. Turney Recreation Complex  
Sturgis-Moore Recreation Area

## City Addresses Rent Issue

On Sept. 21, Mayor Moe and the City Council convened a work session to discuss the current rent crisis in Laurel. (See our rent crisis story on page 6.) As Mayor Moe said, this is the first of a series of meetings to address the issue. Look for an update in the next issue of *Voices of Laurel*.

## GoldStars Tribute Wall at American Legion

The City of Laurel is the first city in Maryland to host the GoldStars Tribute Wall. It is the only traveling memorial of its kind that honors the 7,416 fallen heroes of the Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan Wars.

From Sept. 23, to Sept. 25, the Tribute Wall was on display around the clock at American Legion Post 60. It was illuminated for night viewing and safety.

The Wall display is sponsored by American Legion Post 60, the City of Laurel, Sons of American Legion Squadron 60, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 60, and Walk for Vets.

Source: *Business Monthly*

## Pasta Plus Reopens on Limited Basis

The announcement on their website excited long-time customers:

*Dear Pasta Plus Customers,*

*We are excited to announce that we are opening back up on a very limited basis!*

*At this time, we are accepting orders for Pizza, Calzones and Bottled Wine only, with curbside pickup on Wednesdays. All orders must be placed in advance through our web store: <https://pastaplusrestaurant.square.site>.*

*Orders will be processed online and you will have the ability to schedule pickup on Wednesday between 4:00–7:00pm.*

*There are a limited number of orders that will be accepted for each time slot to ensure we are able to serve our customers with our limited capacity.*

*Please note that we do not have the ability to monitor and respond to all email, calls and social media comments. Please contact us via our contact page on our web store website.*

*We deeply appreciate your patience and understanding as we navigate this new process.*

*Best, Pasta Plus Team*

According to co-owner Max Sabatino, the first day’s orders sold out three minutes after the website went live.

Source: [pastaplusrestaurant.com](https://pastaplusrestaurant.com)

## Queen Elizabeth’s Connection to Laurel

In November 1954, Queen Elizabeth II entered her horse “Landau” in the third annual DC International at Laurel. It marked the first time in racing history that the silks of the Royal Family appeared in America. Unfortunately for the Queen, however, Landau finished last.

In the Netflix series, *The Crown*, there is a brief

conversation between the Queen and her horse trainer about accepting the invitation to the Laurel International.

Source: *Laurel at 150*

## Director of Pallotti Arts Academy Named Quarterfinalist for Music Educator Award

A total of 207 music teachers from 180 cities have been announced as quarterfinalists for the 2023 Music Educator Award, presented by the Recording Academy and GRAMMY Museum.

Tony Small, the New Director of the Pallotti Arts Academy and a member of the Laurel Arts Council is among the quarterfinalists.

The Music Educator Award was established to recognize current educators—kindergarten through college, public and private schools—who have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of music education and who demonstrate a commitment to the broader cause of maintaining music education in the schools.

Source: [recordingacademy.com](https://recordingacademy.com)



## Farmers’ Market Lot Improvements

The City of Laurel held its first Sustainable Saturday event on September 10th at the Farmers Market lot at 378 Main Street, where exhibitors displayed a number of eco-friendly programs. Also revealed were some significant upgrades to the site, including a large shade structure and four permanent picnic tables which will benefit the Farmers Market and other City events. The Farmers Market returns in Spring 2023.

Source: City of Laurel website

## Laurel’s First Pride Day

October 8th marks the City’s first ever Pride Day, celebrating the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community. This year’s event will be held at Granville Gude Park on Saturday, October 8, 2022 from 11am–4pm. The festival will include performers, speakers, and vendors.

Source: City of Laurel website

## Take-away Treat Spooktacular

Grab your costume and a bag for goodies and head down to the Robert J. DiPietro Community Center. The City of Laurel Department of Parks and Recreation’s Take-away Treat Spooktacular is back again this year on Friday, October 28th from 6:30–8:30pm.

Source: City of Laurel website

# West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM

## Parks of West Laurel

There are more and more parks all over Laurel these days, providing open space for all kinds of socially distanced recreation. Although the origins of some of their names are perhaps obvious when they are named after a street or neighborhood, some of Laurel's parks are named after individuals who played significant roles in the history of Laurel or an even greater part in the history of Maryland. Here are a few of the parks named after some of those influential people. (I actually knew one of the individuals through his children; another one I never met but know his son and granddaughter well. As you may have guessed, I like talking about my childhood growing up in Laurel.)

### T. Howard Duckett Park—Brooklyn Bridge Road

The T. Howard Duckett Reservoir and dam, also known as the Rocky Gorge Reservoir, are named after Thomas Howard Duckett (1880–1967), who was a prominent attorney in Prince George's County. What did he do that was so significant? He was one of the founding fathers of what is now called the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). In other words, he had the vision and influence to organize the effort to provide consistent, clean water and sanitation for a vast portion of our state. The T. Howard Duckett Park is hard to miss if you are driving on Brooklyn Bridge Rd. It offers open space, ball fields, basketball courts, picnic areas, and playgrounds open to everyone in the community. I cannot count the number of hours I spent watching my son play soccer on the fields there.

### Roland B. Sweitzer Community Park—Old Sandy Spring Rd

This park is named after a longtime Laurel resident and former Prince George's County Police Chief, Roland B. Sweitzer (1919–1992) (see page 24 for his profile). This recreational area is tucked away between an apartment complex and a townhouse development on Old Sandy Spring Rd. It offers public jogging trails, paved paths, a small pond, a tot-lot, and other playground equipment.



Three of Laurel's popular community parks, each named for individuals who played a significant role in Laurel's history. PHOTOS BY RUSS GEIS

### Leo E. Wilson Community Park & Dr. Bruce Morley Dog Park—Van Dusen Rd (at South Arbory)

This park is named after a former mayor of Laurel, Leo Wilson, who served from 1972–1978. He was also the father of three of my school mates growing up. I often walked past their house on my way to school and attended birthday parties there. The dog park that is now included in this recreational area is named after a local veterinarian, Dr. Bruce Morley, whose family also lived in the neighborhood I grew up in. Dr. Morley's

father, Dr. Leeland Curtis "Buzz" Morley, Sr. founded the Rocky Gorge Animal Hospital in 1950. How appropriate to name a dog park after him!

### Blood Drive

November 15, 2022 at the Howard Duckett Rec Center

Sponsored by West Laurel Civic Association

12–5pm.

### Got feedback for me?

How to get in touch with me? Send me an e-mail at [WestLaurelVoices@gmail.com](mailto:WestLaurelVoices@gmail.com), and please call me Ginny!

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



# Laurel Renters Fight Back



BY KEVIN LEONARD AND DIANE MEZZANOTTE

On the Saturday afternoon of the recent Labor Day weekend, while most people were grilling burgers and taking a last dip in the pool, about 30 impassioned citizens gathered in a meeting room at the Laurel Boys and Girls Club. Among the group were community leaders and elected officials from the City, County, and State levels; leaders from a non-profit organization; members of the press; and many tenants of Laurel-area apartments.

They were all there to address an issue that could literally render many of them homeless in the coming months: unprecedented rent increases for apartment tenants in the Laurel area. For over two hours attendees shared their stories, offered ideas, identified hurdles, and strategized their next moves in what has become a bona fide activist movement under the name of the Laurel Housing Justice Association.

## Several Factors Led to Rent Increases

Over the past two years—coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic—rental rates have risen sharply. In addition to the pandemic and its impact on jobs and the economy, other contributing factors include a red-hot home sales market that has seen house prices rise to

never-before-seen heights, demand for home sales that routinely drives offers up beyond asking prices, and stagnant wages.

This housing market bubble had a spillover effect on rent prices. According to the *Washington Post*, “Rents for apartments and single-family homes rose approximately 12 percent during the first quarter of 2022 compared with the first quarter of 2021. In some markets, rents rose by as much as 42 percent.”

And not everyone has been affected equally: “Rising rent prices have been particularly burdensome for Black and Hispanic low-income earners,” according to *Afro News*.

According to Laurel City Councilman Martin Mitchell, “There is no law at the State or City level that caps rent increases.”

Earlier this year, Laurel saw two instances of higher rent issues—independent of each other—that attracted an unusual amount of media attention and sparked a wave of grass-roots activism led by residents and assisted by community activist group CASA and two members of the Laurel City Council. The controversies continue for these constantly evolving stories, but the following summarizes the situation as of late September.

## Westgate Tenants’ Rent Strike Gains Short-Term Compromise

Westgate Apartments on Route 198 (formerly known as Gorman Manor) was acquired by Schweb Partners LLC, a New Jersey-based developer, this past February. Schweb owns and manages numerous apartment complexes in the Baltimore/Washington region, and a Google search revealed dozens of complaints about the company.

After taking over at Westgate, Schweb raised rents. While that isn’t unusual after an ownership change, residents were shocked at how much the rent was increased, with some saying their rent had risen \$300 or \$400 per month in less than two years. Furthermore, it wasn’t clear why such high increases were needed—residents saw no improvements other than some external cosmetic repairs and landscaping upgrades, but no repairs or upgrades to their units. It also became clear that the increase percentage varied from unit to unit. “The rent increases are unequivocally irregular,” one tenant told WUSA9, claiming that after complaining to management her \$120-per-month increase was reduced to \$75.

On top of the rent increase, Schweb also instituted a \$45 monthly water fee, parking fee for residents (\$10

(Opposite): Patuxent Place residents, along with representatives from CASA and Laurel City Council Members Martin Mitchell and Carl DeWalt, meet with Laurel24 owner Cameron Manesh after being notified that their rent would increase between \$625 and \$1,000 per month. KEVIN LEONARD

per month per parking spot), as well as a hefty \$65-per-space AND \$5-per-day guest parking fee. To add insult to injury, the new owners set a 6:00 curfew for parking and then stepped-up enforcement with regular towing, which some residents described as “predatory”: tow trucks would literally wait along the side of the lot until 6:01 and start towing cars away, they claimed.

Residents also alleged that management recycled used appliances from past tenants, leading to leaks and other issues, and that they ignored constant complaints of mold, cockroaches, and rodents.

After months of getting no response from Schweb, and frustrated that their local office manager (who reportedly had never even met the new owner) also was getting no response, residents went on the offensive. With support from CASA of Maryland (a nonprofit group that advocates for immigrants) and Laurel City Councilmen Mitchell and Carl DeWalt, Westgate residents called for a rent strike in August. According to the *Post*, “about 80 tenants signed a petition not to pay” their August rent. The residents staged rallies and protests against Schweb and received significant exposure on local television news and social media.

Even though Westgate is technically not within Laurel’s City limits, Mitchell and DeWalt felt it was necessary to support these Laurel residents.

Ultimately, after the residents followed through on their rent strike and media coverage increased, Schweb finally broke its silence and agreed to a series of meetings with tenants. After the first meeting in July, though, the results were disappointing. A CASA organizer who attended the meeting told WUSA9, “We did not get the results we were looking for.” Schweb did not agree to withhold evictions until an agreement was made.

CASA organizer Jorge Benitez-Perez had somewhat better news to report to attendees of the early September LGBC meeting. Schweb had agreed to a monthly discount of \$50 to \$100 per unit for one year. At the same time, however, there were rumblings that the owners might take the tenants to court in November, presumably over their rent strike.

As for the parking situation, the fees were not changed but the owners agreed to a later curfew of 10:00 p.m. Residents who couldn’t afford to buy guest parking passes were advised to park in nearby public parking areas maintained by the City of Laurel—which, as some tenants pointed out, meant that the Westgate parking situation was having a spillover effect on the city as a whole.

### Senior Apartments, Patuxent Place Face Similar Woes from Local Laurel24 Owner

Meanwhile, over the last couple of years, a small company named Laurel24 has been buying apartment buildings around town. Laurel24 is one of many businesses owned by entrepreneur Cameron Manesh. At a meeting with residents in July that was attended by *Voices of Laurel*, Manesh said that Laurel24 owns

other apartment buildings in Laurel in addition to the sprawling Patuxent Place combination of retail establishments and 79 residential apartments.

The first trouble for Manesh surfaced two days after Christmas last year, when notices were left in the doors of the apartment building at 332 11th Street, at the triangular corner of 11th Street and Sandy Spring Road (a few doors down from the old Fyffe’s Service Center). Manesh had recently bought the building and notified the tenants of his intention to renovate the apartments. The notice stated that if tenants stayed after the renovation, the rent would increase from \$865 to \$1,600 a month. If they couldn’t pay the increased rent, they had 60 days from Dec. 27, 2021 to vacate.

The *Washington Post* picked up the story once it was learned that many of the residents were elderly and had lived in the building for decades.

“Humiliating,” resident Joram Calderon, 74, told the *Post*, which reported that Calderon had lived in the building for 26 years. Also affected was Rose Thompson, 64, a 23-year resident.

Manesh met with the five remaining residents, along with Mitchell, DeWalt, and representatives from CASA and Prince George’s County Councilman Tom Dernoga, in February, when he offered to lower the rent to \$1,350, but “it was still out of reach for the five senior” residents, according to the *Post*. He also offered \$1,000 to any resident who vacated.

Led by Mitchell’s intensive lobbying and behind-the-scenes work, Mayor Moe signed off for the City to pay \$350 per month for each resident, making their rent \$1,000 on a one-year lease effective February 2022. But the residents will be back to square one next February, when the City funds dry up and the rents will increase.

The money came from the American Rescue Plan Act, a \$12.4 million grant, which the City has used for other rent relief purposes with organizations such as LARS. To keep the five elderly tenants in their homes, only about \$21,000 was necessary from the ARPA grant.

“I don’t want anybody to lose their home,” Manesh told the *Post*. But he also admitted that “I have a waiting list for people willing to pay \$1,600 or \$1,700 for these units, but at some point you have to make a moral decision.”

It’s unknown if the City will extend the grant to the tenants or if they will be evicted next February.

But that was just the beginning of Manesh’s troubles with his Laurel tenants. After purchasing Patuxent Place, the same notice went out to those residents: rents are increased and the units would be renovated. Manesh claimed that only tenants who requested it would have their unit renovated, at which time the rent would be increased a second time.

On social media and in the hallways, residents began to compare notes and decided to take a stand. Once again, support to the tenants came from CASA, Mitchell, DeWalt, and Dernoga. This time, however, Maryland State Delegate Mary Lehman also got involved. (Both Lehman and Dernoga are Laurel residents.)

*Voices of Laurel* met with a few Patuxent Place tenants to hear their complaints. They took exception to Manesh’s claims that he was in regular communication with tenants. They said the

communication problem was exacerbated by not having a property manager on site, and that the property manager they did have never returned phone calls.

### Parking Lot Negotiations

In a series of meetings this summer with Patuxent Place tenants (which usually took place in the parking lot behind Oliver’s Old Towne Tavern), Manesh faced a larger and more militant group than on 11th Street. At the meeting *Voices of Laurel* attended, while the group of two dozen people waited for Manesh, stories were offered about the various rent increases (anywhere from \$625 to \$1,000 a month, depending on the size of the apartment); the fact that the previous owner (who sold to Manesh) never raised the rent during the Covid-19 pandemic; and the length of time residents had lived at Patuxent Place—the longest at the meeting was a 19-year resident.

When he arrived, Manesh addressed the group by explaining his rationale for increasing rents—he kept referring to “the HUD market value” as justification—and offered a 20% increase of rental rates across the board for one year, which was lower than the rate demanded in the notice. But he wouldn’t answer what the increase would be after the first year. At one point, he complained to the residents that he had a \$20 million loan to pay off. But the tenants were in no mood to feel sorry for him.

“That’s not our problem,” a resident replied, which led to many more residents voicing complaints.

Feeling the tension mounting between Manesh and the tenants, Mitchell suggested that the two sides separate and discuss what could be done. Mitchell, DeWalt, Mary Cook (community liaison from Dernoga’s office), property manager Tonia Martin, and Bob Moorman (listed as an “investment associate” on Laurel24’s website) met with Manesh, while Benitez-Perez from CASA stayed with the tenants.

When the two sides reconvened, Manesh offered to lower his rate increase to 13.5 percent, along with a promise to hire more staff and move his property manager on-site to facilitate communications.

“I will listen” to the tenants, he said, and added that he “is willing to be flexible.”

The tenants agreed with the 13.5% increase and Manesh announced that the group would continue to meet to hammer out an agreement.

At the end of the meeting, Bob Moorman told *Voices of Laurel* that “I hope your narrative will convey Cameron’s good heart. His #1 goal is bringing the community together.”

### Laurel Tenants Form Activist Group, Drawing Widespread Attention and Support

As the summer went on, it started to become clear to the tenant groups in the various negotiations that their efforts needed to be centralized and made more official. This led to that Labor Day weekend meeting at the LGBC, led by Benitez-Perez, who declared it to be the inaugural meeting of the new Laurel Housing Justice Association.

Many of the meeting participants were known to

# Salute! Antonio Gatto Lodge



BY FRANK RAGONE

The Antonio Gatto Lodge (AGL) has a very long history in Laurel dating back to 1980. It's just one of more than 100 Lodges of the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America (OSDIA) and 12 in Maryland. Its members cherish the importance of culture, tradition, and the contributions of shared ancestry. OSDIA started in 1905 with an overarching mission to promote culture and heritage through several branches. The foundation promotes philanthropic efforts and, to date, they've raised and given more than \$164 million to scholarships, medical research, cultural preservation, disaster relief, and other similar causes. The Commission for Social Justice helps to fight racism, prejudice, and the stereotyping of all races, religions, and cultures.

Let's go back in time to the very first meeting of the yet unnamed Lodge. It was held on February 21, 1980 at the Laurel City Hall and, according to Lodge records, Mayor Robert J. DiPietro initiated it. The first officers were installed, including the first President, Richard S. "Dick" Berardino. A few months later, the first full Membership Meeting was held on April 9, 1980, at Petrucci's Dinner Theatre, hosted by Carlo Petrucci with members that included Robert DiPietro and Frank Casula, both former Mayors of Laurel and Italian Americans. The State President was in attendance to grant the Charter, and the name, "Antonio Gatto Lodge #2459" was approved. The new Lodge of the Sons and Daughters of Italy set sail on the long journey ahead.



## Who was Antonio Gatto?

One of four children born to Guisepe and Salomone Cologera Gatto, he was born in Delia, Caltanissetta, Italy in Sicily on June 11, 1930.

As a young man working in his father's restaurant during WW II, Antonio would

hear American soldiers talking about their country and was fascinated. He began to make plans to leave for America someday. Then, at the age of 14, he started an



(Top): Lodge members prepare delicious Italian sausage and pepper subs at the 2004 Montpelier Festival. (Above): The first full Membership Meeting is held at Petrucci's Diner Theatre on April 9, 1980, where the Charter was granted and the name "Antonio Gatto Lodge #2459" was approved. (Right): Carlo Petrucci and Dick Berardino during the installation of officers. (Opposite): The Lodge is also a regular attendant of the Main Street Festival, so be sure to look for them this October 15th!

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANK RAGONE

apprenticeship with his older brother, Angelo, a tailor in Torino. He lived, studied, and worked with his brother for 14 years, eventually graduating from the Prima Scuola Italiana Da Taglio. In 1958, he returned to Sicily and, later that year, on September 6, he married Melina.

On July 21, 1964, Tony's dream of coming to America became a reality. In 1968, Tony and Melina and their three children moved to Laurel. He became a successful businessman, and opened a men's wear store, complete with a custom tailor shop on Main Street.

The young man with a dream had become a success



through hard work and the determination to succeed. He was a dedicated family man, who was also active in his church and community. On June 4, 1978, a tragic heart attack took Antonio from us.

He possessed those qualities that make Italian immigrants, and all immigrants, special. Determination, dedication, pride, and hard work in all that he did. It was because of these qualities that members chose to name the Lodge after him.

Today the Lodge is one of the largest and most active in the organization, with more than 100 members.



They can be seen at festivals, special functions, and dinners raising funds for numerous charities and to support functions, including the Montpelier Festival; the Main Street Festival; Italian Festivals throughout Maryland; spaghetti, baked ziti, and lasagna dinners; yard sales; raffles; bake sales; celebrations; and dances. These events greatly enhance members' lives and the community, and promote comradery.

The Lodge also helps young student scholars. Since 1981 the Antonio Gatto Lodge Scholarship Fund has assisted 67 high school students with more than \$50,000. They've also generously supported numerous charities, including St. Mary's Church and school and Pallotti High School, Alzheimer's, and Cooley's Anemia, and have sent flowers to sick members as well as the families of the deceased. Over the years the choir has enriched many with their vocal talents. They've performed at Italian Festivals, meetings, and an annual Italian Mass. Members also enjoy the recent addition of a Bocce court.

Ask some current members what the Lodge means to them, and you'll hear stories filled with pride, comradery, and memories of good times. The monthly meetings include dinners that are reminiscent of a large family get-together with great food, complete with live entertainment, or some interesting information from local speakers about history or a topic of interest.

Interested in learning more or becoming a member? You don't need to be of Italian heritage! Visit their Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/antoniogattolodge](http://www.facebook.com/antoniogattolodge), the national page at [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org), state page at [www.osiamd.org](http://www.osiamd.org) or email at [aglcouncil@paisantime.com](mailto:aglcouncil@paisantime.com).

# Why I Live in Laurel



BY LENDA DINCER

**I**t's comforting to know we have a sense of belonging and a place to call home. However, when there's a sudden spike in our rent, it threatens our security.

For a variety of reasons, there will always be people who will capitalize on problems, tragedies, and catastrophes. During these same times, there will also be people who will do just the opposite and help, support, and join you in your cause.

In an interview with one of the residents of Patuxent Place apartments, she expressed her thoughts and concerns, as well as her appreciation regarding her community.

## Reasons for living in or wanting to move out of Laurel:

I grew up in the suburbs of Harrisburg, PA and Laurel reminds me of home. I love the convenience of having all my favorite stores close and with parking. I do not have to drive around town to go to Walmart or Target or even my favorite grocery store. In Laurel, you can find whatever you want and close by - from grocery stores to shopping and movies even gyms and eateries. Laurel has it all! You are literally in the middle of Baltimore and Washington, DC, so when you want a city feel you are only 20 miles away.

**Possible Reasons for Moving Out:** Rental and housing prices in Laurel are almost as much as living closer to the city. People live further out, such as Laurel, for a reason. Price is a big one, and peace and quiet are another. When a 1-bedroom efficiency goes for \$2150 in Laurel, Maryland, you have to ask why? This is not city, not even close. Being pushed out due to price is a big reason to move. If I am going to pay further-in-city prices then I should move in closer?

## What were your expectations and experiences?

I have had both good and bad experiences in Laurel, but that is wherever you go.

**Experiences:** Seventeen years ago, my rental condo near Laurel Lakes was broken into on a holiday weekend when I was out of town. Things that can never be replaced were stolen from me. Fast forward to now and my landlord wants to now charge \$2K for a 1 bedroom. For that, I have looked to buy and the condos in my price range are smaller than my 1-bedroom apartment, so that makes no sense.

**Expectations:** My expectation for living in Laurel was to get more "bang for my buck" in terms of rental or even purchasing power because it is further out. Up until now, that has been the case but that seems to be changing and quickly!

**Is it or was it worth the trade off?** Not sure. The trade-off for me is the distance Laurel has to my friends, job, and city life. I do like Laurel and not

being in the thick of the Washington, DC city, but the trade-off is friends less likely to drive to visit or me to drive to visit them.

## What do you like and dislike about living in Laurel?

**LIKE:** I like the small distance between shops, eateries, movies, or the gym. Everything I need is in one town, one location. I don't have to drive to a different city to go to Walmart or Target or the gym. I love that Laurel has a pool and safe parks to explore and walk. I love my unique apartment. I love that the MARC train is here and easily accessible.

**DISLIKE:** Distance can sometimes be a little far when I want to visit a friend on the other side of PG County. Also, dislike that prices are going up like this is closer to DC when it's not.

**What changes would you like to see?** Affordable housing to purchase (new condos here start at \$400K plus condo fees, older condos in the high \$200K with condo fees).

**What have you tried?** I've tried to buy a house in Laurel off and on for 10 years with no luck. I've participated in many Laurel festivities and activities over the years (Main Street, fireworks). I use the MARC train, Amish Market, eateries, shops, Laurel Town Center, Laurel Mall (when it was open).

## What kind of community are you looking for?

Safe, clean, affordable, diverse, community-oriented, city officials that care. Even though one apartment of mine was broken into (in Laurel), I did not give up on the area but with these recent rent spikes, I may need to. Per the tenant meeting you were at last week it seems like my apartment complex came to an agreement on a 13.5% increase, which is still high but better than what it was. It is a short-term solution as I fear he will not be so generous next year. I am giving myself one year, and in that year I will need to look for a home hopefully in Laurel but maybe not.

I appreciate the time and input from the residents and management at Patuxent Place Apartments. Also, I want to acknowledge and personally thank our elected officials for their support and providing us with a platform to help heighten community awareness.

We all need to keep talking. We're stronger together.

*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.*

# Main Street Festival

*Better Late Than Never!*



BY CHARLES H. CLYBURN



*The first Main Street Festival, May 16, 1981.*

JOHN FLOYD/LAUREL HISTORY BOYS COLLECTION

One of Laurel's most anticipated events is back for its 41st year. The Main Street Festival offers many vendors, huge variety of food, and activities, e.g., face painting.

A parade kicked the festival off with youth sports teams, marching bands, martial arts groups, pom-pom teams, and, at the end of the parade, the Laurel Fire Department trucks.

Musical performers from the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia—for those readers unfamiliar with the local jargon) keep your feet tapping to the beat while other vendors feed your appetites.

One of the popular delicacies are the funnel cakes for which festival-goers come from far and wide to feast on, maybe because they only appear at outdoor fairs and festivals.

"The festival is sponsored by the Laurel Board of Trade in conjunction with the City of Laurel with its many departments (Police, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, to name a few) and has usually been held on the second Saturday in May. The Covid epidemic caused cancellation of the festival in 2020 and 2021. Weather caused a change in timing for the 2022 date and had to be changed to Saturday, October 15th this year," according to Maureen Rogers, Administrative

Coordinator, and Jim Cross, Chairman of the Laurel Board of Trade.

They went on to say that "over 156 vendors have expressed interest in participating this year, as well as new businesses from established Main Street locations."

The festival route has always been the same: Sixth Street to Main Street, approximately three quarters of a mile. Vehicular traffic is banned from that stretch during the festival.

The change for this year's event caused local residents to comment to this column:

A local senior citizen named Sara, stated "the change may bump into traditional Oktoberfest activities. I guess it was necessary but I would not want to see it become a permanent change. I will still participate this year."

Maya, a senior at Eleanor Roosevelt High, was "surprised at the change in date because the weather could cause vendor offerings, *i.e.*, ice cream and cool drinks, to suffer because they are usually purchased more in the warmer weather."

Sabrina, a Howard County housewife, is glad to know the festival is still on and not cancelled. "I love my funnel cakes and can't get them until the Main Street festival. I will be interested in seeing how it's

going to work in the fall weather."

Phyllis, a former Laurel resident, has been coming to the festival every year for the last seven years with her grandchildren, who "like to ride the ponies and taste the offerings of the food trucks." She and her adult daughter "enjoy the community involvement of sports teams, the parade, and the variety of foods."

Angel, a social worker with the University of Maryland, commented "It is a good idea for local businesses and for folks who look forward to the festival no matter the date. Sure, there will be a change in weather but I don't think it will stop folks from coming."

Ms. Jessie, a Selborne House resident, stated "My disappointment upon learning about the date change was short-lived. Maybe the cooler weather will bring more people out for the festival. I am looking forward to participating with family members whom I have invited from out of town."

==

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

## COMMUNITY

# Old Laurel Cinema Now a House of Horror



BY KEVIN LEONARD

In 1966, the Laurel Shopping Center doubled in size, adding a new “L” shaped configuration of storefronts that connected the (previously stand-alone) Hecht Co. with the original shopping center at the Albee Shoes corner. The center was now a gigantic U-shaped shopping center that included Marianne, Webster Men’s Wear, Suburban Music, Thom McAnn, Hot Shoppes, and, at the corner of the new “L,” the Laurel Cinema.

The only other theater in operation at the time was the Laurel Theater on Main Street, which had been in business since 1929. Newspaper ads for the new theater took direct aim at the antiquated Laurel Theater (“A New Concept for Motion Picture Viewing”) and provided a long list of its modern advantages, such as “Babysitting service,” “1000 living room comfort upholstered chairs,” and “Luxury beyond compare.” It was glitzy, modern, and new. This was the beginning of the end of the Laurel Theater as a movie house.

In 1969, Columbia Pictures held the world premiere of the movie *Pendulum*, starring George Peppard and Jean Seberg at the Laurel Cinema. The movie was filmed in Washington, D.C., and the premiere was held as a fundraiser for a PG County Police Department program called “Crime Check.”

But theaters began to sprout all over the Washington/Baltimore area, including the Town Center Twins on Laurel-Bowie Road, increasing movie choices by the dozens. Multiple screens and the latest sound system technology became the standard. Like the Laurel Theater before it, the Laurel Cinema became a dinosaur—obsolete and dated. In 1975, the owners renovated the theater into a twin-screen offering, but that only delayed the inevitable. After changing owners and more renovations, the Laurel Cinema closed for good in 2011.

## New Life for the Theater

In 2014, Richard Blankenship took over the former theater, which had sat empty for three years, to build a haunted house

attraction.

“I’ve always been a big haunt fanatic,” he told the *Laurel Leader* in 2014.

His attraction, called Laurel’s House of Horror, was an instant hit, starting with over 100 customers the first night it opened in 2014, and has been open every year for the Halloween season since (except for 2020 because of the pandemic).

According to current manager Anthony Casalotti, the attraction averaged around 13,000 customers each year up until the closure in 2020, and rebounded spectacularly last year with over 24,000 customers. Casalotti mentioned that, should attendance keep growing, the owner may expand the footprint into the empty storefront next door, previously a bar.

I was given a tour of the premises by Matt Tillett, a lighting designer, creative collaborator, and performer in the House of Horrors (he’s the chain saw man). While we inspected the on-going construction of the sets for the upcoming season, auditions were being held in the lobby for performers. Tillett said they were looking for about 50 actors for the upcoming season.

Much of the set inside the House of Horror changes each season, both to keep things fresh and interesting for repeat customers, and to repair damage caused by frightened customers spooked throughout the House. Tillett stressed that staff inspects and repairs any damage during the season to keep the dark interior safe for the patrons.

He also stressed that they have abundant security on the premises during the Halloween season. Their website states, “For your safety, we kindly ask that you do not show up intoxicated for your adventure.”

I was surprised to see the original curtains from the Laurel Cinema still hanging on the side walls and the double screens remaining from the 1975 conversion into a two-screen duplex. (They are not visible when the lights are out for the House of Horror.)



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAUREL'S HOUSE OF HORROR

## 2022 Attractions

The House of Horror is divided into two separate areas by the wall constructed for the Laurel Cinema’s conversion into a duplex. One side is the Haunted House and other contains the Escape Rooms.

The Haunted House is a self-walking tour that generally takes 25-30 minutes through a variety of strange and creepy rooms and encounters.

Escape Rooms are designed for teams (8-10 players) to figure out how to escape. Reservations for the Escape Rooms are required. There are three Escape Rooms, all with different themes and games, as described on their web site:

**Escape The Movies Cult Classics.** Your journey begins at the Michael Myers abandoned house (Halloween), escaping Jason’s grasps at Camp Crystal Lake (*Friday the 13th*), choose the right door to go through in Pennywise’s house (*IT*), and finally escape the Freddy Krueger’s boiler room (*Nightmare on Elm Street*).

**Escape The CarnEvil.** Every year around Halloween time the carnival rolls into town and with it, a very dark secret. Step right up and get your tickets to enter the Big Top, travel though the funhouse, and don’t forget to visit the fortune teller—they’ll help you Escape the CarnEvil.

**Escape The Asylum.** Come visit the abandoned Carlisle Asylum built in 1939, home of the worst of the worst mentally insane, long shut down or so you thought. Once you check in, can you Escape the Asylum?

Laurel’s House of Horror is open on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from Spet. 23 to Nov 5, plus two Thursdays, Oct. 20 and 27. For information, check out their website: [www.laurelhaunt.com](http://www.laurelhaunt.com).

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.

# Who You Gonna Call?



BY OLEN J. PRINCE

Dead Of Night Paranormal Investigation is a paranormal investigation team that conducts private home and business investigations and blessings, and hosts public events, such as ghost tours and historic ghost walks. We were interviewed by the BBC news when the *Ghostbusters* remake came out in 2016. They accompanied us on an investigation of an Italian restaurant in Frederick to experience what real ghost hunting was like and to see the real methods used in looking for the supernatural.

We also had the honor of doing a podcast that allowed us to visit some interesting and historic locations in and around the Maryland/Pennsylvania area, such as Ellicott City, Gettysburg, and Mount Joy, PA. We are currently researching historic/ghost walks for the Laurel Historical Society within the next year. For this, we turned to Laurel’s own History Boys for help. With the information that we were provided from both The Laurel History Boys and the Laurel Historical Society, we hope to put together a walk that not only talks about the hauntings, but teaches people the history of the town itself; a new tour in a historic living history museum; as well as another tour locally. This will give fans and people curious about the paranormal three different locations to explore and learn with us.

Each member on the team has their own story about why they got into the paranormal field. This team has members interested in many aspects of the paranormal from cryptozoology to demonology. Dead of Night is also available for private home and business calls at no charge.

To learn more, visit [Facebook.com/Deadofnightparanormalinvestigation](https://www.facebook.com/deadofnightparanormalinvestigation), email us at [Ojprince83@icloud.com](mailto:Ojprince83@icloud.com), or call us at (443) 517-8553.

# Civics 101

## Laurel and the 2022 Elections



BY MARY LEHMAN | DISTRICT 21 DELEGATE, ANNE ARUNDEL & PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTIES

### Levels of Government

A resident of Laurel has four and one-half levels of government working for them:

Federal  
State  
County  
Bi-County  
Municipal

Of these four and one-half levels, we will focus on the four that we elect to represent us.

### Election Cycle

For the most part, residents of Laurel elect officials on three different cycles:

- Presidential every 4 years (2020, 2024, 2028)
- Gubernatorial, State Legislature, County Executive and County Council every 4 years (2018, 2022, 2026)
- Municipal Laurel mayor every 4 years (2019, 2023, 2027) City Council every 2 years (2021, 2023, 2025)

### Federal Level

The Federal layer of government includes the:

- President/Vice President elected on a 4-year cycle
- United States Senators elected on a 6-year cycle
- United States Representatives elected on a 2-year cycle

### United States Senator

Each state has two U.S. Senators, each elected to 6-year terms. Senators run state-wide (not in a district.)

- Senator Chris Van Hollen, a candidate for reelection in 2022
  - Senator Benjamin Cardin, whose term ends in 2024
- U.S. Senators' terms do not coincide, so each state always has one sitting member in the Senate.

### United States Representative

- Each state has at least one Representative.
- Each Representative is elected from a single member Congressional District every two years.
- The number of total Congressional Districts for each state is apportioned based on population as determined every 10 years by the U.S. Census. The most recent Census was 2020.
- Maryland has eight Congressional Districts.

### 4th Congressional District

Laurel is represented in the U.S. House by Congressman Anthony Brown. The 4th Congressional District extends from Fort Washington in southern Prince George's County up through Pasadena in Anne Arundel County. Congressional district boundaries will change following the General Election to reflect population changes in the 2020 Census.

Congressman Brown is leaving office at the end of the year and will be replaced by Glenn Ivey who won the Democratic primary in July. Mr. Ivey faces no Republican opposition in November.

### The Federal Government

Services from Federal government include:

- Amtrak (Northeast Corridor)
- Federal employee issues
- Homeland Security & military/veterans
- Immigration
- Interstate commerce
- Medicare
- National Park Service (such as the B/W Parkway)
- Social Security
- Telecommunications policy
- U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

### State of Maryland

Laurel is represented by four state-wide elected officials. Their current terms expire this year.

None are running for re-election.

- Governor/Lieutenant Governor  
Larry Hogan/  
Boyd Rutherford
- Comptroller Peter Franchot
- Attorney General Brian Frosh



### Maryland General Assembly

- Maryland's legislature consists of two chambers: House of Delegates and the State Senate.
- Maryland has 47 legislative districts and each district has one Senator and up to three Delegates.
- Senators and delegates are elected to four year terms and the current terms expire in 2022.
- Maryland's legislature meets for only one 90-day session each year. The Legislative Session runs from the second Wednesday in January to the second Monday in April.

### 21st Legislative District

Laurel is in the 21st Legislative District. We are served by one State Senator and three State Delegates:

- Senator Jim Rosapepe
- Delegate Ben Barnes
- Delegate Mary Lehman
- Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk

### The State Government

Services from State government include:

- Assessments & taxation
- Chesapeake Bay protection
- Consumer protection
- Fisheries/wildlife
- Higher education system
- Highway maintenance/construction
- Lottery/Stadium Authorities
- Medicaid
- Motor vehicle licensing
- Services for the elderly
- State Police/Corrections
- Tourism promotion

### County Government

Prince George's County has an elected County Executive and a County Council. The County Council is elected from nine single member districts plus two at-large seats. Council districts cross congressional and state legislative district lines.

County officials are elected for four-year terms on the Gubernatorial schedule. The County Executive, State's Attorney, the Sheriff, Registrar of Wills, Clerk of the Court and Judges are county officials elected on a county-wide basis. The County Executive and County Council are limited to serving only two consecutive elected terms.

School board members are elected on staggered terms; however, the current 13-member hybrid board will return to a nine-member, district-based, all elected board in 2024.

Laurel sits within County Council District 1 and is currently represented by Tom Dernoga.

Mr. Dernoga won the 2022 Democratic primary in July; he has no opposition in the November General Election. His second term will expire in 2026.

Members of the County Council also sit as the District Council (zoning board) and Board of Health.

Services from the County government include:

- Animal control
- Building permits
- Community college
- County Police/Fire/EMS
- Family Services
- Health Department services
- Library system
- Property tax collection
- Public Schools (pre-K to 12)
- Transit services
- UM Capital Region Health/Hospital System (shared county/state)
- Youth Employment Programs



### Quasi-Government

Non-elected government-chartered agencies whose role is geographically limited to specific jurisdictions, but includes Laurel:

- Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)\*
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

\*The City of Laurel has unique zoning/land use authority; M-NCPPC has zoning authority throughout Prince George’s County outside the city limits.

### Municipal Government

Laurel’s city government consists of a Mayor and Council. The mayor is elected at-large and serves a four-year term. There are two city council wards, each represented by two councilmembers. One councilmember is elected at-large. They serve two-year terms.

In 2023, the mayor and council are all up for election. The city employs a full-time city administrator, a police chief and police department, a public works



director, an animal control officer, and a building permitting staff.

City of Laurel services include:

- Building permits
- City parks and recreation centers
- Municipal code enforcement
- Police protection
- Refuse/recycling collection
- Snow removal
- Street/sidewalk maintenance
- Zoning and land use powers

### General Election 2022 Dates

#### Tuesday, October 18th

New or updated Voter Registration closes\*

\*You may register to vote during early voting or on Election Day, but you will use a provisional ballot.

#### Thursday, October 27th

Early Voting Begins 10am–8pm

#### Thursday, November 3rd

Early Voting Ends 10am–8pm

#### Tuesday, November 1st

Deadline for Request for Mail-in Ballot

#### Tuesday, November 8th 8pm

Deadline for Mail-in Ballot, either postmarked or returned to a ballot box

#### Tuesday, November 8th Election Day 7am–8pm

#### Friday, November 18th

Deadline to Certify Vote statewide

### Our Role

Our role in this process is simple: *VOTE.*



Delegate Mary Lehman can be reached at (410) 841-3114 or (301) 858-3114, or by email at [mary.lehman@house.state.md.us](mailto:mary.lehman@house.state.md.us).

# From the Office of Council Member Tom Dernoga



BY TOM DERNOGA | PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY COUNCILMEMBER

Because the County Council is responsible for local land-use decisions outside of the Laurel municipal boundaries, a lot of local politics revolves around development issues. And, while every county General Plan of development for the past 60 years has prioritized Smart Growth principles and had policies to rein in sprawl, not one single plan has ever successfully prevented ever-consuming sprawl. So, it is no surprise that at the end of one council’s term of office and with the incoming council dedicated to Smart Growth, that there would be a flurry of legislative and political activity.

The last couple of weeks after the summer recess have seen a flurry of legislation being rushed through the process so that they may be enacted before the end of the term. For example, one bill eliminates most of the Council’s authority to hear zoning and site plan cases, and another would preclude amendments to the zoning ordinance without a supermajority (this bill was pulled). This second bill was intended to make it harder to enact Smart Growth policies.

Several other bills propose developer friendly amendments to the brand-new Zoning Ordinance that effectively loosen regulations on certain properties

by allowing developers to access or apply for looser regulations than the new ordinance would permit.

All of this, and even more, has been very controversial. The good news is that it has really engaged a substantial number of members of the public around development, environment, and climate issues.

### On the Positive Development Front—Muirkirk Road Distribution Facility

Soltesz Company, a Prince George’s County-based company, is planning to build a distribution facility near the intersection of Konterra Drive and Muirkirk Road just south of Laurel. The project will improve a portion of Muirkirk Road and reduce local flooding. The buildings will be environmentally designed with on-site water quality treatment and will be built to green building standards. The project maintains a significant wooded stream separating the buildings and provides buffering. The project will require approvals from the county and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). Processing of the application is just commencing.

### Fairland Regional Park Ready to Expand

When the Konterra Town Center’s site plan was approved a dozen years ago, Konterra was required to dedicate over 40 acres of land to Fairland Regional Park across from the skating rink and the pool. However, the timing for the transfer was tied to Konterra subdividing its property to break ground. Between the fiscal crisis and the more recent demise of retail stores, Konterra Town Center has been on hold waiting for development economics to sort itself out. Now, Konterra is processing its first two residential development applications and is ready to dedicate the land to the park. I expect M-NCPPC to develop a variety of athletic fields, but I also expect M-NCPPC to update its Fairland Regional Park Master Plan, which will include a community engagement process. Stay tuned.

### Please keep in touch

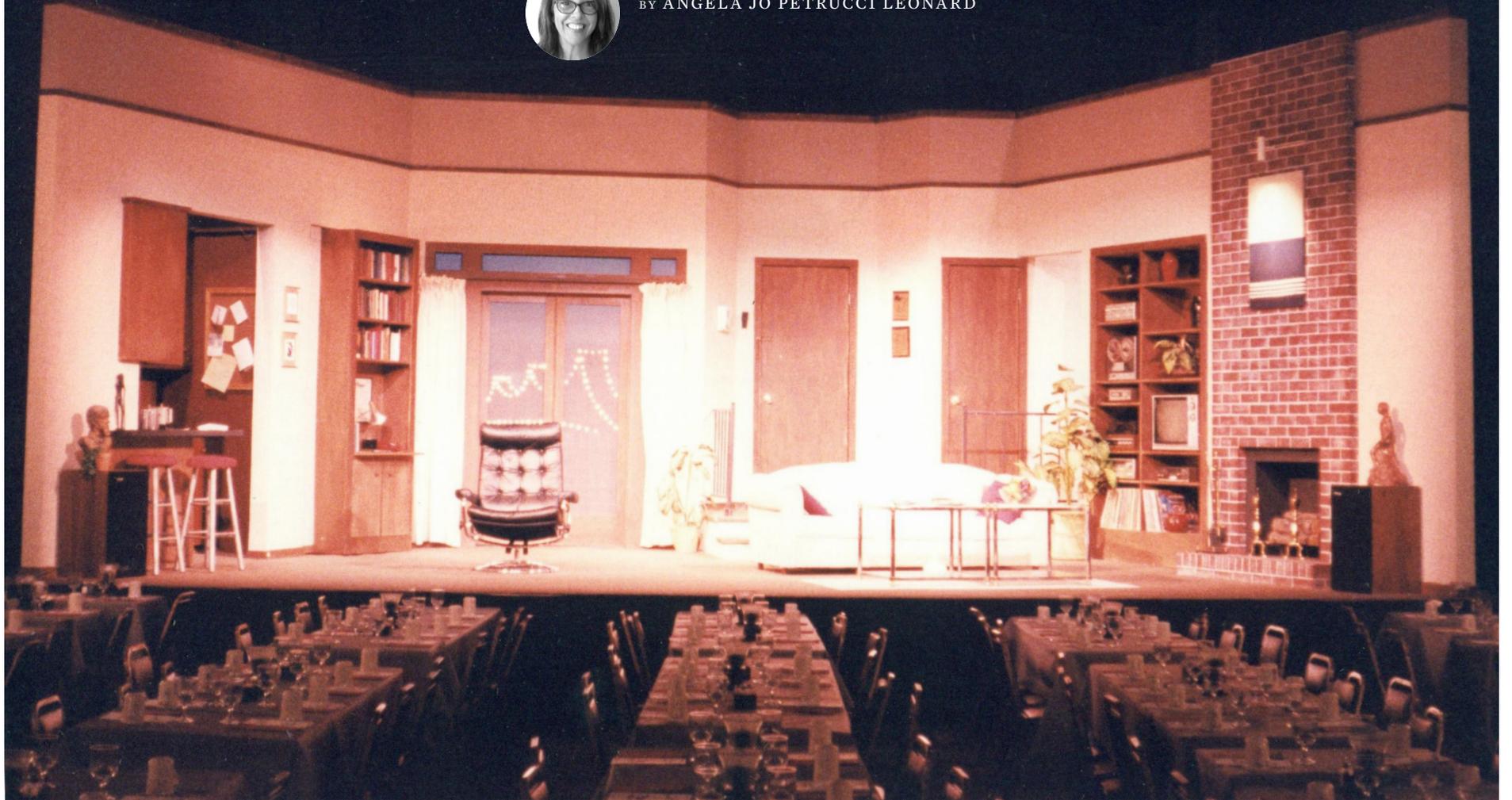
Email us at [councildistrict1@co.pg.md.us](mailto:councildistrict1@co.pg.md.us) or call 301.952.3887. Se habla Español. For invitations and community events you would like to share with us, please email [district1scheduling@co.pg.md.us](mailto:district1scheduling@co.pg.md.us) with details. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram: @TomDernogaD1

# Petrucci's Dinner Theatre

## Main Street Memories



BY ANGELA JO PETRUCCI LEONARD



**T**his article is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Angie Petrucci Miller. They say that behind every good man is a strong woman. My mother was behind the whole family and is a woman of magnificent strength, courage, and integrity. She was and is my silent hero.

In our early years in the restaurant and theater business, Mom planned the menus, managed the kitchen, and kept the books. She did countless things that went unnoticed by most people. She made sure the theater had charcoal in the corners to absorb the smells caused by decades of sweaty crowds and dark damp corners. She always insisted on a clean kitchen and clean shows. When Mom retired and stopped being engaged in the day-to-day running of the business, her special touch and TLC were missed.

Thanks, Mom, for your wisdom, love, and tireless caring. You set the bar for greatness. You instilled in us that it's not just a business, but a family. Our staff knew they were members of the Petrucci family, and our customers were guests in our home. You taught us to treat our employees like family and to treat our customers like royalty.

This is the story of my recollections. Others, I'm sure, will remember things differently.

### Closed Forever

That was the sole message on the marquis of the Laurel Theater in 1976. To me it said "we've tried everything, but nothing worked. It's over." Built in 1929 as an 800-seat movie theater, it was a huge draw on a thriving Main Street.

People of all ages came in by foot, by car, by bus, and by train to spend the day watching movies.

For 25 cents you could ride the train into town from Baltimore or other neighboring towns to the end of Main Street, walk up a couple of blocks to the theater, buy a soda, catch a double-feature—complete with pre-show cartoons and news—and then hop back on the train to go home.

The building changed venues at some point and was a vaudeville house for a short while. The old stage remained in the very back, complete with light wells in the front. During World War II, War Bonds were sold in the lobby.

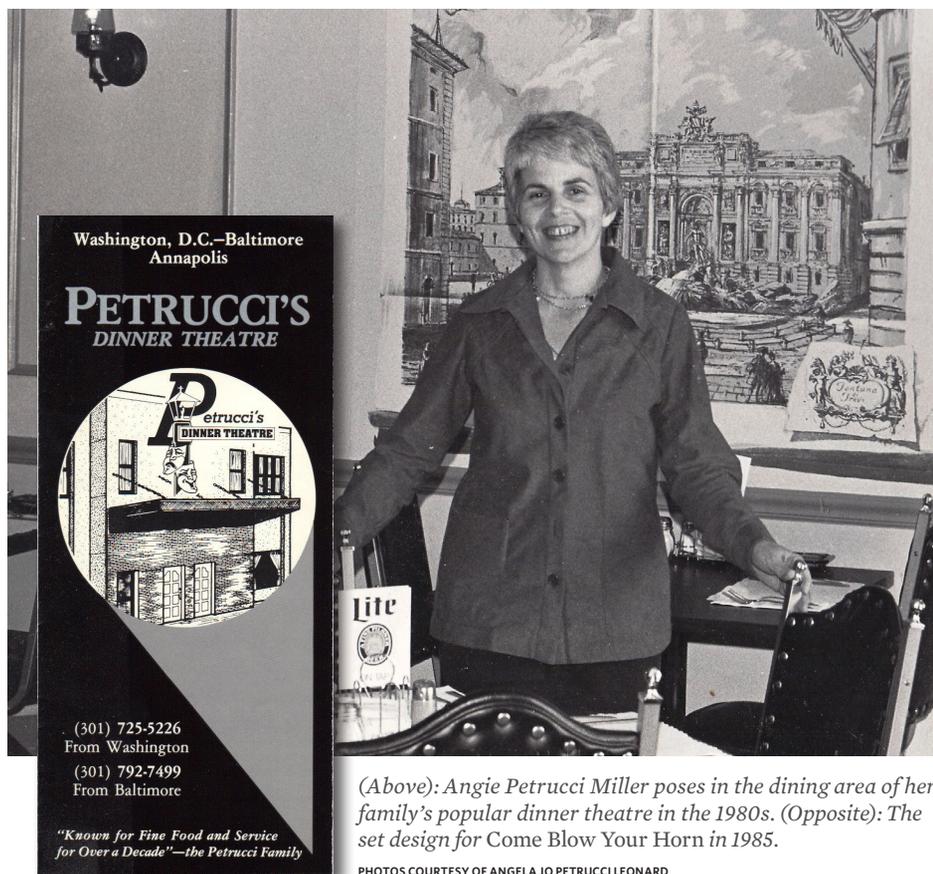
For decades, first-run movies played in a state-of-the-art facility with 600 seats on the main floor and another 200 in the

spacious balcony. It was one of the first buildings to boast air conditioning!

There were hundreds of old movie posters in a huge storage room at the back of the balcony, below the projection room.

In the 1970s, double theaters started opening—first one, then another. The old single-screen genre was struggling to survive. The owners at that time tried showing cheap B movies for a while, then went to X-rated films. Still struggling with lack of patrons and now with lack of community and local government support, they finally closed. But "Closed Forever" was not the case.

You see, in the early 70s, Carlo and Angie Petrucci had signed a right of first refusal on the building. So, when a local businessman tried to buy the building,



the Petruccis went to court and were able to exercise their right of first refusal to purchase the building. Mom, Dad, Dave, and Paul formed a partnership and the adventure of a lifetime began!

### In the Movies

I was in my senior year of high school when we were suddenly in the movie business. We ran second-run movies to bring in income as we renovated the building. After selling tickets and popcorn, I did my homework in the lobby with the sounds of *Patton* or *Jaws* playing in the background.

The projectors were in a projection booth that sat on top of the front roof of the building. To get there, you went up a flight of stairs, into a closet, and then climbed up an attic ladder. Just behind the booth was a room with a toilet and no door because running a film with that old equipment required constant attention.

The projectors used a carbon arc as the source of light to project the film onto the big screen. This technology produced a perfectly fine white light if the projectionist had cleaned and focused the reflector, adjusted the rectifier correctly (that converts the AC current to DC current for the lamphouse) and kept watch of the two carbon rods to ensure they were the right distance apart for the arc of light to burn just right and made adjustments when needed.

At the same time, the projectionist needed to watch the film for cue marks. These were indicators (like an "O" or a "+" in the top left of the film) to signal the end of a reel. The projectionist had to switch from one projector to another at just the right time and then load the next reel into the first projector.

One night we were watching a James Bond movie from the projection room, marveling when the screen started displaying different colors, then realizing the film had gotten stuck and was in the process of burning. Such fond memories...

I don't remember what movie was showing one night when we were home and Paul called the theater to see how things were going. My brother Kevin was holding down the fort alone. He reported that he sold the tickets and popcorn, then went upstairs and climbed the ladder to the projection room, got the movie started, then hurried downstairs to walk the aisles with a flashlight to make sure the one customer that showed up that night wasn't putting his feet up on the seats in front of him, then ran back up to make sure the film didn't start to melt.

We said, "One day we'll look back on this and laugh so we might as well laugh now." We laughed about that for years.

### Petrucci's Dinner Theatre Shows

- I Do, I Do!* Director: Chuck Dick, 1977  
*The Star-Spangled Girl* by Neil Simon, Director: Jack Thompson, 1978  
*The Owl and The Pussycat* by Bill Manhoff, Director: Leonard Price, 1978  
*Butterflies Are Free* by Leonard Gershe, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1978  
*Plaza Suite* by Neil Simon, Director: Don Wiswell, 1978  
*Play It Again Sam* by Woody Allen, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1978  
*Never Too Late* by Sumner Arthur Long, Director: Don Wiswell, 1979  
*The Fantasticks* by Harry Schmidt & Tom Jones, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1979  
*You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* by Clark Gesner, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1979  
*Same Time Next Year* by Bernard Slade, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1979  
*California Suite* by Neil Simon, Director: Tom Wiswell, 1980  
*Forty Carats* by Jay Allen & Barillet Gredy, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1980  
*Catch Me If You Can* by Jack Weinstock & Willie Gilbert, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1980  
*Chapter Two* by Neil Simon, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1981  
*Cactus Flower* by Abe Burrows, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1981  
*Bell, Book, and Candle* by John VanDruten, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1981  
*Romantic Comedy* by Bernard Slade, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1981  
*Barefoot in the Park* by Neil Simon, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1981  
*I Do! I Do!*, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1982  
*Any Wednesday*, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1982  
*Murder Among Friends*, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1982  
*Same Time, Next Year*, Director: Fay Jacobs, 1983  
*Death Trap* by Ira Levin, Director: Nigel Reed, 1983  
*I Ought to Be in Pictures* by Neil Simon, 1983  
*The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie, Director: Irene Hondroulis, 1983  
*Born Yesterday* by Garson Kanin, Director: Phillip Rayher, 1984  
*Promises, Promises* by Neil Simon, Director: Phillip Rayher, 1984  
*Chapter Two* by Neil Simon, Director: Dan Higgs, 1984  
*She Loves Me* by Masteroff, Bock & Harnick, Director: David Harper, 1984  
*Ten Little Indians* by Agatha Christie, Director: Nigel Reed, 1985  
*Come Blow Your Horn* by Neil Simon, Director: Dan Higgs, 1985  
*They're Playing Our Song* by Neil Simon, Director: Todd Pearthree, 1985  
*The Sound of Music* by Rogers & Hammerstein, Director: Todd Pearthree, 1985  
Phyllis Diller, 1985  
*Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer, Director: Nigel Reed, 1986  
*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Director: Carole Lehan, 1986  
*The Amazing Kreskin*, 1986  
*Witness for the Prosecution* by Agatha Christie, Director: Nigel Reed, 1986  
*Man of La Mancha* by Dale Wasserman, Director: Nigel Reed, 1986  
*The Foreigner* by Larry Shue, Director: Nigel Reed, 1987  
*Ain't Misbehavin'* by Fats Waller, Director: Ray Hatch, 1987  
*Brighton Beach Memoirs* by Neil Simon, Director: Gene Morrill, 1987  
*The Best of Burlesque*, 1987  
*Noises Off* by Michael Frayn, Director: Nick Olcott, 1987  
*The Odd Couple* (Female Version) by Neil Simon, Director: Gene Morrill, 1988  
*Fiddler on the Roof* by Stein, Harnick & Block, Director: Jon Palmer Claridge, 1988  
*Biloxi Blues* by Neil Simon, Director: Anthony Sadlak-Jaworski, 1988  
*The Best of Burlesque*, 1988  
*Guys & Dolls* by Swerling, Burrows & Loesser, Director: Jon Palmer Claridge, 1988  
*Sherlock's Last Case* by Charles Markowitz, 1989  
*Anything Goes*, Director: Gene Morrill, 1989  
*A Flea in Her Ear* by George Feydeau, Director: Terry Glaser, 1989  
*Greater Tuna* by Williams, Sears & Howard, Director: Antoni Sadlak Jaworski, 1990  
*Annie* by Strouse, Meehan & Charnin, Director: Gene Morrill, 1990  
*Broadway Bound* by Neil Simon, Director: Dorothy Neumann, 1990  
*Nonsense* by Dan Goggin, Director: John Healey, Jr., 1990  
*Big River* by Miller & Hauptman, Director: John Healey, Jr., 1991  
*Nonsense* (National Tour), 1991  
*Carousel* by Rodgers & Hammerstein, Director: Tony Reich, 1991  
*Something's Afoot*, 1992  
*The Unsinkable Molly Brown* by Willson & Morris, Director: Todd Pearthree, 1992  
*Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?*, 1992

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# Back to School... Four Decades Later

*Walking the Halls for the First Time Since 1984, Memories Abound*



BY RICHARD FRIEND



The last time I'd walked through the doors at Deerfield Run Elementary, I certainly wasn't carrying a laptop bag and an iPhone. I was a 6th grader in 1984 carrying what is today considered a vintage lunchbox—the likes of which are now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

I had the opportunity to visit my old school in July, where I met principal Mary F. Wall and was treated to a walking tour throughout the facility. While much has obviously changed since I was a student there, I was pleased to find that it's still very much the same. As a kid, I didn't give a lot of thought to things like nostalgia, or the character of the building. Frankly, I just couldn't wait for that afternoon bell to ring so I could get home and play Atari. But in the years that have passed, I've often thought fondly of Deerfield Run, and somewhat inexplicably wished I could experience being there again in person.

To say that the memories came immediately flooding back would be an understatement. In fact, it's fair to

say that nearly every inch of this building sparks a recollection. And funny enough, the memories aren't of the dread I once felt at having missed a homework assignment, or of yearning for summer vacation to start so I could avoid this building for three fabulous months. Instead, this place now holds a warm and almost magnetic comfort. It feels like home.

The years seem to melt away as the familiar corners, nooks, and crannies all feel as if I'd only been here yesterday, fresh off the school bus from Steward Manor. I immediately notice the sign above the entrance to the lunch room—it's still there from when I was a kid, and to this day it's the only place I've ever seen the word "cafetorium" (a combination of cafeteria and auditorium) used. The tables and chairs are newer and in a state of disarray, (owing to this being summer vacation) and international flags now grace the walls; but other than that, the cafetorium hasn't changed. I'm suddenly craving that delicious rectangular pizza—and even that half pint of Embassy chocolate milk.

Next, we step into the gymnasium, and it's every bit as big as I remember it. In particular, I remember the 30-foot-high ceilings—and how terrifying it was trying to climb the ropes (which are also still here). This gym was the domain of a fantastic physical education teacher, Mr. Harry White. Built like a real-life action figure, Mr. White also had the air of an NBA referee, with his standard dark blue pants and gray t-shirt. And speaking of the NBA, in the entire time I was at Deerfield Run, I never saw Mr. White miss a basketball shot. Ever.

Ms. Wall and I walk through the main corridor and into the heart of the building where the classrooms begin. The classrooms themselves are where the biggest physical change has occurred since my time here as a student. They were (and are still) called "pods," and are classified by color: red, orange, yellow, blue, and green. But when I was a kid, the pods were large open areas. I'd wondered recently about how sustainable the open learning area model might be in



today's terrifying reality of school shootings. I was fortunate growing up in a time when the words "active shooter drill" weren't part of our lexicon. We had routine fire drills, but the idea of someone bringing a gun to school was just unimaginable. Ms. Wall explained that while increased security was certainly important, the main reason for converting the open pods to individual classrooms with doors was because learning in large spaces is no longer considered to be the best practice.

The hallways leading to each pod look much as they did in my day, but as you turn to enter, that's when you see the big difference—each now has a corridor of its own, with multiple smaller classrooms on either side. Thoughtfully designed floor tiles, walls, and chair colors immediately communicate each pod color. Each is like a little wing of its own within the school. Because there are actual walls and doors here now where there previously weren't, this is the only area of the building that I have difficulty reconciling how different things look. But despite the aesthetic changes, little details from the past remain—like the clock above the doors leading out of Yellow Pod, which I remember watching tick down that Friday in February 1979 as the P.A. system announced the likely closure of school the following week for the impending blizzard.

Walking towards Green Pod, where I spent the most time, (2nd, 5th, and 6th grades) we stopped at what had been one of my favorite places in the school—the Art class. This was where I first learned the nuances of drawing and painting; how different types of pencils made different types of marks, and the concept of

sketching. I even took a Saturday drawing workshop here as a child, which was taught by my regular art teacher, Ms. Joyce Kintz (now in her 80s and a Facebook friend). I remember Ms. Kintz looking over my shoulder at my work one day and saying, "Richard, you're a very sophisticated artist." After class, I went to the library (what Deerfield Run called the Media Center) and immediately looked up "sophisticated" in the dictionary.

The Media Center is still in the same space, but again, because school is out for the summer, it's somewhat in disarray. Ms. Wall tells me that some art classes have been moved here, (the old art class is now a third kindergarten room) but there are still plenty of books on shelves. I can recall the excitement I'd experienced when I could check out the latest *Guinness Book of World Records*, any of the Crestwood *Monsters* series books, *Choose Your Own Adventure*, or my all-time favorites, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators* mysteries. While walking through, I notice one of the comfortable reading chairs that I'm positive is a holdover from when I was a student here. There's only one, but it's clearly a survivor.

As we walk through each hall and into each room, the school brings vivid memories to the surface that exceed anything I could have anticipated. Not only can I picture classmates and teachers from over 40 years ago—including some I'd nearly forgotten—I suddenly remember thoughts, feelings, and snippets of conversations from my time here as if only a few days had gone by. It's a unique multi-sensory experience that I assume you can only get from visiting a place like



MARY WALL

Richard Friend recreates his 2nd grade class photo, sitting where he sat (front row, far right) in 1979. Memories of school supplies and eighties stuff—including metal lunchboxes, scratch n' sniff stickers, favorite pencils, and favorite books come flooding back while walking the halls of Deerfield Run.

this from your past—a place where the walls still talk after all these years.

After touring the building, I had the chance to do something that I was fortunate to *not* have done often as a student—I went to the principal's office. I remember how frequently my buddy, Jimmy Smith, used to come here. After getting in trouble once for throwing snowballs, not only did he have to go to the principal's office—he had to write a certain phrase so many times that he literally still remembers it today: "I will not throw snow. I will leave snow on the ground where it belongs."

Ms. Wall explained how she's tried to change the perception of the principal's office throughout her nearly 12 years as principal. And she's right—going to see the principal shouldn't be just for students who are in trouble. Kids should *want* to get to know and engage with their principal. Ms. Wall gave a recent example of

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## Catching Racetrack Tipsters, Criminals & Nazis: The Unheralded Past of the Laurel Monitoring Station



BY ANGELA LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

PART 1

The experiences from World War I and post-war communication advances provided our military, our government leaders, and even a certain element among average Americans with insight into the new and clever ways the enemy would work to gain tactical and psychological advantages in future contests. These insights were gained through the rise of radio communication and related technological advances. The advances were rapid. To keep pace with mainstream advances and get ahead of the unsavory lot of primarily criminals, spies, and ne'er-do-wells, the U.S. Government consolidated its agencies, and financed an expanded infrastructure that included building the Laurel Monitoring Station in the Maryland suburbs, to meet the rapidly changing communications environment.

As early as 1919, radio was used on a large scale in connection with rum-running activities, according to U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Communications Commission, and Radio Division of the Dept. of Commerce files. During WWI, the science of long-distance radio transmission was not prevalent, except among a few scientists and engineers. However, as shortwave radio communications advanced, it led to

clandestine uses, often by criminals. In fact, the first instance of an illegal transmitter small enough to be concealed on a person's body was recorded in 1928 in Laurel, when a "tipster was apprehended at Laurel Racetrack with his vest pockets full of equipment and his body girded with wire," according to the Center for Cryptologic History. The amount of communications traffic competing for space throughout the airways was increasing exponentially and rapidly.

The need for a single government agency with the authority to license, regulate, and possess some degree of enforcement authority to ensure that an unlimited number of users could effectively and efficiently communicate with their intended audiences without impacting the effective and efficient communications of others, especially those with national security mandates, such as the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, grew steadily following WWI.

It culminated in 1934 with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of The Communications Act, which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC absorbed the authority of several disparate agencies: the Federal Radio Commission, the Department of Commerce Radio Division, the

Interstate Commerce Commission, the Post Office, and the Department of State. Over the next several years, the FCC would undertake the assumption of its broad authority, especially that as guardian of the U.S. airwaves.

Similarly, our government's ability to counter espionage and clandestine transmissions improved significantly by 1939 from the early days of the clandestine radio operator's efforts to avoid detection during the days of rum-running through Prohibition. In the pamphlet *Listening to the Rumrunners*, from the Center for Cryptologic History, it said: "The radio operations of the run-running organizations were, in fact, comparable in terms of size, technical skill, and organization with the radio operation which would be conducted by enemy agents in World War II."

In fact, the Federal Communications Commission initially had the mandate to monitor and protect the communication airwaves from pirates and clandestine users throughout the country, among several other non-military, non-national security functions. It did so via seven primary monitoring stations and 26 field auxiliaries or secondary stations. In 1940, *Time* noted that with these monitoring stations "the FCC pounced easily upon illicit transmitters, inspected ship and police radios, and supervised the nation's hams (amateur radio users)."

In June of that year, an infusion of funding for a National Defense Operations Section led to the broadening of the FCC's routine monitoring mandate. Four additional primary stations were under construction, and 72 secondary stations were readied to join the network. The original primary stations were not yet equipped with high-frequency Adcock direction finders, recorders, and other essential equipment, while three of the primary stations were ill-suited to increased responsibilities or tasks.

The arm of the FCC that was tasked with investigating and monitoring clandestine wireless operations in the United States and its possessions, as well as with training military personnel and intelligence agents in monitoring techniques, was established on July 1, 1940. The Radio Intelligence Division (RID), Engineering Department of the Federal Communications Commission, was headed by George E. Sterling, who, according to *Time*, "helped organize the first radio intelligence unit of the Army in World War I, served as an inspector for the Department of Commerce before the FCC took over radio," and was an "inveterate ham" radio operator. Sterling was the Chief of the Division until 1946 when the RID was discontinued.

In his manuscript, "The History of the Radio Intelligence Division Before and During World War II," Sterling captured the many accomplishments, innovations, and a few setbacks of the RID. He set the stage for the pioneering nature of his newly formed division as:

*During the period of neutrality while the war was being waged in Europe in (1940-1941) new responsibilities were imposed on the Commission and particularly the Field Division which was responsible for the enforcement of radio rules and regulations and international treaties as they pertained to the technical operation of radio stations.*

The initial core personnel of the RID were Field Division Radio Inspectors, many of whom had learned the craft locating illegal radio transmissions connected to the rum runners during Prohibition. Others, recruited from industry and the ranks of amateurs, became the initial monitoring officers and radio operators, which was made up of both men and women.

The women became proficient and demonstrated special skill in producing typewritten copy from “miles of Boehme tape recordings made from high frequency radio circuits of the enemy and neutral countries. This required special skill since the recordings were made with a type of stylus making both horizontal and vertical characters.”

Just prior to being drawn into the war, the FCC was called upon to provide propaganda intercept. It set up separate groups of engineers and code operators for monitoring enemy propaganda broadcasts. Initially, these groups were collocated within FCC field stations. However, soon the amount of propaganda broadcast by official and clandestine stations in enemy and neutral countries was overwhelming, according to Sterling.

State Department assistant secretary Breckinridge Long in January 1941 noted that the broadcasts were, “aggressive in character and subversive in intent.” Sterling indicated that the alarming radio use by Nazi spies in Europe and anti-U.S. propaganda causing diplomatic misunderstandings with our Allies and other neutral countries, led the FCC to prioritize getting the country to a state of radio preparedness.

The FCC was asked to submit a plan for monitoring these broadcasts. Funding for recording, transcribing, translating, and analyzing selected propaganda was approved. In February 1941 the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service (FBMS) was established. In July of 1942, FBMS became the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service (FBIS). In the spring of 1943, congressional investigations of FBIS’ personnel and functions lead to its decline and eventual termination of services.

The Analysis Division was disbanded and its important functions and personnel performing them were transferred to the Office of War Information. In December 1945, the activities of FBIS as a part of the FCC ended. The FBIS was subsequently transferred to the Military Intelligence Department of the General Staff of the War Department. The War Department was consolidated under President Roosevelt into what became the Pentagon.

### Laurel Monitoring Station Opens

While hostile activities overseas threatened war in Europe and were likely to embroil the United States, Washington sought to stay abreast of the movements and intentions of the aggressors. The FCC/RID enacted a plan to put the country in a state of radio preparedness. Strategic access to monitor the airwaves, pinpoint illegal stations, and sources of interference required modernizing existing stations, increasing the number of primary stations, and sending mobile units to at least one station in each of the states to do investigative work.

The FCC acquired land in Maryland for what first was known as the Guilford Monitoring Station, but would become the Laurel Monitoring Station. It was to

be a primary monitoring station, located within easy access to Washington, D.C. However, with the advent of WWII and probably due to its location, the site housed several other FCC/RID operations. The property, a 237-acre tract of land in Howard County, (currently on Oakland Mills Road next to Guilford Elementary) was identified for condemnation and legally adjudicated to be surrendered to the United States prior to February 1941 for use as an FCC primary monitoring station.

In March 1941, a Memorandum from the FCC citing the proposed construction of a Radio Monitoring Station near Guilford, Maryland, declared it should be identified with the City of Laurel, Maryland, to avoid being confused with the Guilford area of Baltimore. A 1983 *Laurel Leader* article noted that it became the Laurel Monitoring Station because Laurel was the biggest spot on the map when the FCC set up shop in the farmhouse. Today, the FCC Monitoring Station falls within the boundaries of Columbia.

The Laurel Monitoring Station began operations in April 1941. It was co-located with the National Defense Analysis (NDA) group that was established in 1940 as an activity of the FCC to monitor foreign propaganda. The NDA became a branch of the RID.

The Maryland property had a historic farmhouse, originally known as Brown’s Purchase, on the land. It was obtained by the government through a declaration of taking. The government deposited \$12,000.00 to the court to pay the estimated just compensation to the owners of the land.

A Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form was completed on the building in 1979, at which time the building known as the Brown-Collins-Earp House was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic (Places).

According to the Maryland Historic Trust (MHT) application, prepared in November of 2011, deed research indicates that the land acquired was known as “A(.) Howard Earp farm” and was a compilation of three parcels acquired by Earp in 1890, 1902, and 1907. Portions of all three parcels were part of an original land grant known as Warfield’s Contrivance, given to Richard Warfield Jr. in 1718. Other land grants mentioned in the deeds are “Henry or Harry’s Lott” and “Halls Lot.”

The Laurel site was ideal not only for its proximity to Washington but also because of the expansive field surrounding the farmhouse that would accommodate the large and varied antennas necessary for collecting the radio signals for the FCC’s policing the U.S. airwaves functions, and for those of the RID, and FBMS’ counter propaganda missions. The farmhouse, however, was in serious disrepair when the FCC/RID acquired it. Quick repairs were made to the house as electric power, antennas, and equipment arrived and were promptly installed.

The working conditions at the farmhouse were described by the MHT as: “The first floor of the farmhouse was equipped with listening and recording apparatuses, as well as translators. Operators listened to the airways 24 hours a day, recorded what was heard, and sent any suspicious information to the White House, Army and Navy Intelligence units, the State Department, and the Justice Department immediately.”

The MHT further noted that in December 1941, a Cape Cod-style house was constructed on the property to provide housing for a detachment of 30 servicemen from Fort Meade, who provided security for the station. The servicemen were later replaced with civilian guardsmen, who manned a prefabricated guard booth.

In the summer of 1942, research and development efforts were begun to improve directional finding antennas. Two engineers took up residence in the Cape Cod house (along with the civilian guardsmen) to begin research and development of the improved direction-finding equipment.

### Baptism by Fire

By August 1941, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that a Roosevelt Administration bill contained a provision for converting the five-month-old foreign broadcast monitoring service of the FCC from propaganda-analyzing into an active counter-propaganda agency.

However, initially, the business of establishing what foreign programs were recorded, and to what extent, evolved. It was a baptism by fire, trial-and-error approach to doing business. There was a steep learning curve regarding understanding the intelligence value of the foreign broadcast programs: who would benefit from access to these broadcasts, and to what degree did the programs need to be processed for their dissemination?

At first, programs were identified and translated summaries were taken to Washington twice daily. Later, on-site transcribers made the determination as to the format the broadcast programs would be forwarded to D.C.: as raw recordings, analyzed reports, or as summarized or fully transcribed reports.

The bill also provided for two Americans to essentially begin operating in London in the British Broadcasting Station’s headquarters. The two would be tasked with telephoning Washington with a daily report based on listening in on Russian, German, Italian, and other “domestic” broadcasts, as part of the Administration’s plan to counter Axis radio propaganda. The London operation was in addition to the four U.S.-based listening posts already established.

FCC director of the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service Lloyd A. Free testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee on the need for “instantaneous communications facilities between Washington and the listening stations” to improve the agency’s ability to provide information to Washington more quickly than newspapers. The FCC stations had only beaten the papers by two or three hours in an example cited in his testimony.

**THIS IS PART ONE OF A TWO-PART FEATURE. THE STORY WILL CONCLUDE IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF VOICES OF LAUREL.**



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

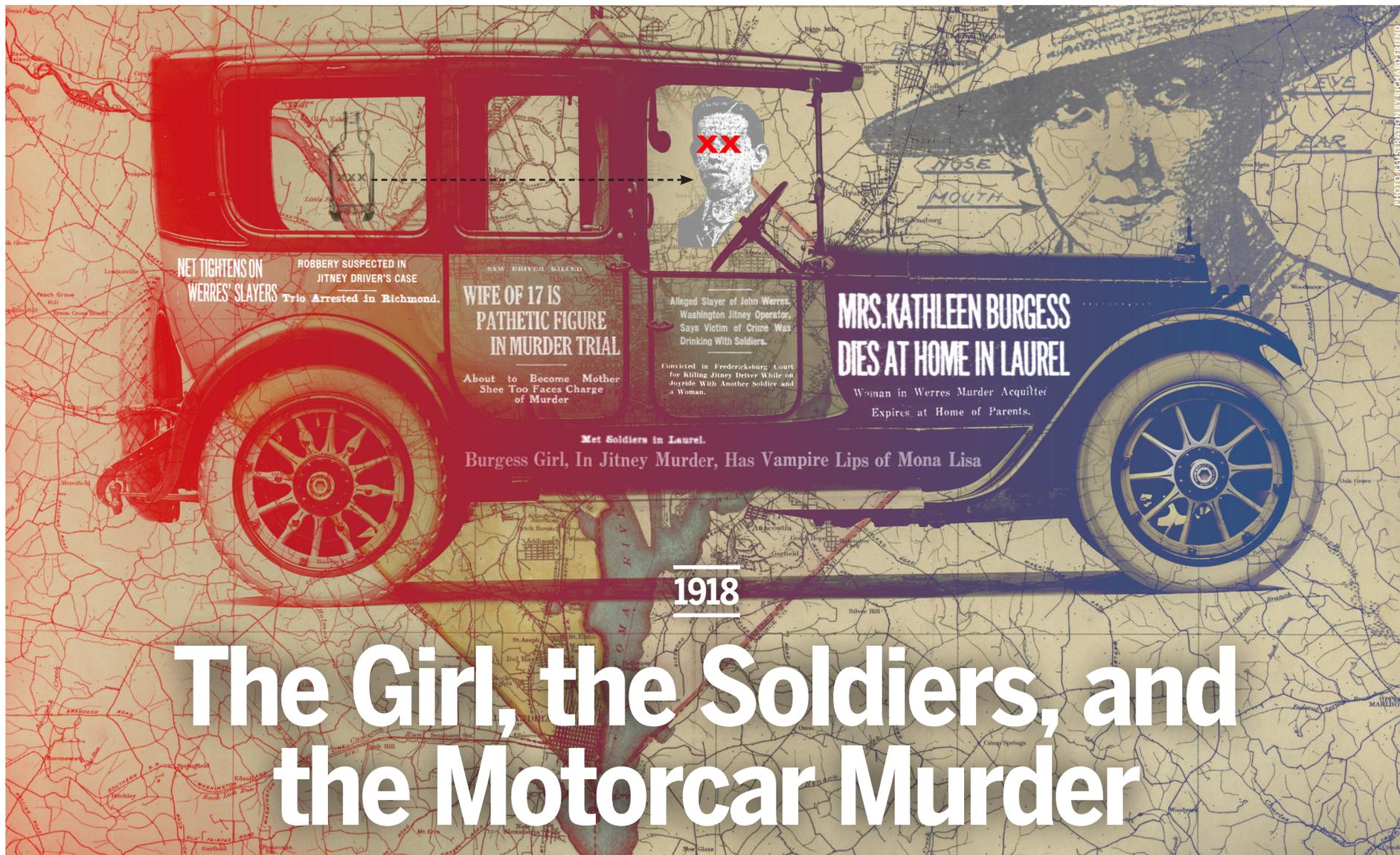


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

# The Girl, the Soldiers, and the Motorcar Murder



BY RICHARD FRIEND

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

If you thought sordid crime stories were a relatively recent thing, you're in for a surprise. This one, with a central Laurel connection, took place over 104 years ago. But it's a story that would've gotten Jerry Springer's attention for sure.

By May 1918, a young woman from Laurel had already lived quite an eventful life in her scant seventeen years, but it was about to become a lot more eventful. Catherine Burgess (whose name was also cited as Katherine and Kathleen in contemporary newspapers) was already a married mother of an infant. Her husband, Harry Burgess, was a Marine stationed in Quantico, VA before going off to France to fight in World War I. Catherine considered herself "separated" from Harry, and when interviewed shortly after the event I'm about to describe, went so far as to say that she "hated" him.

Catherine, you see, had fallen for another man she'd met in Baltimore about three years earlier—another enlisted man, no less. Charles Gamble was a soldier with Company A, 601st Engineer Corps stationed in

Camp Meade (later renamed Fort Meade). Gamble was also married, but after his wife conveniently died, he and Catherine looked to rekindle their romance. They didn't have to look far.

In late April, Catherine traveled to Camp Meade to visit Gamble. There, he told her of his intent to desert the Army—he wanted her to go with him and embark on a new life together in Texas. She played coy. According to Burgess, "I said I might, but to come to Laurel when he was ready and I would see." Two weeks later, Gamble obtained a leave of absence and traveled to Laurel. After treating Burgess to dinner and a show in Washington, DC, they returned to her home on Main Street in Laurel and discussed their future plans before Gamble headed back to base for what would be the last time.

The following night, Gamble and fellow soldier Robert Newman showed up at Burgess' home. The plan had been to hire a car for a double-date in DC, but at the last minute, the other girl backed out. Perhaps she'd relented because she knew of the soldiers' plan to steal the car—killing the driver if he put up a fight.

Yes, Catherine Burgess knew, and she was still game. With a suitcase in hand and leaving her sick infant at home, she accompanied the two soldiers to a nearby store where they purchased civilian clothing. They reached DC at 7 o'clock the next morning and spent the day drinking. When the soldiers had burned through the roughly \$200 they had between them, Burgess gave them her wristwatch, which they sold for \$10. That was enough to hire another automobile. John P. Werres, a Government Printing Office employee who moonlighted as a jitney driver, made the fateful decision to pick up the fare.

After driving the trio aimlessly around Washington, the soldiers instructed Werres to head toward Alexandria, VA. He'd driven approximately three miles south of DC when he'd finally had enough. Werres accused them of "only going out for a pleasure ride," stopped the car along the Ballston-Falls Church road, and informed the group that he was turning back. According to Catherine, Newman struck first, hitting the driver with a piece of iron he'd brought along specifically



(Right): Soldiers Robert Newman and Charles Gamble are shown posing with Catherine Burgess of Laurel shortly before the fatal ride, in which the men murdered driver John P. Werres (above).

PHOTOS: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

for that purpose and knocking him unconscious. Gamble then struck him with an empty beer bottle. Catherine watched from outside the vehicle as Werres, dying or already dead, was pulled from the vehicle by the soldiers and dragged off the road. They carried him up a bank and into the woods, where they left his body in a thicket of bushes. Before leaving, they took Werres' watch and \$2.50. Gamble and Newman returned to the car about twenty minutes later, where the trio drove to a nearby stream. There, the soldiers changed into the civilian clothes they'd purchased in Laurel, and tried to wash away blood that had stained their hands, as well as Catherine's suitcase. Burgess would later claim that she didn't want to go with them after the murder, and asked them to take her back to Washington—but that her life was threatened if she didn't continue on.

With Gamble behind the wheel, the trio drove on to Richmond. But as so often happens with criminals today, a simple traffic violation is what caught the eye of police. While searching the car, the soldiers' bloody uniforms were discovered and the men were held for questioning. Catherine Burgess, not believed to have done anything wrong, was released and allowed to return to her home in Laurel.

Any relief she may have felt upon returning was quickly upended when she learned that her baby, whom she left behind when she took off with Gamble and Newman, had died from neglect. She'd also missed the infant's burial.

Authorities in Virginia quickly made the vehicle's connection to John Werres, who had been reported missing by his wife. Under questioning, Newman and Gamble admitted to being deserters of the Army, and Newman finally confessed to murdering Werres. Gamble, who had initially remained silent and uncooperative, relented after being shown Newman's confession. The two soldiers independently gave similar accounts of what had transpired, but with one predictable difference—each blamed the other for striking the fatal blows.



Catherine Burgess was brought to Washington to aid in locating Werres' body. Once it was found, no autopsy was performed as his wounds aligned clearly with the trio's accounts of the murder.

At roughly the same time that Werres' was being laid to rest at St. Mary's Cemetery in DC, authorities were again visiting Catherine Burgess in Laurel—where they collected her bloodstained suitcase and formally charged her as being an accomplice to the murder.

News of Burgess' arrest was sensationalized in several major papers, including a May 25th *Washington Times* article in which a psychiatrist provided an analysis based solely on her facial features. Dr. D. Percy Hickling, apparently fixating on Burgess' mouth, claimed that the girl "has vampire lips of Mona Lisa," and that her "smile shows a cave woman's passion." Burgess remained in jail until her trial on August 14th, by which point yet another sensational detail was revealed—she was pregnant with another child.

It took a jury of twelve men less than three minutes to find her not guilty of the charge of first degree murder, and Catherine Burgess was again sent home to Laurel. In separate trials, both Gamble and Newman were each found guilty. Gamble, who was initially sentenced to die in the electric chair, had his sentence commuted to life in prison after Newman was given the same. Burgess said all the right things upon her acquittal. "I am going

to follow the judge's advice and be a good girl. I am going to start life anew, and prepare a home for my baby that is to be born. I am going to work and face the world without fear. For Mrs. Werres, the widow of the poor man who was killed, I feel so sorry. My sorrow for her is the only sorrow I feel today, my first day of freedom since this awful thing."

The widow of the slain man indeed had a difficult road ahead of her, as it was revealed that John Werres had only recently stopped payment on a life insurance policy in order to afford the mortgage on the little house they were buying on Bladensburg Road. And in a cruel irony, the fateful night that he agreed to chauffeur Newman, Gamble, and Burgess was to have been his last. Mrs. Werres had been pleading with him to quit the nightly jitney business, and he had just received an offer of \$400 for his automobile.

If you believe in Karma, you might say that it caught up to Catherine Burgess. On November 1, 1918, just three months after her acquittal, she died shortly after giving birth to her second child. She was still only seventeen years old.

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

In this column, contributors to *Voices of Laurel* describe their memories of growing up here. What are your memories? If you would like to contribute an article, contact us.



# When Phair Office Was O.W. Phair Elementary



BY JIM SMART

Seems everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated November 22, 1963.

I remember...

We were new to Laurel. We had just moved to Laurel that September after brief stints in Hawaii and later in Arlington. My father was career NSA out at Fort Meade and we needed a place close to his work just down the Parkway. That place was Steward Manor apartments at Routes 198 and 197. In those days, Steward Manor was new and it had air conditioning for hot Washington area summers.

My sister and I would catch the bus from Morris Drive and make the trek up Gorman Avenue to O.W. Phair Elementary School on West Street, not far from Laurel Junior High. Our bus driver was Mr. Weaver. At that time late in 1963, Phair wasn't even 10 years old, yet it seemed old to me at age seven. It opened its doors for business in March of 1954 and was dedicated to the late O.W. Phair, a prominent Laurel businessman.

I remember my first day at Phair. I was a newcomer, much as I always was in school. My father was a born nomad. He loved to move. Laurel was our latest landing zone. My second grade teacher was Mrs. Flick, "*James...*

*this is your desk and I want you to sit right here.*" I will remember those words for as long as I live. She was a nice lady and had an enormous task—educating an "attention deficit" me.

We remember the darndest moments from our school days long ago. They stand out. One day, there came a hideous burning smell in the classroom. One of the fluorescent lights overhead suffered a failed ballast, which was burning and had to be replaced. It was a nice distraction from education for a time while maintenance pronounced the ballast dead and offered a fast replacement.

The weeks to follow were uneventful—routine and decidedly boring. It was a chilly sunny November afternoon. Thanksgiving was right around the corner. Recess and lunch had just ended and it was time to get back to our studies. There came an unsettling announcement over the PA system that school was letting out early. Had no idea why, but was thrilled to be getting out of school early. Busses rolled up and off we went to Steward Manor. We'd head down West Street and around the bend to Gorman Avenue where it connected with Sandy Spring Road. Mr. Weaver steered our bus down Gorman Avenue into Laurel and up over the railroad tracks toward home. Everyone everywhere was crying, which was quite disturbing to a little burr-head kid like me. I couldn't have understood—not at that age—how profound the moment was.

I jumped off the bus and burst into our apartment. My mother was in tears and Walter Cronkite was at the desk (news has

not been the same since). He had already announced the death of our president. The nation was in utter shock along with the rest of the world.

Our nation mourned and laid its slain president to rest on hallowed ground—Arlington high on a hill overlooking Washington and the Potomac. The following year, 1964, The Beatles arrived, as did Ford's sporty affordable Mustang fun car. It was a heady time for Americans. We needed a "feel good" moment, which came in the form of the British invasion and an exciting new affordable sporty car from Ford.

It was time to heal.

At the time, Laurel was experiencing a population explosion. New homes and apartments all over the place. A nice clean wide spot in the country to raise a family. Our favorite family pastime was looking at model homes and apartments. As a result of population growth, temporary classrooms had to be added to Phair—those "little red school houses" we all remember outside of school buildings all over the area. I was one of several second graders moved from Mrs. Flick's class to Mrs. Ullmeyer in one of the portable school rooms to finish second grade. I never cared for Mrs. Ullmeyer. I still have scar tissue in my ear lobes from being led to the chalkboard for public humiliation before the



Jim Smart's second and third grade class photos from O.W. Phair Elementary School in 1964 and 65, respectively.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM SMART

class to explain a math formula. To her credit, I was a challenging student.

When we returned to school late that summer, the empty field behind Phair between West Street and Gorman Avenue was being cleared for apartments. I was in third grade and my teacher was Miss Sandra Wight fresh out of college. She was roughly 25 and beautiful. In the school parking lot was her new Wimbledon White Mustang convertible. A year later, she would marry and never be seen again.

While other kids were playing on the swings and monkey bars, I was at the fence watching them build Gorman Manor apartments (now Westgate at Laurel). Day by day, I watched apartment buildings rise out of the Maryland clay. By mid-1965, Gorman Manor was open for business as families filled apartments.

Whenever I am back in the area (I live in California), I head to Laurel to relive the memories with my Steward Manor brother, Rich Friend. I visit what used to be O.W. Phair Elementary School, flanked by a decidedly ugly high-rise office building. Phair closed in 1979 and was saved from the wrecking ball by cousins Dennis and Gary Berman and their partner Richard Dreisen, who reinvented Phair Elementary into Phair Office Park. It was a time in the 1980s when government, commerce, and entrepreneurial spirit took a community eyesore and gave it new life.



Jim Smart grew up in the Washington-Baltimore area—primarily in Lanham, Laurel, and Bowie. He lived in Laurel from 1963–65—moving to Belair At Bowie late in 1965.

# 1972:

## 50th Anniversary of Laurel's Most Historic Year



BY KEVIN LEONARD



If you lived through it, you would probably agree that 1972 was the most historic year for Laurel, especially given the importance of two events that had a lasting effect on the community.

In May, arguably the single most historic event in Laurel's history occurred when Arthur Bremer shot Presidential candidate Alabama Governor George Wallace in the parking lot of the Laurel Shopping Center during a campaign rally. In addition to Wallace's multiple gunshot wounds, three other people were shot by Bremer. Wallace was permanently paralyzed from the waist down. The next day, while recovering in Holy Cross Hospital, he won the Maryland Democratic primary, but his presidential campaign was over. Bremer, who had been stalking Wallace on the campaign trail, was convicted and sentenced to 63 years in prison. Bremer served 35 years at the state penitentiary in Hagerstown and was released on parole in November 2007.

Just a month later in June, Hurricane Agnes dumped a record amount of rain on the area, causing a catastrophic flood in Laurel. Two bridges, the Ninth St. Bridge connecting Laurel with the High Ridge area, and the Race Course Bridge were washed out. Businesses and homes all along the Patuxent River, as well as the Mistletoe Gardens apartments on Laurel-Bowie Road, were the two hardest hit sections in the immediate area. Both Route 1, which was under at least eight feet of water, and Route 198, which paralleled the Patuxent, were significantly damaged. About 1,000 residents were evacuated during the storm.

Flooding at Mistletoe Gardens apartments in south Laurel was among the most extensive from Hurricane Agnes.



LAUREL VOLUNTEER RESCUE SQUAD COLLECTION

# The Legacy of Roland Sweitzer

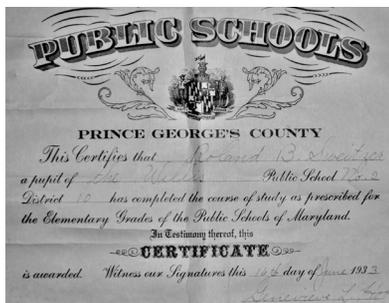


BY KEVIN LEONARD



When interviewing people, it's common for them to want to dish some dirt or set the record straight, such as it is. These comments are always accompanied with, "this is off the record, of course," which we journalists abide by. It's a rare occasion when nobody that's interviewed has anything negative to say. But that's exactly the situation I encountered when researching Roland B. Sweitzer, Sr., the former Chief of the Prince George's County Police Department and City Administrator for Laurel. The universal respect and admiration for the man was inspiring.

Sweitzer, who passed away in 1992, spent his entire life in Laurel until he and his wife, Blanche, retired to Florida in 1984. His two sons, Roland, Jr., and Greg, also had careers with the Prince George's County Police, and the family was recognized in 2001 for having a member serving on the force for 60 consecutive years, which is a record.



Sweitzer's diploma from the Willis School.

COURTESY OF GREG SWEITZER

## Early Years in Laurel

Sam Sweitzer bought a small farm in 1918, which was located just west of today's I-95, a year before his son, Roland, was born. Up until

the late 1950s, small farms made up all

of West Laurel. Much later, as the land was developed, the road running through the old farm property was named after the family: Sweitzer Lane. Roland and his family lived on the farm until the State of Maryland

bought the property in 1968 to make way for I-95. The Sweitzers then moved to Redmiles Road in West Laurel.

He graduated from the Willis School, a public school located nearby the family farm, in 1933, and then Laurel High School in 1937. In the 1930s, he had a number of different jobs, such as delivering milk for Seibel's dairy, working for Donaldson's Funeral Home, and as a plumber with John Flester. In a phone interview, Jay Donaldson recalled that the family mentioned Sweitzer but he could only speculate that Roland was an assistant to DeWitt Donaldson, the firm's founder, helping with deliveries and transfers. John Flester operated a plumbing business out of his home on Sandy Spring Road in the 1930s and 40s. The 1940 U.S. Census lists both Sweitzer (20 years old) and Flester (60 years old) as plumbers.

Just prior to the start of World War II, Sweitzer became the first 21-year-old accepted into the PG County Police force. According to his son, Greg, after Pearl Harbor there was chaos everywhere and nobody knew what to do. Sweitzer, the rookie cop, was handed a shotgun and told to guard the water tower in Bladensburg. He maintained his lonely vigil for weeks.

His police career was interrupted in 1944, as described in the book *Journey Through Time, A Pictorial History of the Prince George's County Police Department*, by Lt. Dennis Campbell:

As the war dragged on, it affected every facet of the American lifestyle, including the police department. Although there was an obvious need for increased police manpower, little growth occurred because of the rate at which young men were being drafted into the armed forces. Because their work was classified as critical, policemen were initially exempt from the draft, but this changed in 1944 when all exemptions were dropped for single men

under twenty-nine years of age. Within a short period of time, two policemen, Roland Sweitzer and Wilmer Suit, were drafted into the service.

## Career with PG County Police

He returned to the PG County Police after two years in the U.S. Marine Corps, steadily working his way up the career ladder.

For example, in 1951, he was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant and "assigned to conduct the department's first in-house Police Academy for training new officers," according to Lt. Campbell's book. Then, "In 1954, the department created the new rank of captain. Promoted to the new rank were: Vincent S. Free, who was still acting as superintendent of police; Charles N. Thomsen, chief of detectives; and Roland B. Sweitzer, who headed the Patrol Division."

In 1971, then-Chief Vincent Free retired and Lt. Col. Sweitzer was named the new Chief of the Prince George's County Police Department. His appointment came during an extremely difficult time for law enforcement. As Lt. Campbell described it:

Issues such as poverty, racial discrimination, and the Vietnam War fueled strong anti-establishment sentiments throughout the 1970s. The rate of violent crime, which began to increase in the 1960s, continued its upward spiral during the 1970s. ... Large-scale anti-Vietnam War demonstrations became commonplace in many cities, including Washington, D.C., with similar demonstrations occurring on many of the nation's college campuses. Prince George's County was not immune. On several different occasions in the early 1970s, Governor Marvin Mandel was forced into calling out the National Guard to quell anti-war demonstrations at the University of Maryland.

The uniformed police officer, as government's most

outwardly visible sign of authority, absorbed most of the anti-establishment sentiment. ... Frequently referred to as “pigs” and literally spat upon, the police were often viewed with contempt.

Wading into this turmoil in his new job, with the added burden of rapid growth both in the department and in the county’s population, Chief Sweitzer implemented several progressive programs designed to reduce crime and bolster community confidence in the police. He made numerous administrative changes to modernize the department. Among them were the establishment of assigned beats for the members of the patrol force; the centralization of criminal investigations; the creation of a community relations program, a fiscal affairs unit and a public information office; and increased hiring of women and minority officers. As described by Lt. Campbell:

Chief Sweitzer also implemented some internal changes to improve the police image within the county’s growing black community. A Community Relations Unit was formed for the sole purpose of fostering better police/community relations. Several of the department’s general orders were amended to lessen the possibility of police/citizen confrontations. A four-day special cultural-awareness training program became a mandatory part of the police academy’s yearly in-service training. The goal of this training was to make officers aware that they had to function in a multicultural society, and that they had a responsibility to serve all county residents equally. Just a few months after taking over, Sweitzer implemented one of the nation’s first personal patrol car programs. Police officers who lived in the county were allowed to use their patrol cars for personal use while off-duty, with the proviso that they would monitor the police radio while in the car and assist with emergency situations.

In an article he wrote for the September 1973 issue of *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Sweitzer described the effectiveness of his program: “This program, which allowed approximately 365 policemen to use their cruisers for personal use while off duty, has been credited with cutting back the growing rate of crime in the county and providing, with little cost to the taxpayers, additional police presence on the streets.”

In 1972, Sweitzer made another change to bolster the public’s confidence: police trial boards would be open to the public. Previously, all disciplinary proceedings had been closed. Also that year, he opened up hiring of women as full-fledged patrol officers. Until then, women officers were hired to only work with juveniles. The expansion of roles for women officers continued in 1975, when Sweitzer appointed the first female detective, Carol Murphy, who was transferred from the uniform division.

His son, Greg, recalled that Sweitzer loved Laurel. He would take Greg with him on Saturday mornings as they strolled down Main Street, stopping in storefronts and greeting passers-by. “He knew everybody and never forgot anybody’s name,” said Greg.

A story that was related to me concerned how much Sweitzer looked after his fellow officers. A huge storm with driving rain knocked out the power in parts of Laurel, including the series of stoplights along Route 1. A Laurel policeman was directing traffic in freezing

rain for a few hours when a car pulled to the side of the road. Chief Sweitzer got out, handed the cop a cup of hot coffee, and told him to take a break from the rain in his squad car. The amazed policeman watched from his dry car as Chief Sweitzer took over directing traffic.

After only four productive years as Chief, but 34 years with the Prince George’s County Police Department, Sweitzer retired for health reasons on May 1, 1975. He was succeeded by one of his deputies, John W. Rhoads.

In reporting his retirement, the *Washington Evening Star* said, “Sweitzer is considered the last and the best of the old guard. ... Sweitzer inherited a dispirited department alienated from the public it served and torn by schisms. He is leaving what observers assess as a better organized, better equipped, happier department.”

### Laurel City Administrator

After retiring from the police force, Sweitzer worked for Mid-City Chevrolet “just killing time in retirement,” former Mayor Bob DiPietro told me in an interview. But when the 25-year-old DiPietro was elected Mayor of Laurel in 1978, he knew who he wanted as his City Administrator.

“I’d known Roland my whole life,” he said, “and I wanted a City Administrator that knew Laurel and knew its history.”

As described by DiPietro, the City Administrator is a full-time employee charged with running the day-to-day responsibilities under the direction of the Mayor (which, in Laurel, is a part-time position). “His best asset,” according to the former mayor, “was the respect shown to him by the city employees and getting the staff to work as a team.”

In 2015, The Laurel History Boys staged a Mayors Roundtable with all the living former mayors and current Mayor Moe. During that discussion, DiPietro recalled a story about Sweitzer:

Roland Sweitzer [was] my City Administrator. I think every one of us has lived through the aggravation of paving the street and having the WSSC dig it up 15 minutes later. Roland said “Let’s get a meeting with the general manager and take him on a tour and show him.” The head of the WSSC showed up and Roland had three cups of coffee. So he started driving through the city to talk and show these potholes. I noticed when I opened my lid my cup was half full. But the guy from the WSSC opened his lid and the coffee was just about to fall over the sides and we hit every pothole. Roland *covered* that man in coffee.

Sweitzer served as Laurel’s City Administrator from 1979 to 1984, when he retired for good. At his retirement dinner, attended by more than 300 people, Sweitzer typically thanked others.

“You have to know I didn’t earn all the accolades myself,” he said. “I had a lot of help.”



*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.*

# Happy Birthday, Ginny!

BY KEVIN LEONARD

Virginia Scagliarini, one of Laurel’s most notable residents, recently celebrated her 100th birthday. She has been a favorite source of mine over the years when I wrote about Laurel history.



She is the daughter of the late Benjamin and Kathryn Chapman, who moved to Main Street in Laurel in 1924 with their two-year-old daughter. Ben Chapman was a horse breeder and trainer.

When the government wanted to build a new post office in Laurel, the Chapman’s lot on Main Street was chosen as the site. In negotiations, Mrs. Chapman enlisted her friend and neighbor, Postmaster Elizabeth Boss, to propose lowering the price of the lot from \$10,000 to \$9,000 if the government would pay to have their house moved 50 feet to the back of their lot that was not part of the sale. The government refused and paid \$8,500 for the lot, invoking eminent domain. Laurel’s Post Office was dedicated on Sept. 1, 1937.

The Chapmans loved their house, so they took the government’s offer and hired contractors to move the house 50 feet onto a new foundation.

Ginny lived in Laurel her whole life, graduating from St. Mary’s in 1936 and St. Mildred’s Academy (which became Pallotti High School many years later) in 1940.

By the early 1950s, both Ben and Kathryn Chapman had passed away, but Ginny and her husband, Dolph Scagliarini, lived in the relocated house behind the post office. Ginny told me that the house that had been moved in 1937 to make way for the new post office was converted into four apartments. The Scagliarinis lived in one and rented the other three to members of the Army Field Band at Fort Meade. But by the late 1950s, their relocated house was exactly where the government wanted to expand the Laurel Post Office.

Once again, negotiations commenced for the lot. They dragged on for years with the memory of having her house taken from them in 1937 still fresh in Ginny’s mind. But it was no use. The property was condemned.

In an unusual arrangement, the Scagliarinis were allowed to buy back their house after receiving payment from the government for the property. They had a foundation built on a lot and, once again, had the top half of their apartment house lifted up and moved to a new location on Seventh Street.

Happy Birthday, Ginny!



# “We had a guy...”

## Tales From the Laurel Police Department



BY RICK MCGILL

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

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

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



Maybe it’s because we answer the phone 24/7/365 in all weather and no matter who calls, but people seem to think the police department can do anything. I suppose that’s also the reason we end up with some good stories to tell. Sometimes animals enter the picture in ways our complaining caller doesn’t like.

One night we had a girl at 410 Main Street call to complain that a bat had somehow gotten into her apartment. She had exhausted whatever limited knowledge she had about chiroptera and the means of convincing them to leave one’s premises and assumed that bat extermination was one of the super powers in our police arsenal.

I’m not sure how the idea of using a fire extinguisher entered the conversation once our guy got on the scene but I do remember thinking I had heard they could be helpful in freezing or disabling a bat long enough to get a towel or blanket on it to carry it outside and humanely release it back to Mother Nature. I also know the type of fire extinguisher needed for the operation is a CO2 (Carbon Dioxide) model, which dispenses its contents as a very cold gaseous cloud that quickly dissipates on its own, leaving nothing to clean up afterward.

After a fair amount of time went by and our officer hadn’t cleared the call yet, I stopped by to see what the delay was. As I parked and walked toward the apartment, I also began to wonder where they had obtained a CO2 fire extinguisher. All the extinguishers we carry in our cruisers are dry chemical and meant to smother a fire, not freeze it out.

I know you guys can see where this is going, so to cut to the chase, as I entered the apartment both the caller and our officer are coughing and rasping. He heads for the door carrying a towel-wrapped and probably now-deceased bat. The apartment is completely coated with yellow powder from a dry chem extinguisher from his police cruiser. The air is still thick with powder and we all stepped outside to breathe. My guy shook the bat out of the towel and handed it back to our complainant.

As he retrieved his empty fire extinguisher, I didn’t have the heart to tell her it was the wrong kind. So I nodded to the apartment as clouds of yellow powder wafted out the door and said something like, “This isn’t so bad. Nice job. A little vacuuming and you’ll have things back to normal.” I knew it would take much more than that but she took it in stride.

“Thank you guys so much. I hope the thing is okay.”

“Happy to help, ma’am. Good night.”

I’m shaking my head as we walked back to our cruisers. He goes, “I know, Sarge. Wrong stuff. But it worked.”

On the plus side, she probably won’t call us next time.



Since it’s still summer while I’m writing this, I’m reminded of those hot, humid summer nights on the midnight shift when, you’ll recall from some of my prior entries, anything is possible. The typical call volume has trickled down to nil and the city is tucking in for the night. Our guys are finally finding time to do some actual crime detecting, usually by patrolling into the back allies and unlit areas where thieves and miscreants lurk.

In places like Baltimore, where I went to the academy, it’s called “trying up your post.” But it mainly means snooping around your assigned beat area and trying to catch bad guys in the act. You might radio in to Communications saying, “I’ll be on foot around Georgetown Alley, Radio,” and you’d shake some doors. Or you’d park somewhere and just listen for a while. Sound carries far at night. Breaking glass, cracking wood, car doors... anything is possible.

I was parked in the dark around Montrose Avenue

and 10th Street one damp, quiet night just listening. I had been parked a couple of blocks away but the sound of residential air conditioners was too loud to hear much. After a while I heard the telltale unmistakable sound of something breaking. You could be drowsy from long periods of nothing happening but suddenly you’re hyper-alert and waiting for the next sound to get a direction and better idea what the heck it is.

I radio in where I am and that I’ll be out on foot for a while. I don’t have enough information to mention the noises I’m hearing so that can wait. I quietly exit my car and pushed the door closed without a sound. I heard the cracking sound again from behind one of the houses so I head that way. You don’t use your flashlight as it would telegraph your approach and you’d never catch anyone that way. Your eyes are accustomed to the dark by now and it’s easy to hop fences and navigate back yards and driveways and follow the noises, which get a little louder every few minutes.

I grew up on Ward Street so I could wander Laurel Hills blindfolded. By now I’m about halfway up Turney Avenue going over fences from yard to yard and as soon as I have a good location, I’ll call in the troops and we’ll have this burglar or Peeping Tom or whoever he is surrounded and in handcuffs so fast I’m already writing my own commendation.

Closer now and I think it’s in the next back yard. I lean around the corner of the house and the yard is dimly lit by the soft blue light of a bug zapper. Whoever it is must be trying to pry open a basement door or maybe---

ZZZZITT!!

A big June bug fries in the bug zapper. It sounds exactly like the noises I’ve been creeping up on for the last half hour. There’s no one breaking in. I sheepishly made my way back to my car, via the sidewalk this time, thankful that I hadn’t alerted the squad to the suspicious noises that turned out to be dying bugs.

ZZZITT went my commendation.



Catching bad guys isn’t as easy as it looks on TV. But it takes practice to coordinate a bunch of good guys on the radio to swoop in and round ‘em up. We can’t arrange a convenient felony to practice on but sometimes we have time to hone our roundup skills on other targets of opportunity. Targets who, if they evaded our efforts successfully, it wouldn’t really matter if they got away.

Enter the truant high school student.

The day shift can be boring when routine calls are few and far between, so sometimes the Beat 1 guy, me back when I worked a beat and the Beat 1 officers I supervised later, would roam the residential areas like Marton Street, Belle Ami Drive, or Ashford, with an eye toward school-age kids wandering around during school hours. The truly valid part of this is that many times daytime burglaries are committed by juveniles who should be in school. Other times they're just hooking school and not really looking for trouble. Of course, sometimes we'd find one or two who were on "work release" with a valid reason to be off-campus. But those kind don't run when they see the police. Like checking to see if the car in front of you is stolen by switching on your overhead lights: if they run the jig is up.

So, when conditions are right: light radio calls, our guys are bored, kids are running, we can use them as practice for the real thing. It takes knowledge of the street names, for example, if a kid runs between these houses next to me what street is he coming out on so I can direct a car that way? It takes radio coordination, knowing which direction your guys are likely to come in from and how best to direct them. Good training.

Now, we don't get into foot chases with people half our age, mainly because it's just not worth it for truant kids. Plus, I'm not working the rest of the shift with a bunch of sweat under my body armor. Besides, they can't outrun that radio. With enough cars heading them off in enough directions, even the all-county track stars will run out of steam. When they give up, we collect them and take them back to school to meet with Tony Perucci or Tom Kirby. Then we meet for coffee and a squad critique of lessons learned.

A teaching moment for all concerned.



Like I've mentioned in prior episodes, our department is constantly sending guys to specialized training schools and seminars in order to get the most use out of what always seemed to be limited manpower. You could request to be assigned a special school or some schools are assigned to you whether you want them or not.

In the mid-80s, then-lieutenant Cook asked me one day, "Ricky, have you been to breathalyzer school yet?" "All due respect, Lieutenant, there's no 'Y' on my name. But, no, sir, not really interested in that one, if I can get out of it."

A week later I got orders to attend the Maryland State Police Breathalyzer Operator's Course in Pikesville. And to him I was "Ricky" from then on.

Much later, as a sergeant, I was assigned, again unwillingly, to Environmental Crimes School hosted by the Maryland Department of the Environment in Baltimore. If I was handed a catalogue of courses to pick the one I was least interested in, this would be it.

Cops are the hardest to supervise in a classroom setting and I tip my hat to anyone who tries. Most of the time they don't want to be there, and some of the time the instructor is a civilian anyway and we're supposed to listen to them?

So, the first day of class I and Cpl. Della, who may have been as unenthusiastic about attending as I was, sat in mock rapt attention as the instructor explained what the Maryland Department of the Environment was and how it was responsible for policing violations of various laws and regulations on toxic waste and rainwater runoff and other things that revealed the whites of many eyes in the room.

He then asked, rhetorically I'm sure, "So, why are you guys here?"

Sergeant Smart-ass raised his hand, and with a welcoming nod from our instructor, I lowered the bar yet again: "I want to save my planet from the scourge of pollution."

Once he regained control of the room, we did complete the course and despite my initial impression I must have picked up a thing or two to use on the street. But I don't think I was ever called on again in that class.

But the story isn't over. Many months later, as I was out snooping around the undeveloped property behind Lafayette Avenue looking for bums, back when they were bums (though now they're called a "homeless encampment"), I found myself in what my highly specialized training told me constituted a Wetland. A rookie might call it a stinking swamp that threatened to ruin his patent leather Corfam shoes and fresh-pressed Class A trousers. But to certified Environmental Warriors it is a Wetland, vital to the ecosystem and protected by law.

In this Wetland, I noticed a quantity of standing, stagnant water, which of itself begged no further attention, but to my Captain Planet-trained eye also held what we in the Environmental Crimes Unit call a "petroleum sheen," that rainbow effect of oil on water. I followed the seepage to its source, which was a business on Lafayette Avenue that used a lot of heavy equipment: dump trucks, backhoes, etc., and they apparently cleaned the equipment with pressure washers allowing the gas and oil to run off into the swamp—I mean Wetland—behind the property.

I retrieved a camera from my cruiser parked up the street and opened a case for what was the first and perhaps only environmental crime in department history. The report was forwarded to the MD Department of the Environment, which followed up and contacted the business in the form of fines and notices and so forth.

I heard from the business owner afterward and was surprised he wasn't mad. He actually thanked me for helping them get squared away and it was altogether a cordial call. I also heard from the investigator at MDE in Baltimore. He was impressed enough with my report that he offered me a job.

Had I accepted, who knows the outcome? Climate change might not even be a thing now.



There is no end to tales that came out of the B&E Tavern.

We had a guy, a frequent flyer named Chris, who we had to deal with on several occasions highly intoxicated, but not a trouble-maker. He was fairly young, nice-looking kid, but hard alcoholic and needed help once in a while getting to someplace safe. Several of us had dealt with him more than once and I came across him early one evening behind the B&E before he had had too much. We talked for a while and I tried to get him to realize the road he was on wasn't going to end well. You never know if you get through to someone but he seemed lucid and agreed that he should get his act together. It's best not to dwell on it either way.

Sometime after that, I had a call for an injured person/man down in the alley beside the B&E Tavern. I got there and it was Chris, now sitting up against the wall holding his hand in his lap. The hand was all bloody and the short story is, he had passed out on the ground in the alley, which is a tight squeeze to drive through anyway, and a car had driven over his hand and popped the end of a couple of fingers like balloons. We packed him off to PG Hospital in an ambulance.

I heard much later that on another visit to PGH, probably under similar circumstances, he had checked himself out of the hospital AMA (Against Medical Advice) and got as far as the Baltimore-Washington Parkway where he was struck and killed by a passing car.

I've always wished I'd talked to him longer.



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

Investigation to continue...



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

# History of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System

PART 1 OF A SERIES



BY DW ROWLANDS

Today, Prince George's County—like all Maryland counties—has a county-run public library system. But it didn't have to be that way: in much of the country, public libraries are operated by municipalities or special library districts. Maryland is one of only seven states where public libraries, which serve as community institutions and some of our most enduring forms of truly public space, are organized at the county level. In 1946, the Prince George's County Memorial Library System became the first in DC's Maryland suburbs to be run at the county level.

So how did Prince George's County get its library system off the ground?

## Public libraries came relatively late to PG County

The Boston Public Library, the first large, free municipal library in the US, opened in 1854, but the years after the Civil War were when urban public libraries took off across the US: Detroit in 1865; Chicago and San Francisco in the 1870s; Baltimore in 1886; and Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, Brooklyn, and DC in the 1890s.

Smaller cities and towns throughout the country opened libraries during this same period. The first public library in Montgomery County opened in Rockville in 1869, and several other towns in the county opened over the next three decades. However, Prince George's County (and much of Northern Virginia) did not get its first public library until the early years of the 20th century.

The first public library in Prince George's County was established in 1908 in downtown Laurel by a citizens' group, the Laurel Library Association. The library was housed in several different rented quarters until 1929, when a resident donated a building to be used by the library association and the Laurel Women's Club.

In the years before World War II, three additional libraries opened in the county, all run by community groups or city governments. In 1921, the Women's

Club of Hyattsville opened a small public library in space donated in the J.C. Hawkins Electric Shop on Baltimore Avenue in downtown Hyattsville; in 1923, the city took over providing space for it in city hall.



*The Greenbelt Center School, now the Greenbelt Community Center, was the first home of the Greenbelt library.* NATIONAL ARCHIVES

by the City of Greenbelt in 1939, only eighteen months after the city itself was founded, and was housed in the Greenbelt Center School, now the Greenbelt Community Center. In 1942, the unincorporated community of Beltsville also got a library, established by the Women's Community Club and housed in a room in the local elementary school. However, the space was soon taken back by the school system and this first Beltsville library dissolved.

## 1945 Maryland law gives county libraries a boost

By 1945, three counties in Maryland, as well as Baltimore City, had established library systems. Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Library pioneered the trend in 1886, followed by the Washington County Free Library in 1901—only the second county-run public library in the country—then later the Anne Arundel County Public Library in 1921, and the Howard County Public Library in 1940.

In 1945, the state ensured this trend would continue when it passed a law creating a library division in the state department of education and offering funding to the state's counties to support public library systems.

The state agreed to provide funding for books at a rate based on county

populations. To participate, counties were required to establish county library systems, pass a property tax of two cents per \$100 of assessed real estate value to support these libraries, and—crucially—to make their libraries open to all.

## Race and public libraries in Maryland

The requirement that libraries established with state funding be “open to all” meant that county library services funded by the state could not be racially segregated. This was hardly a foregone conclusion in Maryland, which had a rich history of Jim Crow laws: Baltimore banned White and Black residents from living on the same blocks in 1910, and the state did not pay Black and White teachers equally until required to by court order in 1941. The state's schools did not begin to desegregate until after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

Racism seems to have delayed the implementation of the public library law in some places in Maryland. In 1952, residents of Calvert County threatened to burn the Anne Arundel County bookmobile if it served their county, due to anger at the fact that the books would be available to Black residents. But if there was concern in Prince George's County over the idea of an unsegregated public library system, it didn't make it into the newspaper.



*Children line up for a 1950s library bookmobile in Prince George's County.* NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Unsurprisingly, a number of new county library systems were established in Maryland shortly after the passage of the 1945 law. Prince George's County, in 1946, was one of the first, following Harford County in 1945. Other counties followed: Baltimore County in 1948, St. Mary's and Charles Counties in 1950, Montgomery County in 1951, and Carroll and Calvert Counties in 1958. Many of these library systems took over the operation of existing libraries that had been established by municipalities or private organizations.

When the Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) was established by the county commissioners in 1946, there were initial proposals for a central library either in Hyattsville (near the county center of population at the time) or in Upper Marlboro (the county seat), but the new library system did not have the budget to acquire or maintain a library building.

Instead, the library system began more humbly: with bookmobiles. The first bookmobile was purchased in 1947 with donations from the public and a second was purchased in 1952 with county funds.

In addition to bookmobiles, the library system began to operate branches by providing books and librarians for libraries in spaces provided by local communities. The Laurel library became the first PGCMLS branch in 1947 and the Hyattsville library joined in 1948, along with newly-opened branches in city-owned buildings in Fairmount Heights and District Heights.

PART 2 OF THIS SERIES WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF VOICES OF LAUREL.

*DW Rowlands is a human geographer and PG County native, currently living in College Park. She is a senior research assistant at the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking in the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution.*

# Holy Grail for Led Zeppelin Collector: Laurel Pop Festival Poster



BY KEVIN LEONARD

It started in 7th grade in 1969. Brian Knapp was in music class, taught by a popular teacher who set aside the last 10 minutes of each class for “free play,” which allowed the class to listen to whatever music they wanted. When someone put on *Led Zeppelin II* and dropped the needle on “Whole Lotta Love,” Knapp, hearing the song for first time, was hooked.

“The song just grabbed me as a kid,” he told me in an interview.

Since his family didn’t own a record player, Knapp badgered his parents into buying one and he followed suit with the first album he ever bought: *Led Zeppelin II*. This started his life-long pursuit of collecting all things about the band. As a teenager, his bedroom “was full of Led Zeppelin stuff.”

His passion for the band neatly coincided with Led Zeppelin’s heydays from 1968 to 1980, when Knapp was in junior high, then high school, then college.

## A Different Breed

Collectors are a different breed, and they are everywhere, evidenced by the plethora of shows on television dedicated to the craft: *Antiques Roadshow*, *Pawn Stars*, *American Pickers*, etc. Where some see junk (or trash), collectors’ special vision sees worth. Collectors like Knapp have a passion for a particular subject that borders on obsession. We’re not talking about a kid with a stamp album. These collectors have small (or very large, in some cases) fortunes invested in their collections.

Seasoned collectors in Knapp’s league are savvy negotiators, having spent countless hours researching artifacts. When bidding on an item, they already know how much it would fetch on the open market, or they have another collector ready to trade with to get a missing piece for their collection. It’s like a huge chess match with lots of moving pieces. They also build an extensive network of contacts and resources, keeping their ear to the ground for new items coming up for sale. Obviously, the Internet (websites, blogs, Google, eBay) is a prime source for much of this, but their vast networks also include auction houses, social media, contacts from conventions, and friends and family.

Knapp’s love of music history—particularly the legacy of Led Zeppelin—is a huge reason behind his obsession, but it is fueled by one passion: the hunt for new artifacts. “The hunt is the drug,” as Knapp put it. In his hunt for Led Zeppelin memorabilia, Knapp calls himself a “completist.” That means if he obtains, for example, a ticket stub to a concert, he doesn’t stop there. The hunt is on for “a program, t shirt, band contract, photos” or anything else about that concert to

complete his collection. Although it may take years, he usually finds them.

As he showed me his collection, he pointed to a newly arrived assortment of vinyl albums, boxes, programs, and who-knows-what covering the floor, waiting to be cataloged. “This was all mine years ago. I just bought it back,” he said. The “completist” never rests.

## Best Collection in the World

After more than 50 years of hunting, Knapp’s collection is widely considered the most comprehensive collection of Led Zeppelin memorabilia in the world. He estimates that there are only five or six other Led Zeppelin collections that come close to his. Confirmation, of sorts, has been provided many times.

In 1988, in the first public exhibit of his collection, Knapp organized a three-day Led Zeppelin convention, which was the first of its kind for the band. At the convention, held at the Meadowlands Hilton in New Jersey, hundreds of fans enjoyed a museum (set up with artifacts mostly from Knapp’s collection), exhibits from other collectors, performances by tribute bands, and listened to speakers associated with the band’s history.

In 1995, band members Jimmy Page and Robert Plant embarked on a nationwide tour, accompanied by a rolling museum outfitted in a custom 18-wheeler. The museum contained numerous artifacts borrowed from Knapp by the band’s management and marketing company.

In 2018, a representative from Atlantic Records called Knapp because the show *Pawn Stars* was looking for “The Object,” a mysterious black statue that was featured on the cover of the album, *Presence*. The record company produced 1,000 copies of the object in 1976, when the album was released. Led Zeppelin’s record company knew that if anyone had one, it was Knapp. He did, and appeared on *Pawn Stars* in 2018. (Search *Led Zeppelin* “The Object” to see the clip.)

In 2019, Allison McGourty, a film producer in England who was working on an “official” documentary about the history of Led Zeppelin, contacted Knapp about his collection. The documentary is notable for two things: this is the first time that the surviving band members have supported having their story told, and the producers have scoured the globe looking for artifacts and archival footage

**LAUREL POP FESTIVAL**

LAUREL RACE COURSE - LAUREL, MD.

**FRI. EVENING JULY 11** 8:00 P. M.

**SAT. EVENING JULY 12** 8:00 P. M.

**LED ZEPPELIN**

**JOHNNY WINTERS**

**JETHRO TULL**

**AL KOOPER**

**EDWIN HAWKINS SINGERS**

**BUDDY GUY**

**SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE**

**10 YEARS AFTER**

**MOTHERS OF INVENTION**

**JEFF BECK**

**GUESS WHO**

**SAVOY BROWN BLUES BAND**

**Tickets: Reserved.. \$6.75- \$5.75 - \$4.75 - Box Seats.. \$10.00**

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LOBE PORTER - BALTIMORE

COURTESY OF BRIAN KNAPP

of concerts. McGourty was given access to Knapp’s collection and considered numerous items for use in the still-unreleased film.

Then, in 2021, *Record Collector* magazine, published in the UK, photographed numerous items from Knapp’s collection to accompany an article titled “All That Glitters Is Gold.” The article went on to say, “Collecting on such a scale can be a competitive business, and in the past Brian has been reluctant to publicize his collection. But we’re delighted to say that he has had a change of heart and has aspirations to open a Led Zeppelin-themed museum or exhibition, designed to highlight the band’s enormous influence on popular music and culture, especially in the United States. ... Over the coming pages we uncover a wide range of artifacts that’ll give you an idea of the enormity and quality of his collection, not to mention a twinge or two of envy.”

His collection has to be seen to be believed. Some of his more rare artifacts include the custom Harley-Davidson chopper that belonged to drummer John Bonham (who rode the motorcycle in the film *The Song Remains the Same*), the blue shirt worn by Jimmy Page

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

## Renters Fight Back CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

each other, having been working on the rent issue for months at that point. But as introductions occurred around the room, some of the new faces generated a buzz of excitement: two City Council members, the Executive Director of LARS, a well-known Laurel advocate for the homeless, the Director of the NAACP in Prince George's County, an aide to MD State Delegate Mike Rogers.

And for those who didn't recognize him when he entered the room, Glenn Ivey introduced himself in turn. The former PG County State's Attorney and current Democratic nominee for Congress in Maryland's 4th District, Ivey shared that it was his wedding anniversary and so he couldn't stay long, but he felt that the issue was extremely important. He lauded CASA for its involvement, noting the important work they have done at both the local and national levels over the years. Ivey echoed the sentiments of others who had stated that the issues the Laurel tenants face are happening all over the state and throughout the entire country, and many people would be watching the Laurel situation closely for inspiration and specific ideas.

To that point, one young couple noted that they had traveled to the meeting from Virginia to see how the Laurel tenant group was approaching the challenge; they had seen an unsuccessful rent strike play out in Virginia in 2020 and were heartened by the partial successes of the Westgate strike. A reporter from the University of Maryland's *Diamondback* newspaper was there because of the relevance to college students who rent near campus. One woman lamented that she had lost her church home after rent went too high at the building where her church met.

Although most of the tenants at the meeting had been personally impacted by rent increases, they also pointed to the bigger-picture impact on society. For instance, frequent moves to avoid unaffordable increases disrupts lives, including those of children who have to readjust to new schools and make new friends. Also, as rent goes up, less money is being pumped into the economy, which negatively affects state tax revenues.

One of the most memorable statements was made by a woman who owns her house in Russett, who lamented that, prior to the press coverage of the rent strike, she'd had no awareness of the hardships that apartment tenants were facing. Although rent increases don't affect her directly, she asserted that the issue "affects me morally!" and therefore "we ALL have to be involved."



Residents of Westgate at Laurel (formerly known as Gorman Manor) apartments on Route 198 organized a rent strike in August after new owners substantially increased rent and monthly fees. RICHARD FRIEND

### Next Move: "Get Political"

Benitez-Perez pointed out at the meeting that the owners in question had not responded to tenants until local officials got involved—in addition to the compromise when the City of Laurel provided some rent assistance at the senior apartments, the Westgate towing situation was improved only after direct involvement by DeWalt, Mitchell, and Dernoga. Therefore, as another attendee noted, the only way to achieve long-lasting results would be to "get politically active."

As a start, CASA is circulating a petition calling for the City of Laurel to enact a law that prohibits landlords from profiting as a result of displacing tenants. To that end, Mitchell shared with *Voices of Laurel* a draft of a bill he authored and will co-sponsor with DeWalt. Titled the "Anti-Homelessness and Displace Act," the bill will set a limit of "3% of the existing monthly rent for any residential property" and will establish a "Rental Registry" that will prohibit unregistered properties from raising rents at all, among other actions designed to offer renters "protections from massive rent increases from lease to lease."

At the County level, it was stated that Dernoga is trying to pass an emergency bill in PG County to protect tenants, and fellow County Council member Jolene Ivey has also introduced legislation, but has acknowledged that the County doesn't have the authority to enact certain regulations without State

approval. Benitez-Perez noted that the incoming PG Council is "super progressive" and he expects the focus to turn more toward county residents rather than businesses. Of course, with Laurel's unique four-county status, such reforms might not benefit all Laurelites, and that's why State-level reform is needed.

In fact, CASA has been concentrating on the State level for years, according to Benitez-Perez, because of some longtime Maryland State laws that offer much greater protection for landlords than for tenants. As an example, Benitez-Perez noted that the State of Maryland does not allow tenants to sue their landlords through a class-action lawsuit, and most people cannot afford the expense of suing on their own. While a proposal to change that law was introduced at the last Maryland General Assembly session, no action was taken.

According to Benitez-Perez, there are no housing-related bills up for action on the agenda for the upcoming session, either, but there are advocates in the Assembly who can at least raise the relevant issues as a first step toward slating them for future sessions.

At least one of those advocates has already spoken up. State Delegate Lehman, who sits on the Housing Subcommittee and attended one of the meetings with Manesh and the tenants, told *Voices of Laurel* that it "is incumbent on legislators to do something" to fix this situation. Her concern is fueled by her "strong feeling for the need for more affordable housing" in the Laurel area.

# Led Zeppelin Collector CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

at the Knebworth Music Festival in 1979 (which is well-known to hard-core Led Zeppelin fans, according to Knapp), along with hundreds of rare concert posters, ticket stubs, band jackets and t shirts, promotional items, band contracts from various gigs, photos, and, of course, vinyl albums, tapes, and CDs.

## The Holy Grail

In 1969, Laurel hosted a pop festival at Laurel Race Course, attended by 15,000 fans, that offered a lineup of some of the biggest pop performers of the year. The impressive lineup included Led Zeppelin, Sly & the Family Stone, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Jethro Tull, Johnny Winter, the Edwin Hawkins Singers, Buddy Guy, 10 Years After, The Jeff Beck Group, Guess Who, and others. Three of the acts that performed in Laurel played at Woodstock the following month. Unfortunately, the second night of the festival rained. The soaked fans were getting colder as nighttime wore on, and bonfires were started on the infield, using wooden folding chairs as fuel. Characterized as a “riot” by the media, it caused the cancellation of any future pop festivals in Laurel.

Knapp had owned a ticket stub and program from the Laurel Pop Festival for years, but the Holy Grail of Laurel Pop eluded him: an original poster from the two-day festival. (Serious collectors are not interested in reproductions.) This “glaring hole,” as he put it, in his collection gnawed at him, especially every time he passed an exit on I-95 that said “Laurel.”

Knapp’s network—and patience and persistence—came through for him in his search for the Holy Grail. Jeff Krulik, a local filmmaker (and member of the Laurel History Boys’ Board of Directors) directed and produced the documentary *Led Zeppelin Played Here*. Krulik has screened the film in various venues across the country, winning numerous awards in the process. Knapp appeared in Krulik’s film and they became friends during the filming.

Some years ago, Krulik struck up a conversation while working at his storage unit with the guy who owned the unit next door. Somehow, the Laurel Pop Festival came up and the guy mentioned that he had a friend who owned an original poster. Apparently, the friend attended the festival and the poster held lots of memories for him.

Krulik passed on the information to Knapp, who then tracked the friend down and tried to negotiate with him. But the friend simply wasn’t interested in selling. But Knapp stayed in contact with the friend, occasionally upping his original offer. It took almost eight years, but a few months ago, the friend finally relented and sold it to Knapp.

## Always on the Lookout

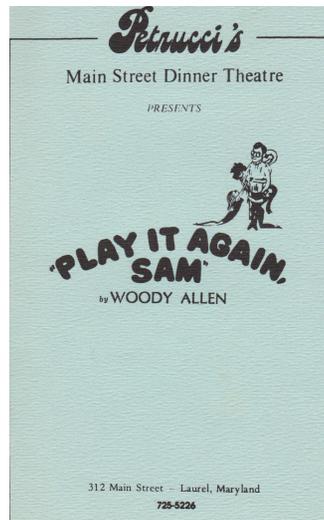
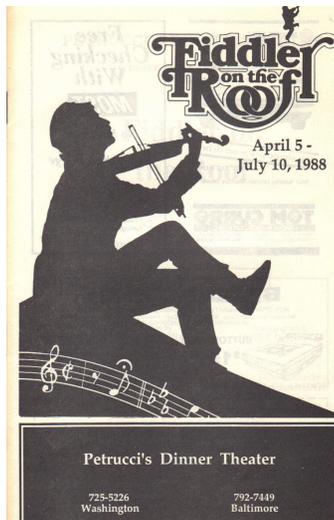
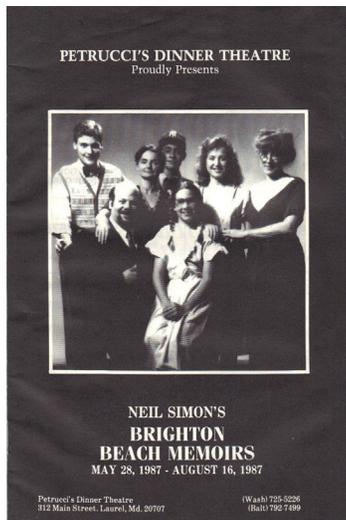
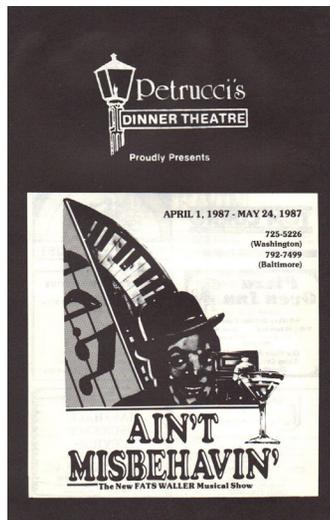
Brian Knapp is far from done. He is always on the lookout for, mostly, Led Zeppelin memorabilia, but also any pop music artifacts from any local venue like Merriweather Post Pavilion, the Baltimore Civic Center, Capital Centre, etc. Anyone with any old ticket stubs, handbills, programs, posters, etc. that would like to sell can contact Knapp at [goset123@msn.com](mailto:goset123@msn.com).



Pages from the 2021 issue of Record Collector magazine showing a sample of Brian Knapp’s incredible Zed Zeppelin memorabilia collection, widely considered to be the most comprehensive in the world. Knapp recently found what had been one of the most elusive pieces in his half century of collecting—an original poster from the Laurel Pop Festival. COURTESY OF RECORD COLLECTOR MAGAZINE

# Petrucci's

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15



(Above): A selection of programs from 1980s productions at Petrucci's Dinner Theatre. (Right): A Laurel News Leader ad announces the grand opening of Petrucci's Italian Restaurant on January 16, 1977. COURTESY OF ANGELA JO PETRUCCHI LEONARD

## A New Era Begins

After 50 years as an entertainment facility, with its two storefronts and upstairs apartments, the building was gutted and repurposed into a restaurant and banquet facility.

The local paper reported, "THE LAUREL THEATER, closed after almost 40 years, was purchased by a local businessman and converted to a restaurant and theater complex. The project involved combined efforts by local citizens, professionals, and city and county officials. The project reflects a cooperative spirit and faith in the revitalization effort of Main Street." That doesn't quite capture the back-breaking work, swinging sledge hammers to break up old concrete and tearing down walls made with plaster and lath.

Most of the renovations took place while I was away in my first semester at Salisbury State College in Salisbury, Maryland. When I came home at the Christmas break, I worked at Pal-Jacks and Mike's Pizza while Mom, Dad, and other family members worked on the theater building and preparations for the new business.

Once the renovations were "done," we still had two thirds of the building without a purpose. Knowing what I know now about theater, there were people chomping at the bit to get a chance to use this building for live theater. It had the space, the unobstructed views, perfect acoustics, high ceilings for hanging lights at just the right angles, plus room to grow. It was a theater troupe's dream waiting to happen.

## Grand Opening!

Never ones to waste time, we opened Petrucci's Italian Restaurant on January 16, 1977. The second-floor apartments had been converted to a banquet facility and offices. It was a great place!

I didn't want to miss out on all the fun, so I took the semester off school to help out.

The only way for me to make money was to <gulp> wait tables. I was terribly shy so waiting tables was really outside of my comfort zone, but it gave me a great education in people and customer service. Paul had

hired some professional waitresses. My agreement with them was that if they absolutely couldn't handle another table, I would start to wait tables.

One night, it got really busy, and I was asked to wait on the next table. I took their order and went to prepare a carafe of hot tea in the coffee station and managed to spill it and give myself third degree burns on my arm and first degree burns on my stomach. I went into shock. Paul saw me wandering around, my arm with bubbling skin and pushed me into the restroom to run cold water over it. In the middle of a huge rush, Mom turned the kitchen over to her staff and took me to urgent care.

On another night, after I had gotten used to waiting tables and learned not to spill scalding hot water on myself, I was waiting on a single gentleman. He said he was a photographer and would like to take pictures of me. My brother Dave said to tell him that if I needed any pictures, he would take care of it. I was so naïve!

We really rolled with the punches during these days. One day a water pipe on the second floor burst and flooded the restaurant. We had to borrow squeegees from the fire department to squeegee out the carpet. We knew one day we'd look back on all this and laugh. So, you guessed it, we laughed then. It didn't hurt that Paul and Dave could crack jokes about anything and I would laugh at anything!

## Petrucci's Dinner Theater is Born

At some point in these early theater days, I bought into the business with lots of blood, sweat, and tears, and the money I had saved up to go to college. I decided to enroll in the school of hard knocks.

Like I said before, we had a huge part of the building sitting unused just crying out to be an entertainment space. We were approached by a young man who offered to produce a show in the theater to go with our buffet and, before we knew it, Petrucci's Dinner Theater opened with *I Do, I Do!*

Patrons for our first show ate dinner in the upstairs banquet rooms, then went downstairs to the theater seats for the show.

THE NEWS LEADER, Laurel, Md., Thursday, January 13, 1977

**COME DINE WITH US**  
**ITALIAN BUFFET STYLE**  
 AT  
*Petrucci's*  
**GRAND OPENING**

(Sunday, Jan. 16, 1977)

Fine Dining At Prices Everyone Can Afford

**ALL YOU CAN EAT**  
 Every Night of the Week

**4 to 10 P.M. \$4.95 and \$2.49**

Your Hosts: The Petrucci Family

**DO IT NOW! Experience a warm and congenial atmosphere.**

**Cocktails, Wine, & Beer Available**

**725-5224**  
**312 MAIN ST., LAUREL**

After one run, we figured we could do it all ourselves. This theater business didn't look too difficult. (Yes, we were naïve but gutsy.) We closed for a few weeks to renovate the theater with tiered flooring and railings. Petrucci's Main Street Dinner Theater opened in the first quarter of 1978 with *The Star-Spangled Girl*.

We had a lot of decisions to make. I remember the family/business meetings. One was to decide how we were going to pronounce our name (Pet-ru-sees or Pet-ru-cheese?) After all, it was important that we all pronounce our name the same way. Then there was the meeting to decide how we were going to spell theater: theater or theatre?

We took turns wanting to give up, but we also took turns being the motivating cheerleader. There was always one of us who got everyone else excited again.

## The Shows!

We ended up running Petrucci's Main Street Dinner Theatre for about 15 years before selling to the Comedy Connection.

It took a lot of people to pull that off. We had an amazing staff who worked on stage, backstage, behind the scenes, in the office, in housekeeping, in the kitchen, and in the restaurant and bar.

Over the years we produced over 70 shows: musicals, comedies, mysteries, British farce, and specialty shows, plus an educational matinee series with adaptations of classical literature like *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, adapted and directed by Tony Reich.

More importantly, there were tons of lifelong memories made and friendships formed. I am thankful for everyone who was a part of making it happen.



## Parking at Petrucci's: The CRA, City of Laurel's Plans for the Empty Lot at 312 Main Street

By Richard Friend

You've probably been wondering if anything would ever take the place of the old Laurel Theatre/Petrucci's building at 312 Main Street. And you've probably noticed that *something* was finally starting to happen this summer, with fencing going up and excavation activity afoot. We now have the answer: it will be a city-owned parking lot. Robert Love, Director of Economic and Community Development for the City of Laurel, explained:

*"The project at 312 Main Street is to construct 30 parking spaces for the public to use. This will include 28 standard parking spaces and 2 spaces available for charging of electric vehicles. During the construction, large pieces of concrete were discovered underneath the surface which were addressed. The project is now back on schedule with an estimated time of completion by the end of 2022. The City sees this parking lot as a great addition that will increase the visitors along Main Street and continue to boost Economic Development efforts in the area."*

The lot has been empty for six years now, so how did this decision come about? In 2014, after the building sat vacant for nearly a decade, the City of Laurel's Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA) purchased the property for \$250,000 using city funds, according to the late Jack Brock (see his obituary on page 37), then-Deputy Director of Community Planning and Business Services, in a July 31, 2014 *Laurel Leader* article. With no interested buyers by 2016, the City then paid \$140,000 to have the building demolished, according to CRA records obtained by a Maryland Public Information Act request. To save on costs, rubble from the building was buried on the site in what had been the theater's basement.

In February 2021, the City Council voted to turn the site into a parking lot. Work that had finally begun was halted when the contractors realized that the ground was sinking—due to the unstable debris buried below. Contractors recommended that the City correct the issue by digging at least seven feet below the surface, and then cleaning, backfilling, and properly packing the ground to prevent further settling. Again citing cost concerns, the City compromised by allowing the digging to go only four feet down. Speaking to *Voices of Laurel* at the site, contractors said the excavation job is costing the City at least \$500,000—nearly double what it originally estimated before the underground problems surfaced.

In late August, a pair of new solar powered lamp posts that had just recently been installed were removed, and the theatre's old underground oil heating tank was unearthed—directly below a BG&E transformer box. *Voices of Laurel* asked Director Love whether the tank would be removed or remain buried on the site. He replied, "The Department of Public Works

(DPW) has met with Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to come up with a mutually agreed upon approach. DPW has confirmed that the proper environmental protection protocols will be followed as directed and approved by MDE."

We also asked whether or not the City requires residents and business owners to remove similar abandoned underground oil tanks. Director Love said, "To our knowledge the City follows the standards set by MDE for abandoned underground tanks." *Voices of Laurel* spoke to one local business owner who said that the City did, in fact, make them remove an old oil tank on their property when they converted to electric heating—a job that cost approximately \$10,000. The business owner, having noticed the tank remaining at 312 Main Street, jokingly asked, "I wonder if the City is going to force itself to dig that up?"

The final cost of this project has yet to be determined, but according to contractors it will likely exceed \$1,000,000 when all is said and done. We asked Director Love what he expects the final expense to be, taking into account the purchase of the site, the demolition of the building, the current excavation work, and the ultimate paving and lighting installation. "Previously the City Council approved approximately \$650,000 in the (capital improvement plan) for the redevelopment of 312 Main Street and the installation of a municipal parking lot. We believe we will remain within the allocated amount." But the current cost, based on our estimation, is already closer to \$890,000.

An affordable parking lot on Main Street is a terrific idea at face value. But over the past 20 years, a perceived lack of parking space has rarely been cited by business owners as the primary factor that deters shoppers from frequenting Main Street—it's the the lack of more unique, desirable businesses themselves that could make Main Street the shopping destination that it once was. (Or that Ellicott City's Main Street is today). With the addition of some truly excellent merchants in recent years, Main Street *is* trending in the right direction after decades of stagnation.

Good intentions notwithstanding, a \$1,000,000 price tag for a 30-space parking lot should call into question the City's handling of the project—especially after eight years of mostly inactivity. Were all options explored for the potential development of the site? Was the location not as prime as initially thought?

It would behoove Laurel taxpayers to take a much more active role in understanding the CRA's projects and ensure greater transparency in its dealings. The CRA meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 4pm. Meetings are held at Gude Mansion (13910 Laurel Lakes Avenue). Please contact Mr. Love (rlove@laurel.md.us) if you wish to attend a meeting.

# Deerfield Run Elementary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17



(Left): Entrance to the Deerfield Run cafetorium. Students recently approached principal Mary F. Wall (above) and requested that the Russian flag be taken down from the international collection in support of Ukraine.

something that came up during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A group of students came to her office with a special request. Remember those international flags I mentioned that hang along the perimeter of the cafetorium? The students asked that the Russian flag be taken down in a show of solidarity with Ukraine. I found that to be incredibly impressive.

Another major change from when I was a Deerfield Run student is that the grade levels now go from kindergarten to fifth, rather than sixth. Ms. Wall explained that sixth grade curriculum is really written for a middle school model, which consists of a longer day. And that's another important thing she points out—how critical the actual number of hours in the day are to learning. Elementary schools in Prince George's County have a six hour and ten minute day. (Classes at Deerfield Run go from 7:45–1:55). The school day at nearby Howard County is *six and a half* hours. On the face of it, that may not seem like much; but when you consider that those 20 extra minutes per day equal nearly *two hours* of extra learning each week, that's significant.

In fact, the time kids spend actually learning in class each day is even less when you include things like lunch, recess, and non-academic classes such as physical education, art, and music. Ms. Wall hopes to see a shift in the mindset of the importance of learning at this early age, and believes that children can and will rise to the occasion. She wants to see empowered parents who advocate for their kids; parents who are engaged with their children's teachers and committed to doing their part at home to foster a learning environment. That kind of partnership helps teachers make the most of those precious six hours and ten minutes a day.

I was fortunate in my time at Deerfield Run to have had a fantastic principal in Mr. Michael J. Lapriola. He was such a kind, warm, and welcoming soul—certainly not what my generation and those before me would have considered the school principal archetype. I was

in the 2nd grade when Mr. Lapriola took the helm from Jean Mills, who was retiring as Deerfield Run's original principal from its opening day in 1974. Where Mrs. Mills had seemed rather disconnected from students, (in my young opinion, at least) Mr. Lapriola was the opposite. He made you want to be a better student, and we wanted to make him proud.

Mr. Lapriola, who passed away prematurely from cancer in 1992, is still beloved by everyone whose lives he touched; and his spirit is very much alive at Deerfield Run. A wonderful photo of him, which originally ran on a *Laurel Leader* cover many years ago, hangs on the wall in the front lobby—and it captures his personality and the love he had for this place so very well.

Only a few minutes after meeting Mary Wall, I quickly see that she is a principal very much from the same mold as Mr. Lapriola. She is only the fourth principal in Deerfield Run's nearly fifty-year history (the school opened in 1975). Thomas Tucker became its third principal after Mr. Lapriola's death in 1992. Ms. Wall, who has worked in the building now for 19 years, became assistant principal in 2004 and took over the top job in 2011. She has worked within Prince George's County Public Schools now for 26 years, and it's immediately apparent that she takes great pride in her work, and in this school in particular, and her hard work shows. When schools reopened for in-person learning after the worst of the pandemic, PGCPs Chief Executive Officer Dr. Monica Goldson chose Deerfield Run as the first stop to showcase a positive image of the school system.

I asked Ms. Wall about some of the challenges the school faces, and consistent attendance is the biggest. Laurel has long been a transient community, and the student turnover each year can be anywhere from 35 to 40 percent. Put differently, Deerfield Run has nearly 600 students. Of those 600 students, about 120 arrived after the first day of the school year. And about the same number of students left before the same year. That's hard on teachers, especially those trying to

educate kids in these particularly formative years.

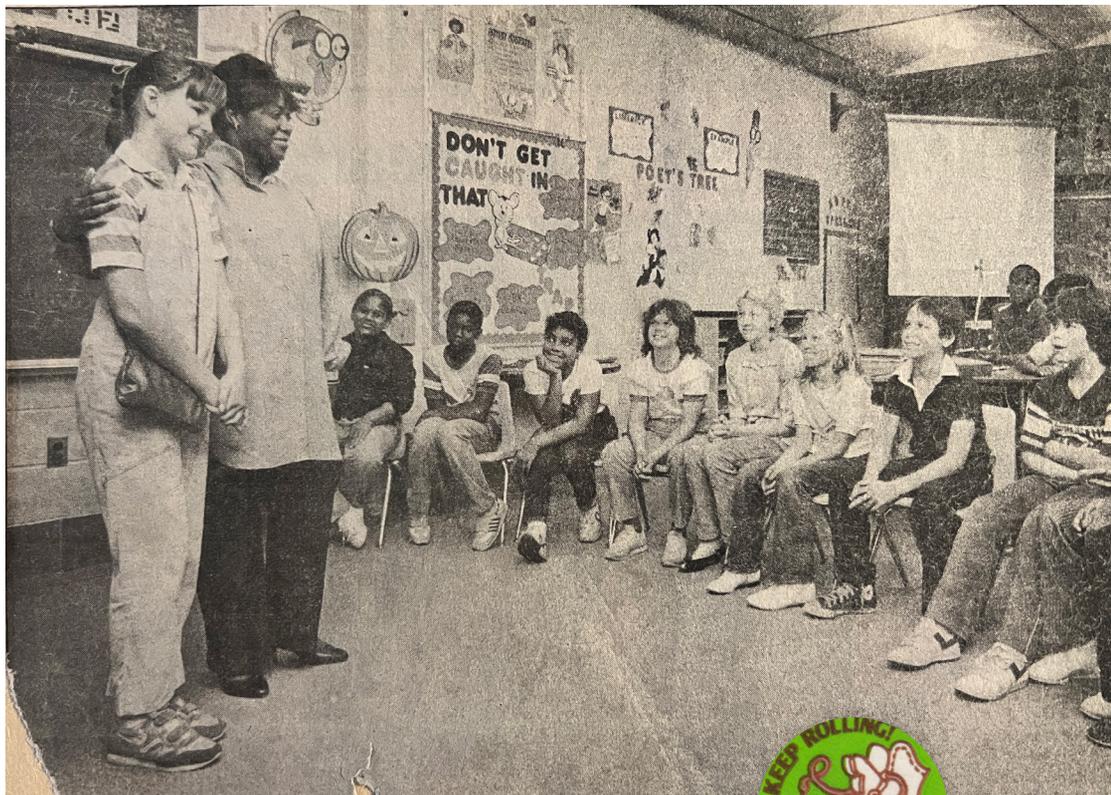
My memory of my Deerfield Run teachers is that they taught everything—the same teacher who taught us spelling would shift gears and teach us math a half hour later. Ms. Wall explained a bit how the learning is structured today. For pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade, the teachers are indeed self-contained—they teach all subjects. Learning is more departmentalized for 3rd through 5th grades, with content teachers who specialize in reading, science, social studies, math, etc.

Also, as the community has grown in diversity, so too has the staff. There is a clear cultural responsiveness with many heritages represented—teachers from Jamaica, El Salvador, Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria, and West Africa all have student populations from the same regions. Every child has equitable access, and the positive effects of this will carry with them through middle school, high school, and beyond.

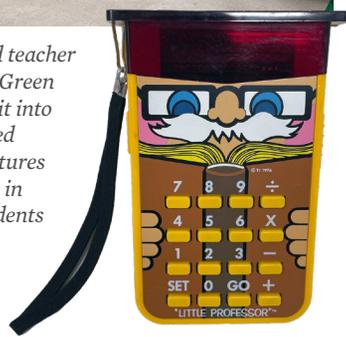
They say that old habits die hard, and even though we're the only two people walking through the school on this July day, I realize that I've been walking close to the right-hand walls just as I used to do as a student in single-file lines. It's not hard to imagine what it would be like to actually be a student here again. As I exit through the front door, I almost expect the smell of those 1970s school bus diesel fumes to greet me once again. I take a contemplative walk around the outside of the school, passing by each door that I used to so eagerly exit on the way to recess. Starting at Green Pod, where I spent my final two years at Deerfield Run, I walk behind the media center, to the playgrounds, ball fields, and basketball court. Then up to the front of the building—where as I pass the kindergarten rooms, it dawns on me that I really have been going back in time today, in more ways than one.

==

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



(Left): In a 1984 Laurel Leader photo, beloved teacher Hortense Adams introduces a new student in Green Pod. The open-learning area pods are now split into multiple smaller classrooms within color-coded corridors. Each classroom within the pods features color-coordinated walls and chairs. Floor tiles in Deerfield Run's signature blue color leads students throughout the building. To see more photos of Richard's visit to the school, go to his page at [LaurelHistory.com/richard-friend](http://LaurelHistory.com/richard-friend).





## Edna M. Davis, 102

Edna Theresa M. Davis, age 102, of Laurel, MD, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, June 8, 2022, after a brief illness. Edna was preceded in death by her parents, Edward and Mary Agnes (Skeals) Murphy; her husband of 44 years, Collin P. Davis; son, William Merritt; two sisters, Mary Irene Murphy and Alice M. Hilton; and a brother, Edward Francis Murphy. Survivors include two children, Gary (Pamela) Davis of Elkridge, and Diane (Kernie) Harkleroad of Annapolis; grandchildren, Shane Harkleroad of Edgewater; Patrick (Casey) Harkleroad of San Diego, CA; Colin (Savannah) Harkleroad of Navarre, FL; Theresa Harkleroad of Annapolis; and three great-grandchildren.

Edna was born in Albany, NY. She graduated from St. John's Academy in Rensselaer, NY, in 1937; she came to Washington, D.C., at age 21 to start a career with the Federal Government that spanned more than five decades.

Edna was active her entire life, spending summers in Ocean City, MD, until she was 102. She walked to her community pool there until she was 99—when the pandemic shut things down—where she swam her daily laps and socialized with friends. Edna worked hard but never missed a party or social event. She loved to sing, dance, and laugh and most certainly lived life to the fullest. She will be remembered as a good friend, ambitious worker, and devoted family matriarch and role model.

Edna is buried at Meadowridge Memorial Park, in Elkridge, MD.

## Frances E. Fairall, 85



Frances Elizabeth (Hatter) Fairall, 85, of Ellicott City, Maryland, formerly of Laurel, Maryland, passed away on July 1st, 2022, at her home. Frances was born September 13, 1936, in Laurel, Maryland, the only child of the late Hope Gordon Hatter and the late Margaret Sinclair (Howard) Hatter.

Frances was a secretary at Laurel Elementary School and then transferred to Bond Mill Elementary School upon its opening. She retired after 30 years of service in June 1997.

Frances enjoyed and was proud of her work and stayed connected with her numerous co-workers, who became some of her very best friends following retirement.

Frances graduated from Laurel High School in 1954. She loved attending class reunions and maintaining friendships with some of her closest high school friends. Frances became quite active in the Laurel Order of the Eastern Star in the early 1970s, where she served as Worthy Matron 1987–1988.

From there she made even more life-long friends, with which she was in touch right up to the end. After meeting Bernard

Brown, they became members of the Boumi Temple Shrine in Baltimore to become part of the Camel Wheels and Camelettes, with the mission of raising awareness and funds for the Shriner's Children's Hospital. Through the years Frances and Bernard enjoyed cruises, attending parades and conventions, and plenty of trips with their friends. Frances always maintained Bermuda was one of her most favorite destinations.

Frances is survived by her children, William F. Fairall of Berlin, MD, Gary H. Fairall of Deep Creek, MD, Lisa M. Krakat (Robert) of Clarksville, MD, and Laurie S. Fairall-Rueter of Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. She is also survived by grandchildren Brock, Marissa, and Garrett Krakat, and Isabelle and Liam Rueter. Frances is predeceased by William H. Fairall and her most beloved companion, Bernard E. Brown.

## Larry Brent Wilson, 80



Larry Brent Wilson, age 80, of Palm Coast, Florida passed away March 29, 2022, at his home.

Larry was born on September 10, 1941 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. He was a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard and played football at Mississippi Delta Community College. After graduating from the University of Southern Mississippi, he was employed by Prince George's County Schools and taught in Laurel, Maryland for many years. Larry earned his Master's degree while living in Laurel. He was an active member of the community. Larry lived in Palm Coast for fourteen years, having moved here to be near his daughter and grandsons. He was a member of the Palm Coast United Methodist Church.

He is survived by his wife of fifty-nine years, Martha Hughes Wilson, daughter Reagan H. Wilson, brother Eddie S. Wilson (Virginia Ann), aunt Bobbie Jordan, grandsons Kyle and Gavin (Bridget), and great-granddaughter Alexis

Grace, and several cousins. Preceding him in death were parents Peggy Sandifer Wilson and William A (Gus) Wilson, and grandparents Joel H. Sandifer and Florence and Robert and Merle Wilson.

Larry was a larger than life person. He was devoted to his family, always putting them first in all respects. He was a dedicated teacher, treating all students with kindness and respect. He had high expectations for all children and enjoyed communicating with former students for the remainder of his life. Memorials may be sent to St. Jude's Children's Hospital, Methodist Children's Home or any charity of your choice that benefits children.



## Donna Good Meyerer, 77

*Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad Life Member*

Donna Good Meyerer, age 77, passed away in Laurel, Maryland on Sunday, July 17, 2022.

Born on February 27, 1945 in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. She worked as a legal secretary for many years and then for the City of Laurel until retiring in 1995. Donna was a life member of the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad and was a member on the first aid team that competed at the International Rescue & Emergency

Care Association conference in 1971 and brought home the World Champion title to the Rescue Squad.

Donna is survived by her husband of 31 years, Steve Meyerer and her long time friends: Terry Payne and Bailey Hoak.

Memorial contributions may be made in honor of Donna Good Meyerer to Wounded Warrior Project.

## Jack Brock, 72

*Former City of Laurel Director of Community Planning and Economic Development*

Jack Terry Brock, age 72, of Middleburg, Florida passed away on Friday, August 19, 2022. Jack was born in Mobile, Alabama and was a man of integrity, respect, and humor; a man loved; and a man of God.

He received Master degree in Management from Troy University and completed his Theological Education for Ministry from the School of Theology at the University of the South and was an Elder in his church.

Jack's career included the U.S. Navy during the

Vietnam Conflict; planning and redevelopment for Escambia County, Florida; housing assistance for city of Pensacola, Florida; and ultimately retiring as Director, Community Planning and Economic Development for the City of Laurel, Maryland.

He is survived by his loving wife, Pamela Sue Cotreau Brock; son, Jonathan Matthew Brock; sister, Susan Ann Kapeghian and cousins and other family.



## Patricia "Patty" Mosley, 67

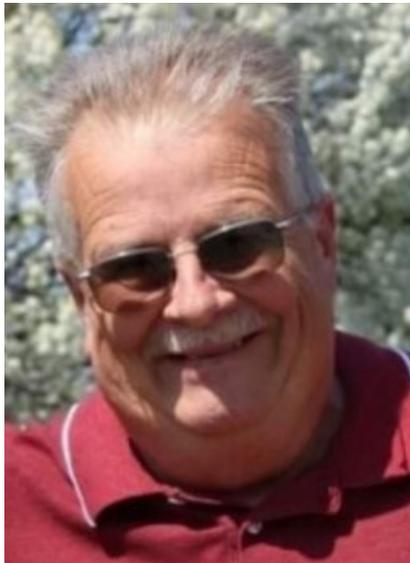
Patricia Jean (May) Mosley, age 67, formerly of Laurel, MD, passed away peacefully in Kennewick, WA, on September 2, 2022 after a brief illness. Patty was predeceased by her parents, Charles and Mary Ellen (Andrus) May of Laurel. She is survived by siblings Robert May and William May of Columbia, MD; Virginia Geis (Russ) of Laurel; and Katherine May, of Huntingtown, MD; children Robert Mosley and Mary Berlanga (Darian), and their father, Larry Mosley, Sr of Kennewick, WA; step-children Christopher Mosley (Becky) of Boise, ID; Larry Mosley, Jr, (Billie) of Kennewick, WA; and Jennifer Goniwicha (Tony) of Las Vegas, NV; and grandchildren, Layla and Marcus Berlanga.

Patty was born in New Haven, CT, the second of five children.

She grew up in Laurel, MD, and was a member of Laurel High School's class of 1972. Patty was fearless, maintained a positive attitude no matter what, and considered no job beneath her. Her jobs included working as a barmaid, waitress, postal worker, grocery store associate, special education teacher, and substitute teacher. She was a beloved daughter, sister, mother, and grandmother. Patty was very resourceful and turned a hobby of crocheting into a business, making hats, gloves, and toys, among many other things.

Patty will be remembered for her energetic and positive nature, her ever-present smile, and her kindness. She was a role model and inspiration to everyone who knew her.





## Clifton Francis Noland, 65

Clifton Francis Noland was born on September 20, 1956 in Baltimore, MD and raised in Glen Burnie. He dedicated his life to public service starting as a volunteer firefighter at 16 years old. He gave many years as an EMT and Paramedic. He is a Life member of the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad, running countless calls serving for 38 years. He worked many different jobs in his lifetime but his last career was as a Laurel Police dispatcher which he loved. He retired in early 2020 and enjoyed time spent with Joanie and his adorable triplet granddaughters.

He loved watching golf and football and enjoyed life to the fullest. His favorite place was Ocean City, MD where he spent countless summers as a child enjoying the beach with his family. He was a quiet man who loved his family and friends. He will be missed by so many but will continue to watch over

all of us as he rests in Gods kingdom.

Cliff leaves behind his wife of 35 years Joanie, his son Jonathan (J.T.) daughter-in-law Erin and his granddaughters Elena, Michaela and Kailyn, His Mom Carolyn Noland, brother Stan Noland (Carol), sister Deborah Teare (James) sister Kathy Maisel (Larry), sister-in-law Mary Agnes Kuehmichel (Buzz), sister-in-law Kathleen Harrington (Bob), sister-in-law Edna Abramovich. He also leaves behind Pastor Don Keller and Patsy Keller as well as many nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews. He was preceded in death by his dad, Arnold Noland and three brothers-in law William, Paul, and Edward.

He left many wonderful friends who helped him during his journey and his final days on this earth. May he rest in eternal peace until we meet again.

## Robert Holden “Bob” Bennett, Jr., 65

On Tuesday, September 6, 2022, Bob Bennett, loving spouse of Eileen (Trainor) and father of Diane Nestor and Brian Bennett, passed away at age sixty-five. Bob devoted his heart and soul to his family. In many ways, he wanted to instill the values he learned from his parents, Bob, Sr. and Elizabeth in earning his Eagle Scout honors. Bob is survived by his sister Lynn B. Scott and brother William F. Bennett.

Bob graduated from Blair High School, as a member of the Blazers Maryland State Basketball Championship Team in 1975. During high school, he also played football which prepared him for decades of volunteer coaching in the Laurel Boys & Girls Club when his children were young. He is best known as a football coach and he acted as the football commissioner for several years in the 1990s. He also ran the Art Monk Summer Football camp under Sports International for about 10 years.

Bob spent a career in sales. After 17 years at Frank Parsons Paper Company, he moved into the competitive field of talent acquisition in temporary staffing, where he worked as a division director, branch manager, sales manager, field trainer, and director of strategic solutions. His expertise in growing accounts in new territories earned him a stellar reputation in the trade.

Bob believed in a work-life balance. Bob played extensively in the men’s softball leagues throughout Laurel and ASA travel teams. However, Bob’s favorite activity was playing golf. But not just any golf! His goal was to play the top 100 courses in the country, so he and his wife used this as their travel guide to create a lifetime of travel throughout the United States. His talent as a salesman often came in handy to obtain some of the most coveted tee-times on the most prestigious courses, meeting the most interesting people who also “dabbled” in the sport of golf. His most well known introduction is “Hi, I’m Bob!” The friendly demeanor just opened doors which might otherwise be closed.

Bob saw his own family grow with the marriages of his two children. Diane married Denver Nestor, bringing a grandchild, Desiree into the family dynamics. His family pride doubled when Brian took EJ as his bride and they introduced a second grandchild into the family. Stevie is starting the second generation of the Bennett family on the path through Pallotti Early Learning Center and into kindergarten at St. Mary’s of the Mills School.



## Robert Allan Burton, 64

Robert “Robbie” Allan Burton, 64, passed away at his home in Laurel, Maryland on Saturday, July 16, 2022 with his loving family by his side.

Robert was born on December 25, 1957 in Cheverly, Maryland. Son of the late William E. and Naomi L. (nee Griffith) Burton. Robbie lived in Laurel, Maryland and worked as a painting sub-contractor for over 40 years. Robbie enjoyed playing golf, baseball, blackjack, watching Sunday and Monday night football and pretty much any sport you can think of. Robbie was always the hardest worker in the room. He lived by the motto “work hard, play harder.”

Robert is survived by his loving wife, Cheryl Burton; they were married for 2 years and together for 24 years.

Robbie is also survived by 6 children: Karen Spalding, Jamie Burton, Ryan Burton, Angie Lyon, Brady Burton and Richard Easton; 3 step children: JR Merson, Tina Merson and AJ Travers; 8 grandchildren: Jackson Spalding, Cash Spalding, Cameron Burton, Landon Burton, Sophia Burton, Grayson Lyon, Alivia Lyon and Gabriella Easton; and 3 siblings: William Burton Jr., Lee Burton and Russell Burton.

In addition to his parents, he is also predeceased by 2 sisters: Linda Williams and Donna Simms.

LAUREL ARCHEOLOGY

# Would You Like a Receipt?



BY PETE LEWNES

Over the years, the methods in which to pay for your bills or purchases have changed greatly. Today, your options are many that include automated debit and credit services, by phone or online, various apps along with many others including the standard cash register receipt.

Prior to this, there was the old fashioned way of billhead and this method was still widely used through the 1960s and 70s. During this time, the customer and merchant frequently knew one another—this was particularly true in Laurel. This form of record keeping was used by almost everyone to keep track of their purchases, balances with monies still owed, or a receipt for items or services received that were paid for in full. Sadly, this form of both beautiful artwork and interaction has been lost over the years and will never be seen again.

At many local estate and yard sales that Martha and I have gone to, the family file cabinet was always sought out by myself while my partner in crime was on the hunt for other items from Laurel. In many cases, most of these had simply been stored away for years collecting dust and were just never thrown away. With over 1,000 various billheads in our collection by local government and businesses, here are a few from our town. Enjoy the trip down memory lane!

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

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|---------|--------------------|--------|-------|
| July 19 | 2 1/2 Ton + 3 Coal | 675    |       |
|         | 1/2 " #5 Coal      | 650    |       |
|         | Sack Carrying      | 100    | 1425  |
| Feb 25  | 1/2 Ton + 3 Coal   | 675    |       |
|         | 1/2 " #5 "         | 650    |       |
|         | Sack Carrying      | 100    | 1425  |
| Nov. 30 | 1/2 Ton 3 + 5 "    | 650    |       |
| Apr 12  | 1/2 " 3 + 5 "      | 650    |       |
| Jan 1   | 68 lb. Sulfur      | 68     |       |
|         | 16 lb. Sulfur      | 16     | 84    |
|         |                    |        | 4234  |

**ASHBY & HARRISON**  
Seed - Feed  
General Farm Supplies - Garden Tractors  
Eclipse Hand and Power Mowers  
Parkway 5-1321  
309 Main St.  
Laurel, Md. 2/20 1967

**COOK'S**  
PHONE: 725-1234  
PHONE: 792-7999  
LAUREL HARDWARE COMPANY, INC.  
Paint—Plumbing—Electrical—Garden Supplies  
437 MAIN STREET • P. O. BOX 118 • LAUREL, MD. 20707  
DATE 10/25/1988

| DESCRIPTION | AMOUNT |
|-------------|--------|
| 2 wheel     | 11.90  |
|             | 5.95   |
|             | 12.50  |

NO CASH REFUNDS. CREDIT SLIP WILL BE ISSUED LESS 20% RESTOCKING CHARGE.



# TAKED OUT TIME MACHINE

THE RESTAURANTS  
OF LAUREL PAST



PRESENT

HOSTED BY THE LAUREL HISTORY BOYS' RICHARD FRIEND

THURSDAY OCTOBER 6, 2022 7 PM

zoom

VISIT [LAURELHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://LAURELHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG) FOR MORE INFORMATION. A RECORDING OF THE PRESENTATION WILL BE AVAILABLE ONLINE.

