

VOICES OF LAUREL



FREE

WINTER 2024
VOL. 4, NO. 1

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND



**A 1940s view of the Kluckhuhn Tree on Brooklyn Bridge Road
(before it became The Big Christmas Tree). PAGE 30**

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WINTER 2024 | VOL. 4, NO. 1

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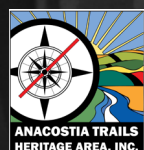
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LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys

BY KEVIN LEONARD AND RICHARD FRIEND



Jim Pollin, son of the late Capital Centre owner Abe Pollin, holds an advance copy of *Capital Centre: A Retrospective* with (left to right) Jeff Krulik, Richard Friend, and Kevin Leonard at a December 3rd reunion he hosted for former employees honoring the 50th anniversary of the legendary arena's grand opening.

Grants and Donations

Thank you to Kathie Peterson, Ruth Walls, the Robison Family, Wayne Davis, Elizabeth Alban, Karl Ginter, Ann Meixner, Rosemary Robinson, Monica Sturdivant, and James Bowman for their monetary donations to *Voices of Laurel*. We are grateful.

Board News

Our Board of Directors reported some notable achievements in the last quarter of 2023:

- Board member Jeff Krulik is one of three curator/producers for the film, *We Are Fugazi from Washington, DC*, which had multiple sell-out screenings at the AFI Silver throughout February, and has screened since in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and more. The film was included in *The Washington Post's* top movies of 2023.
- Board member Carl DeWalt was reelected to his seat on the Laurel City Council, representing Ward 1.
- Carl once again hosted the Annual LARS Christmas fundraiser on Dec. 16 at Oliver's Tavern. The event is dedicated to the late Dawn Hoffman, who started it many years ago.

New Book: *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*

We had hoped to receive the shipment of our latest book before the end of the year, but it took a bit longer to print when we upgraded to hardcover. The books

have been printed and are en route to us via cargo ship, and are now scheduled to reach U.S. Customs in New York by mid-January. We will begin processing orders as soon as we receive them. Our apologies for the delay, but having seen an advance copy of the book, we're sure it will be worth the added wait. You can order it on our website (laurelhistory.com) and we'll post an update on our Facebook page as soon as we have books in hand.

Rich, Kevin, and Jeff were interviewed on Robbie White's radio show, *Forbidden Alliance*, on WOWN in Takoma Park, about the Capital Centre book. The show ran three hours and provided us an opportunity to share many stories about the venue.

Election Coverage

Our Fall 2023 issue featured an extensive Voters' Guide for this year's historic Mayor and City Council Election. Staff Writer Diane Mezzanotte interviewed all 16 candidates running for office—a feat that no other local newspaper managed to accomplish—and provided readers with an equitable, conversational overview of their ideas and aspirations for city leadership. This marked our second Voters' Guide—the first being the Fall 2021 edition that came on the heels of the *Laurel Leader's* demise.

Little Free Libraries

We're donating copies of our books, *Laurel at 150* and *Postmark Laurel* to Little Free Libraries around town!

Visit littlefreelibrary.org or download the app to learn more about this program and to locate nearly a dozen boxes throughout Laurel. Take a book and share a book!

Upcoming Presentations

- On Feb. 16, Kevin will present "The KKK in the 1960s" at the North Laurel Community Center. Virtually all activity of the Ku Klux Klan from Howard County through the greater Laurel area in the late 1960s was the work of a single narcissistic publicity hound. He was so bad that the *Klan* kicked him out. 11 AM. FREE.
- Sometime this Spring (date TBD), Kevin will present the story of the Columbia Mall, from vision to development to its opening in 1971, which changed the face of retail shopping in the whole area. Time and date will be announced on our Facebook page. Howard County Library Miller Branch. FREE.

CORRECTION: In our Fall 2023 issue, Katherine Wright alerted us to a mistake in her article, "City's Priorities Questioned in Ward 2." She misstated that while three of the four parcels of land that make up Ward 2's only passive woodland were acquired in the year 2000, one of the four was acquired in February of 2009, making it nearly 14 years, not 20 years, since the last passive woodland was added to Ward 2.

City Beat

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

Keith Sydnor Elected Mayor

The 2023 Laurel municipal election was memorable. From the time longstanding Mayor Craig Moe announced in the Spring that he would not seek re-election, right up until the final vote tallies were announced on November 8, the campaign season was filled with twists and turns. Some candidates were fined for alleged violations of the city's elections code; three candidates claimed that their campaigns were being undermined by things like unfounded rumors, stolen election signs, and unnecessary restrictions. Suddenly, live-streamed coverage of meetings by the Board of Elections Supervisors and the Laurel Ethics Committee became must-watch events on Laurel TV.

When all was said and done, voters elected former Councilmember Keith Sydnor as Mayor, making him the city's first Black mayor. Sydnor received 51 percent of the votes, besting his closest competitor, Martin Mitchell, by 437 votes. Sydnor was sworn in on November 27. He began his 4-year term by promising transparency, forward movement, and an emphasis on helping the city's youths. See page 8 for the first interview with the new Mayor.

The City Council will also look quite different for its upcoming 2-year term, with new faces in three of the five seats. The two returning council members are Ward 1 incumbents Carl DeWalt and James Kole. DeWalt will be serving his fourth term and Kole his second. In Ward 2, voters elected Kyla Clark and Jeffrey Mills as their council representatives, while Christine Johnson was elected Council Member At-Large. All three will be serving their first terms as elected city officials.

Election Day Events and Final Counts

Polls were fairly busy on November 5, Early Voting Day, raising candidates' hopes of a large overall turnout. Some issues arose, though, especially at the Ward 2 polling site at the Robert J. Dipietro Community Center on Cypress Street. The small parking lot and the number of candidates' teams set up there caused traffic jams and delays, and some voters complained about being "harassed" by campaign workers. This led the BoE to amend the rules for Ward 2 before General Election Day, drastically limiting the space permitted for each candidate's team and prohibiting commercial vehicles in the area. One candidate claimed that the alleged harassment was simply team members talking to voters, well outside the 100-foot off-limits boundary put up by the city; he noted that not only is this permitted, but it can be crucial because studies show that up to a third of voters haven't met or learned about the candidates prior to arriving at the polls.

Some people who showed up to vote were surprised to learn they were not actually city residents. After being turned away, several took to social media to question why the city's boundaries were so confusing and why

they shared a zip code with the city if they weren't actually in it. Similarly, as always happens in Laurel City elections, many voters initially went to the wrong polling place, unclear about which ward they lived in.

When the BoE Supervisors announced the unofficial results on election night, it was stated that about 160 mail-in and provisional votes would be counted the next day. Ultimately, that number turned out to be at least 185 votes, but none of the rankings from the day before changed after adding the mail-in and provisional results. The official results:

Mayor

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Keith Sydnor | 1,194 |
| Martin Mitchell | 757 |
| Brencis Smith | 197 |
| Sophady Uong | 155 |
| Seeta Deonauth | 46 |

At-Large Council (1)

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Christine Johnson | 1,023 |
| Adrian Simmons | 827 |
| Enrico McCleary | 375 |

Ward 1 Council (2)

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| James Kole | 586 |
| Carl DeWalt | 469 |
| Stephen Wallace | 405 |
| Connie Lucas | 170 |

Ward 2 Council (2)

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Kyla Clark | 644 |
| Jeffrey Mills | 543 |
| Melvin Lindsley | 498 |
| T. Matthews | 329 |

Low Voter Turnout Trend in City Elections Continues

The final tallies show trends that seem to confirm complaints by candidates and voters alike that existing election procedures are confusing and/or not well communicated.

Despite initial hopes of a record voter turnout, unofficial sources reported that just 12 percent of Laurel's registered voters showed up at the polls, a number that equates to less than 8 percent of city residents. (The City Clerk did not respond to our requests for official statistics on turnout and other factors.)

The results also show that a significant number of voters are not making selections for all the offices for which they can cast a vote. As stated on the ballots, voters can vote for one mayoral candidate, one at-large council candidate, and two council candidates from the ward the voter resides in. Since 2,349 votes were cast in the mayoral race, the total number of ward-specific councilmember votes should be about double, or 4,698; however, only 3,638—23% less than expected—were cast. The total votes for the at-large council position was 2,225, closer to the mayoral total. Similar results occurred in the last few previous city elections.

Mayoral Candidates Reflect on Experiences

A few weeks after the election, *Voices of Laurel* reached out to all five mayoral candidates for their reflections. Brencis Smith and Seeta Deonauth did not respond to the request; the other three responses appear below.

Sophady Uong: "As a first-time runner in the mayoral election, I can't help but feel grateful and honored to have gained this valuable experience. I have learned a

great deal of what it means to represent a community and to be a part of something bigger. Wishing all the best to Mayor Keith Sydnor and the new Council members as they embark on this new chapter for the City of Laurel."

Martin Mitchell: "The end result stings a little, but I remain hopeful for the future of Laurel. I'm proud of what we accomplished: we knocked on over 16,000 doors and met so many neighbors. My team showed people how to campaign; we made [other candidates] campaign harder. Laurel democracy is moving forward. I want people to know that I ran because I care about Laurel. I really do, and I'll continue to stay involved to prove that."

Mayor Keith Sydnor: "First of all, I want to thank all of the candidates for running. You all are great citizens who care about our community, and I wish you all the very best. Most importantly, I want to thank the citizens of Laurel for entrusting me to be your leader for the next four years. I will not let you down. I have a plan to continue moving Laurel forward, not backwards. Let's continue to work together, even if we disagree on some matters. At the end of the day, we are one community. Laurel Strong!"

Outback Leather Building Goes on Market

In early December, some city residents noticed a real estate listing that shocked and saddened them: 309 Main Street, the longtime home of Outback Leather and its previous incarnation, Gayer's Saddlery. As word spread over social media, assumptions were made that the business was closing, and fans began to "pre-mourn" the loss of another Laurel icon.

However, owner Ron Sargent told *Voices of Laurel*, "I'm not going anywhere! I've been in the leather business for 48 years and I hope to make it to at least 50." Sargent did confirm that he's looking for a buyer for the building—which includes the leather shop and some apartments above it—but hopes to work out an arrangement to rent back his business space. He says he still loves coming to work every day, despite the toll that it has taken on him physically and the difficulties he still faces as a result of Covid-related closures and loss of business.

Once known among Maryland jockeys as the go-to place for next-day turnaround on racing-related equipment repairs, Outback has seen a large drop in that customer set. However, Outback has developed a customer base within the cosplay and Renaissance Fair communities, who often seek custom-made leather costume elements.

While Sargent admits that retirement is starting to look appealing, he says he prefers to ease slowly into that next phase of life. His ideal plan is to get a good price for the building, shed his landlord responsibilities, and then set his own timeline for winding down his workdays and driving his RV off into the sunset to travel the country with his wife.

South Laurel

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



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE | SOUTHLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM

Montpelier Woods Resident's Fear of Snakes Leads to First Novel

Selwyn Griffith has a vivid memory of an encounter with a snake when he was young and living in his native Trinidad and Tobago. At about age 10, he was playing in the yard after a rainfall and saw a beautiful snake, about a foot long. He tried to put the snake into a bottle to show his family, but his brother saw him and yelled at him to run away from the snake immediately. “They later told me that it was a coral snake, and if I had been bitten, I could have died,” Griffith says.

That event instilled in Griffith a deep-seated, lifelong fear of snakes. So, it might seem odd that he wrote his first novel, *Carnage at Ross Park Zoo*, about a deadly snake that escapes from a zoo and terrorizes a community. “My thought was, if I could study snakes, maybe it would help control my fear of them,” he says. *Hold that thought...*

Griffith grew up with 11 siblings. Looking for some solo adventures and a change of scenery, he was accepted by the University of Wisconsin. Having applied sight unseen, his arrival marked his first time in the United States. He says that he picked Wisconsin because he had never seen snow and he knew that it snowed there. He went on to graduate school in Ithaca, New York (another snowy spot). After achieving his Master's degree, he embarked on a 38-year career as a cardiac physiologist at United Health Services in Binghamton. “I worked primarily in cardiac rehab,” he says. “We treated everything from angina to heart transplants.” Along the way, Griffith married his sweetheart, Janice, and they have been married an impressive 51 years. After he retired in 2014, they stayed in Binghamton for a while but then moved to their current home in South Laurel's Montpelier Woods neighborhood to be near their two daughters, both of whom graduated from the University of Maryland at College Park. One daughter still lives in Laurel, while the other moved to Boston.

A self-described avid reader, Griffith also likes to exercise. He works out several times a week at the Laurel-Beltsville Senior Center. He also enjoys photography and travel—hobbies that

combined nicely during a 20-day trip to Europe and an 18-day foray through the American West, where he and Janice visited “eight or nine beautiful states.” They also occasionally return to Trinidad to visit family.

Griffith says he first got the idea for his debut novel's plot when he lived a block away from the Ross Park Zoo in Binghamton. He could sometimes hear the animals there, including the eerie howling of monkeys.

“I started wondering what would happen if any of the animals would ever escape. My imagination took off from there, and I decided to write about a dangerous snake, based on my own childhood experience. I knew it would have to be a big snake, so I started researching them.” Ultimately, Griffith decided to set his novel in the Ross Park Zoo and the surrounding area. “The zoo is real. All the streets are real. The descriptions of the town are real. The only part that isn't real is the snake—I'm not even sure if they ever had any giant snakes there.”

In *Carnage at Ross Park Zoo*, the small zoo seizes an opportunity to take possession of a giant, 980-pound reticulated python captured on the island of Java. With visions of a python exhibit drawing visitors in huge numbers, the zoo finds itself the center of attention upon the snake's arrival on a flatbed truck. However, things go bad quickly when the snake escapes and, hungry and cold, starts feeding on susceptible pets and townspeople. Griffith chose to write the book in a way that the reader knows why animals and people start disappearing—in fact, some of the narrative is written from the snake's point of view as it hunts its prey—while the characters in the story are oblivious to the fact that the escaped python is responsible for the disappearances; having been led to believe that it had perished in the cold of the upstate New York winter. A subplot involves the wrongful arrest of a local man on murder allegations, driven by pressure from the mayor and city council, who don't want the issue of serious crime to get in the way of their upcoming re-election bids.

Griffith says that he purposefully “set

up a human villain” to divert the townspeople's attention from the escaped python and to also set up a parallel between the police manhunt for a suspect in the disappearances and the python's hunt for its next meal. No spoilers here on how the story ends, but suffice it to say that readers might be looking over their shoulders at every rustle they hear in their backyard for quite some time after reading the book.

Although Griffith wrote the book as a challenge to himself and didn't originally intend to publish it, his daughter encouraged him to do so. She served as editor, and the cover illustration was created by Griffith's grandson, then-15-year-old John Torres, Jr. The book currently is available on Amazon.com in digital form.

Griffith plans to continue writing, and already has two more books in the works. One will be a mystery, and the other will be based on current affairs.

So, did writing *Carnage* help ease Griffith's fear of snakes? He laughs at that question. “No, it really didn't. I still don't like snakes. At all.”

South Laurel Restaurant Updates

- At long last, the Checkers on Route 1 opened in late November. It's located on the northbound side, nestled between Nuzback's Bar and Patriot Healthcare.
- Amigo's Tex-Mex held its grand opening on December 8. It took over the spot where Appleby's used to be in Contee Crossing Shopping Center.
- CAVA Mediterranean restaurant has a “coming soon” sign in the door of the back part of the building where Potbelly used to be (RIP); the front part is a dental practice.



Selwyn Griffith in his Montpelier Woods home.

- The Cakery Café is coming soon to the building that used to be Einstein's Bagels—nee the Toddle House, for longtime residents.

What's the Scoop?

South Laurel residents: I want to hear from you! Let's turn this column into a place of celebration for residents of the Prince George's County section of South Laurel. Tell me about milestone birthdays, anniversaries, honor roll students, church events ... just remember, we publish in January, April, July, and December, so plan ahead for when you want your news to be published.

Diane Mezzanotte holds a Journalism degree from Penn State University. She retired from the Department of Defense in 2019, following a 34-year career.

West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



RICHARD FRIEND



EDENS



EDENS

Burtonsville Crossing, a once-thriving shopping center located at the northeast corner of Routes 29 and 198, sat nearly vacant for many years (above left). It is currently undergoing a massive renovation, with the grand opening of its first new tenant, Sprouts Farmers Market, in late January.

West Laurel Recreation Council: Neighbors Serving Neighbors

The West Laurel Recreation Council (WLRC) is a self-supporting group of interested volunteers, offering various educational, social, and recreational programs to the citizens of West Laurel. All WLRC activities and events happen because someone in the neighborhood “makes it happen.” We get lots of good publicity, some administrative support, and can borrow equipment from the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), but most staffing is provided by neighborhood volunteers. One activity is the annual family swim night.

This year’s WLRC Family Swim Night will be on Friday, February 16, from 6:30 until 9:00 pm at Fairland Sports & Aquatic Center. Here is your chance to get exercise: swimming, water walking, or playing in the leisure pool with your family. Adults can sit and relax in the spa. For West Laurel residents, admission is free; for others, admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for children and seniors. Non-swimmers can watch from the balcony or

socialize in the meeting room upstairs. For West Laurel residents, there will be refreshments after the swim. Note: no toys or non-Coast Guard approved flotation devices are allowed. For more information, contact Rush Kester at rwkester@aol.com or call 202-213-1869.

Speaking of Fairland Sports and Aquatics Complex...

Many people aren’t aware of this top-notch athletic facility, located at 13820 Old Gunpowder Road. The Fairland Sports and Aquatics Complex (FSAC) has programs for all ages, including seniors and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Just a few of the FSAC’s many activities are described below:

- Every Monday/Wednesday/Friday, from 8:00 am to 12 noon, FSAC offers Senior Fitness Room Days. Anyone age 60 or older may use the exercise equipment and weight room. At all other times, the appropriate fitness pass is required for access. There are personal trainers on hand to show people how to use the equipment.

- Therapeutic Recreation programs are available for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are residents of Prince Georges County, provided through MNCPPC. As part of this program, Fairland offers AquaFit classes for ages 18 and older. Additional therapeutic recreation classes and social clubs for individuals with disabilities and veterans are available at other MNCPPC locations.

Sprouts Grocery Anticipates January Opening Date in Burtonsville Crossing

Sprouts, the first business announced as part of the renovated Burtonsville Crossing shopping center, has now set a tentative opening date, according to its website. The grocery store’s tentative plan is to open on Friday, January 19, a little bit later than the previously anticipated date of November 2023. Sprouts was the first to sign a lease for Burtonsville Crossing, and the opening will mark the grocery chain’s first Montgomery County location. In the past, when opening a new store, Sprouts has often hosted a “pop-up

party” in front of the store to give guests a chance to taste seasonal produce from the tasting bar, play games, have their faces painted, watch artists carve large produce, participate in a special “guess the weight” contest of an oversized piece of produce, and more. The family-friendly activities generally last for the entire opening weekend. When the grand opening date is officially announced, Sprouts will confirm any activities or celebrations coinciding with it.

Please help me help our community by providing news of upcoming events to include in the West Laurel neighborhood column!

Send me an e-mail at WestLaurelVoices@gmail.com, and please call me Ginny!



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

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Russett/Maryland City

Local news covering the Russett and Maryland City areas



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



(Above left): Flock poles over route 198. (Above right): Donyiel Roundtree in action at the Russett Trick or Treat.



Mystery of the Long Poles on 198: Solved!

If you've driven east on Route 198 in recent months, you've undoubtedly noticed the two strange-looking poles stretched across the road between Russett Green East and Whiskey Bottom Road. And you probably wondered, as I did, what they were and what their purpose is.

The "flock poles," as they are called, were installed by the Maryland State Highway Administration at the request of the Maryland State Police. According to www.flocksafety.com, "Flock Safety is an all-in-one technology solution to eliminate crime and keep your community safe." The poles are mounted with automated license plate readers (ALPRs) to capture eastbound traffic on 198 toward the BW Parkway and help monitor crimes and other unwanted activities. Flock poles have been installed on major thoroughfares near the BW Parkway, including one that bisects the Arundel Mills Parkway.

The Flock Safety website states that its customers—in this case the MD State Police—"own 100% of the data and footage collected with their cameras. Once captured, footage is transmitted immediately to a secure cloud server and encrypted at every point. Flock Safety does not sell or share public safety data with third parties."

Bacontown/Russett Park Being Evaluated for Upgrades

Anne Arundel County is evaluating

10 park sites, including the Bacontown/Russett Park, for potential upgrades, with input from county residents. Under the "Plan Your Park Campaign," residents were given the opportunity to share what they'd like to see in a park near them. Some potential updates could include new facilities, additional recreational uses, and upgraded amenities.

Under the 2022 Anne Arundel County Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan, all 10 parks will be evaluated to assess their recreational and open-space needs and goals. County and consultant planners have developed three preliminary concepts for each location, integrating the resident-requested uses, activities, and features with necessary site development components such as parking, stormwater management, utilities, and environmental conditions. These concepts will be used to create possible park designs, with the resulting plans being offered for review and comment by residents and park users.

The other sites being evaluated under the 2022 Anne Arundel County Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan include: Central Avenue Park, Crofton Park, Jessup Elementary Park, Marley Creek Park, Riva Area Park, Rock Creek Park, Stoney Creek Park, Sullivan Park, and West County Park. Unfortunately, not all park sites will be selected for improvements.

The historic Bacontown community is in Maryland City and dates back to 1880.

Balloons and Smiles from a Good Neighbor

Donyiel Roundtree is the recipient of the fourth-quarter 2024 Russett Good Neighbor Award for her donation of 500 helium balloons, a helium tank, and music for Halloween. She enjoyed her experience so much that she signed up to provide her balloon services again at the Russett Community's annual Winter Wonderland event.

A native Washingtonian, Donyiel moved from Silver Spring to Russett 13 years ago, after visiting many years before. She always loved the area and its proximity to public access. After 22 years in the utility industry, she retired during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing a decision to "invest in myself." She subsequently became a full-time realtor with Keller Williams.

Donyiel shared that working to help people is her primary goal and that after retirement, she asked herself, "What can I do for the community that I live in?" After learning about the Russett Halloween activity, she contacted Russett Management and was directed to the Activities Committee to help.

She says she really enjoyed interacting with the children and seeing the smiles on their faces when she presented them with balloons. Donyiel looks forward to continuing her community involvement and hopes to forge stronger connections between the Russett community and local businesses and organizations.

Russett Library Offering Events for Black History Month

Two of the special events scheduled for February at Maryland City at Russett Library are tied to Black History Month. On February 8 from 6:30-8:00 pm, learn about African American women who helped to shape the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s. Activists, including Ruby Dee, Angela Davis, Daisy Bates, and Ruby Bridges will be highlighted. This event is part of the library's monthly Virtual Visit series and participants can pre-register beginning at 10 am on January 25.

For kids age 6-10, "The ABC of Hip Hop" on Feb 28 (6:30-8:30 PM) uses rhythm and rhyme to explain essential reading concepts such as recognizing syllables. Students will have fun learning how to rap the alphabet backwards and honing crucial active listening skills.

For more information on any of the above programs, or to learn about more of the library's many services and offerings, go to their website: www.aacpl.net/services/maryland-city-at-russett.

Brenda Zeigler-Riley is a 15-year resident of Russett, a retired educator, and entrepreneur with a marketing, public relations, and fundraising background. Please send information on Russett/Maryland City (historical pieces, stories from first responders, hometown memories, resident profiles, etc.) to russett.mdcinfo@gmail.com.



Read online at laurelhistory.com

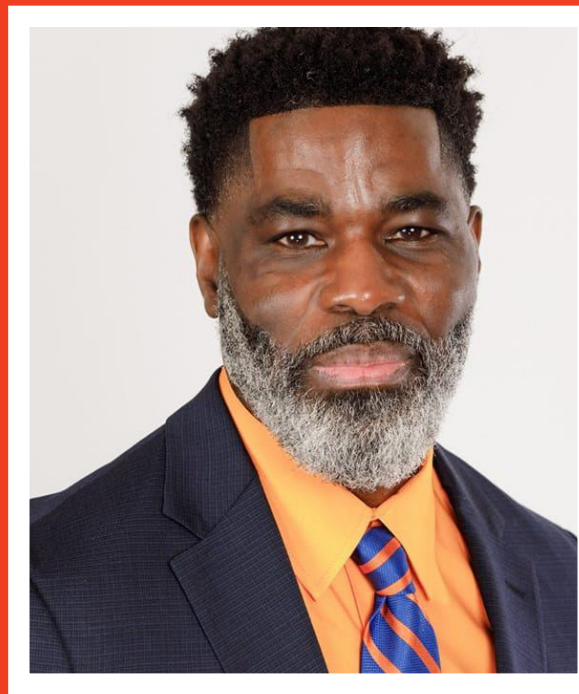
A Conversation With...

Mayor Keith Sydnor

Keith Sydnor was elected Mayor of Laurel in November 2023, becoming the first African American to hold the office. This interview took place in the Mayor's office on Jan. 8, 2024, just over a month after being sworn in.



BY KEVIN LEONARD



Has the historic nature of your election hit you yet?

I knew eventually it was going to be an African American male or female, but my main focus was to win the race and just do the work.

But at some point, you've got to be, "This is pretty cool. I'm the first one, you know?"

Yeah, it is, it is. But I'm more focused on doing the work. I'm a history guy. So, history is going to write itself. It's going to determine after my four years what have I done. I want to be remembered more for the work I've done than actually being the first one.

Let's talk about Main Street. Everybody talks a good game about improving Main Street. What specific plans do you have to revitalize Main Street and work with the small businesses down there?

I think that, like you said, we always talk about that. My goal is to give a real incentive to incentivize business to come there. I think we oversaturated a lot of businesses. So, we want to narrow it down. My goal is to put \$100,000 in this year's budget coming up, and that's \$20,000 per new business to come into the city. And so, I think that once we've narrowed down what business we're looking for, then we're going to recruit those businesses. We're going to send out some type of flyer, some type of press release saying, "Hey, we need these types of businesses. Come inside our city and

we're going to give you \$20,000 to come into the city as a grant. You don't have to pay it back, but you've got to stay here at least four years."

How are you going to figure out who's on that list? How are you going to do that?

We're going to our economic development people. I don't want to oversaturate the businesses on Main Street because they'd be competing against each other. So, we're going to send out a press release or whatever the economic development people say, this is how we recruit businesses to come into the city, and we're going to do it that way. They can give me an incentive to come into the city and increase the foot traffic with some arts and entertainment. Those are some things we want to do, as well, like maybe a Thursday or something like they do here during the summertime. We let our arts come down with a live band or something of that nature. But the foot traffic is the main thing. Once people start walking up and down Main Street and see businesses, so they can come and eat at like another Olive on Main, not something different. Olive on Main, I think, is the friendliest family restaurant we've got in the city, I believe. We've got a lot of chain restaurants, but—

—not on Main Street though.

Yeah, exactly. But that's the goal. I want to incentivize business coming to the city with that model right there.

Along the same lines, but not restricted to Main Street, in the candidate forum you mentioned economic development frequently as one of your priorities. I know you've got an economic development team here. How do you see them doing that? How are they going to accomplish a positive economic development for the city?

I mean, that's their main job. They're subject matter experts, right? They've got the planners, and they know the language that I need to know. I trust them. Robert Love's my director. I met with him already and said, "You got the green light, run it by me. Your job is to bring in economic development to the city along with me, as well." So, to answer your question, it's pretty much the businesses. We grow our economics through businesses and residential development. We don't want to oversaturate. We know people don't want to say we've got too many houses here, but I think we have to be very careful with that because we're in a prime area of jobs. Maryland is the sixth state in the United States for employment, and we're right in the center of NSA, Fort Meade, the FBI building is supposed to be coming in on board sometime in Greenbelt. That's six miles away. The Laurel Medical Center is building up as well. And that's why we don't want to miss the boat because we do our ten-year plan. Our ten-year plan is how do we see Laurel now and ten years from now. Every City Council, every Governor everywhere else wants to find

ways to generate revenue. I want to help folks. We've got a multipurpose center coming up here opening August 24th. It's going to need funding from the city. It's going to need funding from the state and funding from the county as well. But the more economics we have, we can put into it. We can help the underserved people. So, that's the goal of mine: to find ways we can bring in businesses and find ways that we can bring in housing as well. We're only four and a half miles long. So, we're not going to get a big industry coming here. We're going to have to have small businesses.

But related to that: Route 1. I can show you—all the way back to the 1920s—articles that criticized Route 1 through Laurel because it was blight, which is what they called it. Are there any plans to take a look at that? I do understand one side is PG and that, I'm sure, complicates things. But what's the city going to do?

To be honest with you, Route 1 is a state highway and I really haven't—we have businesses there that's inside the city though—but I haven't really put much thought on Route 1 because it goes all the way up into our Town Centre and the Baltimore-Washington corridor. That's a nice area. They got the Town Centre, then you got the other side. I don't know the name, what you call it, but the zip cleaners and you got some businesses there, too. And they fully packed the Hooters there. There's no vacancies over there. The Hertz rental place. And then

you go further up. That's all the city over that side as you go past the Chick-Fil-A. That's outside the city past Cherry Lane. Like you said, one side is county side.

You can't do anything about that.

Exactly. But the goal is—Baltimore, Washington corridor, Main Street area—I call it our generation hub. So, we're open for business for that as well. Most of them are looking for more small businesses. I can change stuff, but I still support small business. So just continue to incentivize, I think, with the \$20,000 if the City Council approves that. That's five new businesses a year. Those businesses probably hire 8 to 10 people. So those are jobs. Hopefully, those people live inside the city or work inside the city of Laurel. Spend that money right back into the economy. That's the goal.

Is there anything that you could point to and say, well, this is really why Main Street has become what it has? Is it just parking? Is it the mix of businesses? What do you think it is?

It's probably a combination of things. I think it's going to have a real anchor to draw people there. I think once you get a couple of restaurants it might draw people there. But a lot of businesses have been there 40 or 50 years and they're doing pretty well. Those are like more manufacturer stuff than they had the office hub here. But it's a problem throughout the United States, but I think that for a small town like us with 30,000 people, we're only 4.5 miles. And I think folks want to see something different besides—no disrespect for the chain restaurants, I love the chain restaurants myself, though—but I think get a couple of more mom-and-pop restaurants as well, and some boutiques or something. I think once we incentivize those businesses to come inside the city. Then, like the arts thing, too, we have some music. Talk to them first. I got to get with Board of Trade. I want to get with them and say, "Hey, can we block off the street or something when business closes, maybe 6:00 or whatever, and just have a band come out there and play some music?" Like the farmers market, things of that nature that's going to draw people to that and just give them the signage and the lights and stuff like that to attract people to walk up and down and look further. Because Main Street has a lot of residential there too, though. But I think the \$20,000 is going to buy us some businesses that we don't have already.

You said at the candidates' forum that you wanted to start a citizens' forum.

Yeah, we've got that planned on January 25th. Our first one. It's a listening session. So, what's going to happen is, citizens are going to come in, they're going to talk about the things that you're not talking about, how we can improve the city, what they like about us, what they dislike about the city. We're going to listen. We're not going to answer their questions on the spot. We've got a retreat scheduled on the 27th. So, the Mayor and City Council will take that information we hear from concerned citizens, look at our budget. How can we implement some of this stuff they're talking about? And like I say, I'm asking the council for \$100,000 to put into our grant program. I'm also asking the council for \$60,000 for first time homebuyers to get them 3-to-\$4000 towards the closing costs for first time home buyers. So out the gate, I'm asking the council for \$160,000 to put back into the city to grow business and grow real estate so people can buy homes for the first time inside the city of Laurel. But a citizens' forum, that's the listening session. But another forum I got talking about, it's a community citizen forum where you want to reduce crime.

So, it would be specifically focused on that?

Yes. Well, that's a different forum. This forum is a citizen forum. But the one I'm going to come up with, a community citizen forum more like a community coalition group made up of business owners, non-profit organizations, faith-based leaders, returning citizens, high school students. And we're going to talk about ways we can reduce crime and prevent crime to keep our community safe. And I think with jobs—the local here, local 24, I've been working with them since 2018 or 19, somewhere around there—and that's one of the best unions. I say that because it's a heat insulator unit, so you've got to be an insulator. But they're taking people without a high school diploma or GED. Not saying that they're minimizing their qualifications. They know that if you have the ability to learn, they feel that they have enough skilled teachers and can teach you to be an insulator and have you in five years a master. So, it started off at \$17.86 an hour, work your way up. Right here on Montgomery Street, 901 Montgomery Street, local 24. So that's a good thing. That right there is going to increase jobs as well.

Do you plan to make those forums a regular thing?

Yes, yes, yes.

They're going to meet regularly?

Yeah. Once we write the resolution up and get it started. I'll probably start up the task force first. We have a clergy committee already. I don't think it's going to take long to do it because we got the clergy committee already. We meet them like every 60 days. I'm going to keep that same schedule. We got the Laurel Board of Trade to meet with them once a month. Those are the business community. I'm ex-law enforcement, so I'm working with Prince George's County. Mike Williams, he's the director of the Returning Citizens from Prince George's County. He's been my director when I was working as a probation officer. So, I just got to get with him, and we can coordinate these things. We've been talking about this stuff for years. And just getting these brainstorming—one resource we got is the local 24. We got folks coming home from prison, some of them are not going to have a GED or a high school diploma, but they have the ability to learn.

Move on to transparency. Do you intend to continue to have virtual meetings?

Yes. We had to change the resolution. I personally would love to have them in person all the time. But sometimes it does make sense when you look at our agenda. Our agenda only might have 1 or 2 things on it, and then you want to look at the work-life balance thing. Sometimes we might suspend a meeting if we don't have nothing on the agenda. Because really, if the council is not writing legislation or bringing stuff forth, then there's just administration saying, we need these type of things. But yeah, the work session is the first Wednesday of the month. The first council meeting is the second Monday of the month. And the second council meeting is the fourth Monday of the month, because you have two public hearings before you pass, before you vote on anything, that's the charter. So, the work session tells you what you want. If it doesn't make it out of the work session, then you know it's dead. But you can extend it if you're not ready to go to the first public hearing. You can table it for another day. You can continue to work on it until everybody is satisfied, they got enough stuff to put forth a vote, or they feel that it's not worthy of it, they can kill it. But that depends on how the council feels.

There's been some things going on over the years that are not necessarily secret, but not in the public eye. The biggest example I can think of is the CRA.

Okay.

I've talked to a lot of people, and nobody has any idea what it is. And they meet in the afternoon. Who can go to that?

The CRA, that's the continuous resolution—?.

The Community—
Community.

Redevelopment Authority.
Yeah.

They're the ones that buy properties.

They buy property. Yeah, yeah. All public meetings, all meetings and committees should be open to the public.

Well, I'm glad to hear you say that.

I mean, I don't think there is any difference. So, I'll do my research on them. But all the other committees that we have might not be televised because—

But here's a body that spends a lot of money on the city's behalf.

I don't know how much money they spent. I have to research them more. That's the committee that I don't really know too much about, to be honest with you. I know what they stand for, but I'm still learning how they operate. So let me research them.

If you dig down in the city website, they don't have any minutes published for all of 2023. That doesn't make sense.

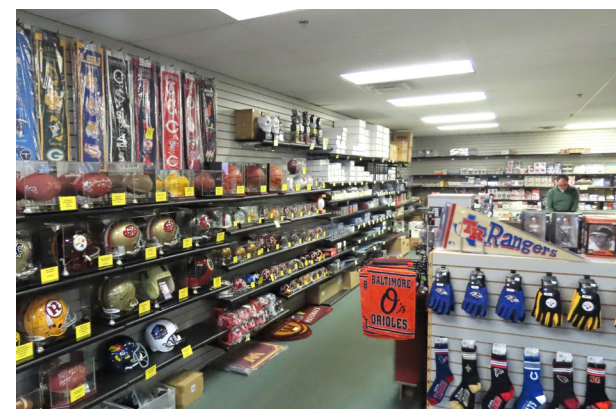
Okay. So let me get back with you on that one. Let me go do some more research on that.

At the candidates' forum, you said there needs to be transparency by both sides when dealing with the Boys and Girls Club issues.

Yes.

So has there been a lack of transparency in the past with dealing with those guys?

I always reached out to the Boys and Girls Club when I first came on the council. They came to me for some things, and I told them that I didn't have the authority to—you had to go back before the general body. And so they never got back with me on stuff that they



PHOTOS BY JOHN MEWSHAW



A Main Street mainstay since 1991, Sports Card Heroes is under new ownership. The popular shop will continue to sell the sports memorabilia that has made it a favorite among collectors.

Sports Card Heroes



BY JOHN MEWSHAW

A Main Street presence for over thirty years, the sports memorabilia store Sports Card Heroes is trading owners. Rodney Currence, who with his brother Rick founded the store, has sold the business to Steven Jordon, of Ellicott City. Jordon took ownership as of December 4 last year.

Rodney and Rick Currence, from Olney, Maryland, opened their store in 1991 in a space above Red Hot & Blue. In 1992, they moved across the street, into a space that is currently a spa and stayed there for twenty years. In June of 2012, they moved back across the street, into a location a few spots from where they started.

The brothers decided on Laurel after researching the area thoroughly. They liked the favorable town demographics, and the location. "You can get here from anywhere," Currence said, citing the closeness to Washington and Baltimore via I-95.

When the Currence brothers first opened the store, sports collecting was going through a boom. The hobby's popularity dipped, however, in 1994. "You had the baseball lockout, and the hockey strike," Currence explained. Sports fans became disillusioned, and the sale of memorabilia dipped. During this time, the store expanded into non-sports merchandise, including

pogs and the red hot (at the time) Beanie Babies. The downtime also had an unexpected benefit, as competing stores suffered. "There used to be five sports stores in the area. Now there is just us."

Eventually the popularity of sports memorabilia rebounded, although Currence admits the hobby has changed. "It used to be for kids, now it's for adults," he said, citing the rise of prices, including cards.

In addition to selling cards, jerseys, bats and balls, and the like, Currence also got involved in autograph services. Starting in 2000, the store would host autograph sessions, where customers could meet the athletes and get their items signed in person. At their height, the store would have a signing once a month, with the athletes booked far enough in advance so the store could advertise upcoming events.

"You could come in for one signing and see who was appearing next month." Among the athletes who appeared at the store were Raymond Berry (Colts football), Darrell Green and John Riggins (Washington football), Alex Ovechkin (Capitals hockey), Dwight Gooden (Mets baseball), Jim Palmer and Cal Ripken Jr. (Orioles baseball), and Ed Reed (Ravens football). Currence has fond memories of most of the players he

dealt with. "The best were guys like Jeff Bostic or Don Warren (from the Redskins football championship teams), who took the time to talk to fans." Asked if there were any players he regretted not getting, his answer was immediate. "Brooks. Should have gotten Brooks Robinson."

I asked Currence if he thought Laurel favored the Baltimore or the Washington teams. His answer: both. "When we started here, it was just the Redskins and the Orioles. The Baltimore Ravens and the Washington Nationals (not to mention the Washington Commanders) came along much later. Sports Card Heroes is known in sports memorabilia circles for their Washington football stock.

Rick Currence left Rodney in charge and went into real estate, then retired from that around seven years ago. Rodney, while giving up the store, will continue in the business, doing mail-in private signings as well as working some of the larger area memorabilia shows. He said he found the "perfect successor" in Steven Jordon. Jordon found out about the store from his father, who was a frequent customer. Jordon is excited about Sports Card Heroes and is happy with the location. Currence predicts there will be little noticeable change for his customers, and the store will continue to serve the sports fans of Laurel for years to come.

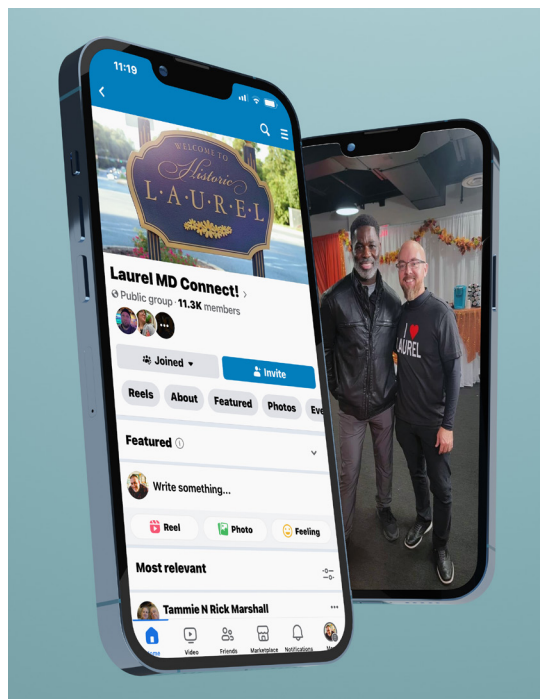


John Mewshaw has been a Laurel resident since 1986. A graduate of the University of Maryland, he has been an amateur photographer for as long as he can remember.

COMMUNITY

Connecting in Laurel

Facebook Group Presents Opportunities and Challenges



BY RICHARD FRIEND

Mike Mondy is more than just a familiar face around town. The amiable realtor is a frequent volunteer and supporter of all things Laurel, whether they be City-sponsored activities or informal community meetups that happen organically. Mondy enjoys meeting new people and helping out wherever he can.

It's that attitude that may have inspired him to create "Laurel MD Connect!"—a Facebook group he founded in October 2020 during the height of the pandemic. The group's mission statement reads, "Our vision is to provide the Laurel community with a fun place to social network. If you're looking to make a recommendation, ask a question, or share something interesting about our local community, you've come to the right place! WELCOME and please help us grow by inviting other members of the Laurel community!"

And grow it has, with a staggering 11,000 members and counting. By comparison, the City's official Facebook page, which has been around for a full decade, currently has 14,000 followers.

The group has been instrumental in welcoming new residents and encouraging others to try out local businesses they might have otherwise missed. The page is consistently full of helpful hints for everything from restaurant recommendations to trustworthy mechanics and has even spawned a few group meetups

where locals have gotten together in person to enjoy a meal or get some exercise by walking around Laurel Lake. Mondy has also shared some spectacular photos he's taken of the lake recently during his own early morning walks.

Laying Some Ground Rules

A group of this size can't exist without a few growing pains, however, and Mondy does a terrific job of gently policing the page when it becomes necessary. There have been a few occasions where a provocative post had to be deleted, or negative comments in a thread threatened to derail an otherwise constructive conversation. In such cases, Mondy typically interjects with a disarming good humor, almost in a "don't make me turn this car around, kids" tone that likely prompts the offending posters rethink their approach and do better next time.

Mondy recently developed a few ground rules designed to help steer members away from the potentially troublesome posts that every popular Facebook group has to deal with at one time or another. Treating everyone with respect and kindness is at the top of the list. He's also taken steps to curb would-be romantics from directly soliciting members for dates, has asked restaurant reviewers to be more mindful when outwardly criticizing local businesses, and is ensuring that self-promotion and advertising remains relevant to Laurel and doesn't become repetitive spam. A full description of the rules can be found under the "About" tab in the Facebook group.

Amigos Fever

In November, the group suddenly found itself inundated with reviews, comments, and conversations about the new Amigos Mexican Grill, which had just enjoyed a wildly successful soft opening in South Laurel. The sheer number of posts on the topic became a topic unto itself—with meme-worthy responses that included some who "marked themselves safe from yet another Amigos review." Most took it in good stride, and the restaurant probably couldn't have benefitted more from the publicity if they'd paid for it. It's the kind of lightning-in-a-bottle fervor that only happens in the best Facebook groups, and now every new restaurant in Laurel will undoubtedly hope to catch even a fraction of that same Amigos Fever.

It's entirely fitting that it was a business named "Amigos" that became such a hit in the Laurel MD Connect! group, as countless friendships are being formed through its membership ranks—friendships with founder Mike Mondy, new Laurel residents, local business owners, and many more.



Mr. & Mrs. Businesses on Main Street



BY CHARLES H. CLYBURN

We have known about "Mom and Pop" businesses throughout history, but this is about a Mr. and Mrs. business venture. Mr. (Tony Basim) and Mrs. (CeCe Shannon) rent space—he on the first floor (PHD Barber Shop) and she on the second floor (Route 1's Best Variety Shop)—at 102 Washington Blvd. in downtown Laurel, otherwise known as Route 1 and Main Street, the town's art district center. They are listed as owner and operator of their respective spaces.

A married couple for 13 years, after a nine-year courtship, Basim, a native of Queens, New York, has been in the barbering business for over 25 years. He is quoted as saying "In my community, hair care was very important to both men and women. Looking sharp, clean, and debonair oozed self-confidence and esteem-building. It was important to look good, not only in the mirror, but in the public eye!"

He first visited a barber shop at age 11 and was caught up in the experience, becoming a licensed barber in New York in 1995. Moving to Laurel in 2001, Basim worked in several shops for nine years until the day came when he told a fellow barber "I think I am ready to open my own shop and do things my way!" The co-worker mentioned the location on Main Street and, after 17 years, the rest is history!

When asked why the moniker of "Professional Hair Doctor," Basim told us the history of the barber, back in 700 BC, who was originally the surgeon, the dentist, and the all-around professional medical doctor. And, therefore, the name stuck. So, when the second floor of 102 Main Street became vacant after being the meeting place for Alcoholics Anonymous for over 20 years, Basim approached the owner with the idea of occupying that space with his wife's business ideas.

CeCe looked over the space and immediately remembered the Five and Dime store on Main Street in her hometown, Bowling Green, Virginia, where her father took her and her sister every Saturday. That store had toys, candy, and fake jewelry, among other things. Main Street Laurel brought back those memories of shopping in that Five and Dime, and walking the space on the second floor she was filled with the possibilities of what may be her own business. CeCe told us, "This location is good for growing a business and particularly, a variety store. It has two sides, is near a hotel and a residential area."

The grand opening of "Route 1's Best Variety Store" happened on October 21, 2023, and the future looks bright. If you are looking for beauty supplies, household products, second-hand clothes, and a consignment corner, look no further than the 2nd floor of 102 Washington Blvd. in downtown Laurel. And, while you are in the neighborhood, you might want to get a haircut.



VICK LEONARD

My First Movie Premiere

Honored and Humbled



BY KEVIN LEONARD

In addition to my work with The Laurel History Boys, I do historical research as a consultant. Most of my clients are filmmakers and book authors, and I've been fortunate enough to work for both a Pulitzer Prize winner and an Oscar winner. The majority of the films I've worked on are documentaries, including the latest, *The Space Race*.

The Space Race was produced by the Kennedy/Marshall Company (who my contract was with) for National Geographic Documentary Films. The film explores the Black pioneers in NASA's astronaut corps, many of whom are unknown to the general public. The stories of these Black pilots, engineers, and scientists who became astronauts and the struggles they endured to get there are the focus of the film.

Ed Dwight's Story

In the film, wrapped around the stories of the astronauts who flew in space, is the story of Ed

Dwight—who *didn't* get to fly in space—despite his being anointed the first Black astronaut by the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s.

At that time, Air Force Captain Ed Dwight was a test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base, which produced numerous NASA astronauts in its early days. Dwight was piloting supersonic jets at Edwards and training in the Aerospace Research Pilot School, run by Chuck Yeager. When he applied to NASA to join the astronaut corps, his application was championed by the Kennedy administration, which had made civil rights a major campaign issue.

His application was also championed by Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League, who sent Dwight around the country on speaking tours and arranged interviews for him. He became a celebrity as “the first Negro astronaut.”

“I received about 1,500 pieces of mail a week, which were stored in large containers at Edwards Air Force

(Left): Kevin Leonard (seated at right) attends the DC/DOX Film Festival premiere of *The Space Race*, a documentary about NASA's first Black astronauts. Kevin worked as a researcher for the film. Beside him is astronaut Ed Dwight, and behind him is Charles Bolden—another astronaut who was later appointed head of NASA by President Barack Obama.

(Below): Kevin's name appears in the film's closing credits.

| SPACE CENTER HOUSTON | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| POST PRODUCTION ACCOUNTING | TEN KEY ACCOUNTING |
| HEAD ACCOUNTANT | JASON MARC SCHOENER |
| FIRST ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT | KARLEIGH WEISSMAN |
| ACCOUNTING CLERK | SHERIF SERAG |
| PRODUCER FOR WISFUL PRODUCTIONS | TRISH SCOTT |
| PRODUCTION INSURANCE | ARTHUR J. GALLAGHER & CO. |
| NASA ARCHIVE CONSULTANT | STEPHEN SLATER |
| RESEARCHER | PAULETTE MARTE |
| | KEVIN LEONARD |
| | MICHELLE AU |

Base. Some of it came to my mother in Kansas City,” Dwight told *Smithsonian Magazine*. “Most of my mail was just addressed to ‘Astronaut Dwight, Kansas City, Kansas.’”

But there's a big difference between training for space flight and being accepted into NASA's astronaut corps. Every step of the way, Dwight encountered prejudice and resistance to his becoming an astronaut. With Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Dwight's chance to be an astronaut evaporated, with no explanation.

They Did Fly

The film also tells the stories of the Black pioneers who were accepted into the astronaut corps and did fly into space.

It wasn't until 20 years later that astronaut Guion Bluford, as a crew member aboard the eighth Space Shuttle flight in 1983, became the first Black astronaut to fly in space. In addition to Bluford, the film traces the careers of astronauts Ron McNair, who died on the Space Shuttle *Challenger* in 1986; Fred Gregory, who became a NASA Deputy Administrator; Charlie Bolden, who rose to become NASA's first Black Administrator; and others.

Premiere at DC/DOX Festival

Researchers are pretty far down the totem pole of crew members on a film. By the time my name appears on the credits, most people have left the theater (or switched the channel if it's on a streaming service). But there have been two exceptions when the filmmakers asked me to appear in their shows. (It was not much of a stretch appearing as “Kevin Leonard, Researcher.”) I was in two episodes of *The Tesla Files* on the History Channel and on an episode of *American Detective with Lt. Joe Kenda*, which was about a murder in Laurel in the 1980s. My experience (if you can call it that since I had no idea what I was doing) filming those shows is a story for another day.

So it was quite a surprise when Alexandra Bowen, one of the producers of *The Space Race*, invited me and my wife to the DC premiere as part of the DC/DOX Film Festival. The film was shown a week earlier in New York City as part of the Tribeca Film Festival. It was the

first time I had been invited to the premiere of any film I had contributed to. Alex introduced me to the film's directors, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza and Lisa Cortes. (It shows how low on the totem pole we are since I had never met them, despite working for months on the film.) I was thrilled when Diego complimented me on my research.

It was shown in the theater in the Martin Luther King Library in downtown DC. We arrived early because, well, once again, we had no idea what we were doing. But it was fortuitous because also arriving early were two of the astronauts featured in the film: Ed Dwight and Charlie Bolden.

Ed Dwight came in first, an elderly gentleman in a NASA jacket, and he, his wife, and son sat down next to me. I asked if he was an astronaut and then apologized that I didn't recognize him. He laughed when I explained that all the photos and films of him that I uncovered in my research were from about 60 years ago. He was a joy to talk with—full of stories yet totally unpretentious. As we talked, he confided in me that the darker side of his story was not part of the film (and was a topic new to me). He told me that after Kennedy died, and his champion in the White House was gone, a smear campaign against him was launched in the government and military. Lies and gossip—with racial prejudice—denied his dream of becoming an astronaut.

He also talked about his career as a sculptor since he left the military. He made it sound like a hobby. But, as I learned later watching the film, he is a world-renowned sculptor with artwork all over the country. Google "Ed Dwight sculpture" to see some of his remarkable art.

A short while later, Charlie Bolden and his wife arrived. He was just as unpretentious ("Call me Charlie") and full of stories as Ed Dwight. Here was a guy that not only flew as an astronaut but later in his career was appointed head of NASA by President Barack Obama. He was stationed in Japan for a period during his military career and talked with my wife, Vicki, about living in Japan. (She grew up in Japan because her father was career NSA.) He also made it a point to tell me what an inspiration Ed Dwight was to him and all the other Black astronauts.

The lobby had mostly filled up when a buzz became apparent: Bill Nye the Science Guy walked in and came over to us (still talking with Dwight and Bolden) to talk with the astronauts. He seemed oblivious to the many people aiming their phones at him to snap a picture.

Finally, it was time to take our seats and watch the film. It did not disappoint. The crowd loved it and was further entertained with a Q&A session after with the film's directors, Dwight, Bolden, and two current astronauts.

All in all, it was a wonderful evening for us. I was honored to be invited but incredibly humbled to talk with two inspirational—yet unpretentious—heroes from America's space race.

==

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

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BY RICHARD FRIEND, KEVIN LEONARD, AND JEFF KRULIK

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From the Office of Council Member Tom Dernoga



BY TOM DERNOGA | PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCILMEMBER



Council Member Tom Dernoga accepted his end-of-session gift from Council Member Wala Blegay.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM DERNOGA

2024 Gavel Exchange

On Tuesday, December 5, the County Council convened to elect a new County Chair and Vice Chair for Legislative Year 2024. During the Gavel Exchange Ceremony, Council Member Wala Blegay and Council Member Dernoga passed their leadership to the new Council Chair, Jolene Ivey, and Council Vice Chair, Sydney Harrison. Following the adjournment of the ceremony, the County Council entered winter legislative recess and will reconvene in January 2024. Under new leadership, the Council will continue to navigate challenges, create solutions, and serve our people. You may watch the Gavel Exchange Ceremony by going to bit.ly/41qARD8.

We All Have a Role to Play in The Snow

We have several cold winter months ahead of us with a good chance of snow, and Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) is ready. The Snow Plan Operation consists of over 250 vehicles and 352 trained personnel prepared to handle snowfall, from light snow to full blizzards. To monitor the progress of snow removal and ice mitigation efforts, visit bit.ly/SnowCitizenInsight to use

DPWT's new Snowplow Tracker! Green indicates a road has been cleared and is a safe route for drivers. Red indicates the snow plan team has identified the need for snow or ice removal and will soon address that route. DPWT will also update the public on their social media platforms. The county is prepared for snow, and we all have a role in reducing the amount of toxic chemicals and debris in the snow, eventually melting into the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Remove unnecessary salt from your property to reuse later. Be careful about which snow-melting methods you use and take care of your storm drain. Protecting your storm drain or inlets from clogging is easy and preventable. You can start by consistently practicing the following: Remove debris and trash from the grates when you see them. Clear debris from the curb line and on top of catch basins so stormwater can flow freely down the street and into the storm drain system. Do not dump trimmings, grass, or leaves over the inlet, ditches, or curb line. This will assist in preventing clogging. Report concerns to assist the Office of System Drainage Management operation by submitting a PGC311 Request. To submit a request, visit pgc311.com/customer/servicetypes or call 301-833-4748.

Better Bag Reminder

The Better Bag Bill is in effect! After January 1, 2024, all retail businesses are prohibited from distributing single-use plastic carry-out bags. Restaurants will provide paper bags for leftovers and take-out. Other retail establishments will sell paper bags for 10¢. However, we strongly encourage everyone to use durable, reusable bags. Make sure your home and car are stocked with reusable bags for your next trip to the grocery store.

County-Wide Curb-Side Compost

Due to the successful implementation of the Curbside Food Scraps Composting pilot and three expansions, Prince George's County has launched Phase 4, the final expansion of the PGC Composts program, to eligible residents receiving County-contracted trash and recycling services.

The remaining residents will receive direct mail outlining their wheeled green cart and kitchen pail deliveries in the fall of 2023. All eligible residents will receive their materials by the end of January 2024.

Eligible households should look out for your postcard in the mail. There is no need for you to do anything. All materials will be delivered to your residence to start composting, including

a wheeled 32-gallon green cart, a 2-gallon kitchen pail, a How-To Guide, a refrigerator magnet, a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and a list of acceptable compostable liners.

Use our online tracking tool by visiting bit.ly/3thnqbT to determine whether you receive County waste collection services. Eligible residents for compost collection will see "Organics and Yard Trim Day – Monday" listed when searching their street address. For eligible households that do not receive materials by February 2024, or find the information with your address incorrect, please contact PGC311.

Join our District 1 Senior Living Newsletter List

Don't miss out on resources, local activities, and events for seniors. To sign up for our monthly senior email newsletter, visit bit.ly/D1SeniorNewsletterOptIn.

Contact Us

Please keep in touch. Email us at councildistrict1@co.pg.md.us or call 301-952-3887. Se habla español. On parle français. نحن نتكلم العربية. Follow us on Facebook, X, Threads, and Instagram: @TomDernogaD1.

AUTHOR PROFILE

Hidden History of Howard County

New book about Howard County history written by Voices of Laurel contributor and son



BY ANGELA LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

Curiosity surrounding an old iron bridge they would cross walking along trails in their neighborhood led this father and son duo to look deeper into the history of their community. And it was that curiosity that ignited and fuels their passion for getting to the true story behind well-worn stories about Howard County history, as well as for discovering little known or long-lost gems of history and bringing them to light. The pair has taken many of those stories and put them in their first book, *Hidden History of Howard County*.

The book is full of deep dives into the history of HoCo, as they refer to Howard County throughout the book. The authors have laid out a buffet of historical tidbits, notable topography, and little known but no less noteworthy people that merit a closer look, and they seem to plead for another historian to continue the research where their work ended.

Hidden History of Howard County contains several years' worth of research finds and stories that Wayne Davis amassed and, with input from his son, Nathan, have been publishing via a Facebook page and at times in local newspapers, including *Voices of Laurel* and *Guilford Gazette*.

Although there is a focus on the Guilford area of Howard County, other areas in the county are represented. The Davises believe that the unearthing and telling of factual local history is important, and their book encourages people of any city, town, or neighborhood to seek out the history around them.

Thrilling Finds

One noteworthy individual they encountered while researching an unmarked, overgrown cemetery was a prolific researcher and historian of African American history in Howard County named Beulah Meacham Buckner. Buckner died in 2005 before she was able to publish her extensive trove of research. Despite having only had access to Buckner's collection of data for a very

short time, which was in the possession of the Howard County government, Wayne wrote in the book that:

The quality and quantity of records Buckner obtained are impressive, containing documents, journals, newspaper clippings, notes, typed pages of her manuscript, computer disks, photos, slide negatives and more. Her research is overwhelming and powerful, especially knowing how she felt about the lack of research into our county's Black history.

Little did they know when they set out to find out more information about a mill that once operated in their village of Kings Contrivance, they would make the discovery that would lead to what Wayne called, "the heart and soul" of what led to writing a book about HoCo's hidden history. "I think that's what really got us hooked into history," he said. "It was like we were prospecting for gold. It was just an amazing thing."

He and neighbor Gerald Ueckermann, who was researching mills and looking at street plats, noticed a reference to a cemetery. Curious about the cemetery, Wayne and Nathan went over to take a look. The overgrown, unmarked land was nestled between Rt. 32 and a technology building on Guilford Road.

Initially excited to uncover what they thought was a unique find, Wayne said, "we found out later that an African American researcher called Beulah Buckner had" researched and asked about the cemetery back in the 1980s.

Wayne was equally thrilled to learn about Buckner's efforts to research the cemetery and other aspects of local Black history. But, finding the cemetery, even though it was technically re-discovering a forgotten cemetery, proved to be an adventure. The adventure included cadaver dog training, state and local archeologists, and others who partially cleared, assessed, and mapped the site.

Learning about the deceased local African American researcher's connection to the site led Wayne and Nathan to find out more about her. "We

wanted to find out how she knew about it, and that's what prompted us to want to find her records," he said. They did locate her vast trove of research with the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks several years ago, though it is unclear where the Buckner research is at this time.

Each author has their favorite finds and stories in the book. Wayne noted that the cemetery find was up at the top of his list. From a storytelling perspective, he enjoyed the murder mystery that he stumbled upon while researching the quarries. He also was moved by the strength and tenacity of the Carter family ("just how strong Willis Carter was") and the whole historically Black community of Guilford; and how they fought for public education and desegregation.

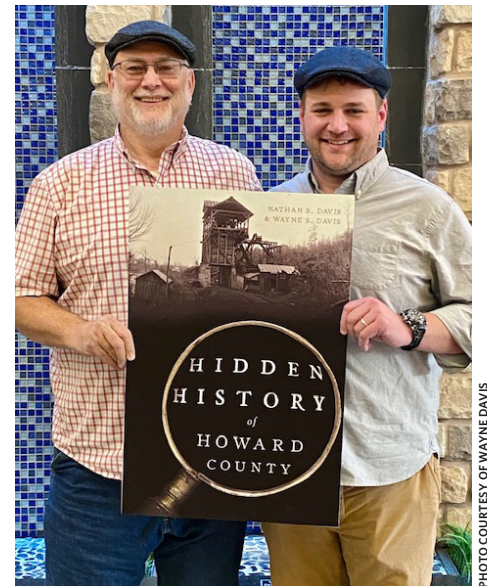
Nathan said, "I'd probably say the thing that I wish that I knew the most, or I wish was taught to me when I was at Hammond [High School], [was about] ... Roger Carter. That's a tremendous story," which ranked high up on his list.

Researchers and budding history enthusiasts will appreciate the plethora of tips, databases, and websites, found in the Acknowledgements and Appendix of the book that can be used to undertake their own searches, as well as the book's pages of end notes sourcing their finds.

Does anybody really care?

There is an undercurrent of frustration throughout the book at the way HoCo history is portrayed and who is left out of the narrative. The authors believe that facts about HoCo's history should be acknowledged and taught but worry that people appear to accept the narrative they are given without curiosity. Nathan expressed his frustration, saying, "I am still surprised how little people care [to learn more about history]." But the book is filled with stories that may change that.

Nathan hopes readers will take away from their book a few ideas, "not to take all history at face value, because it's a lot deeper than that," because "the popular



Wayne Davis and his son, Nathan, with a poster displaying the cover of their new book, a deep dive into the little known history of Howard County.

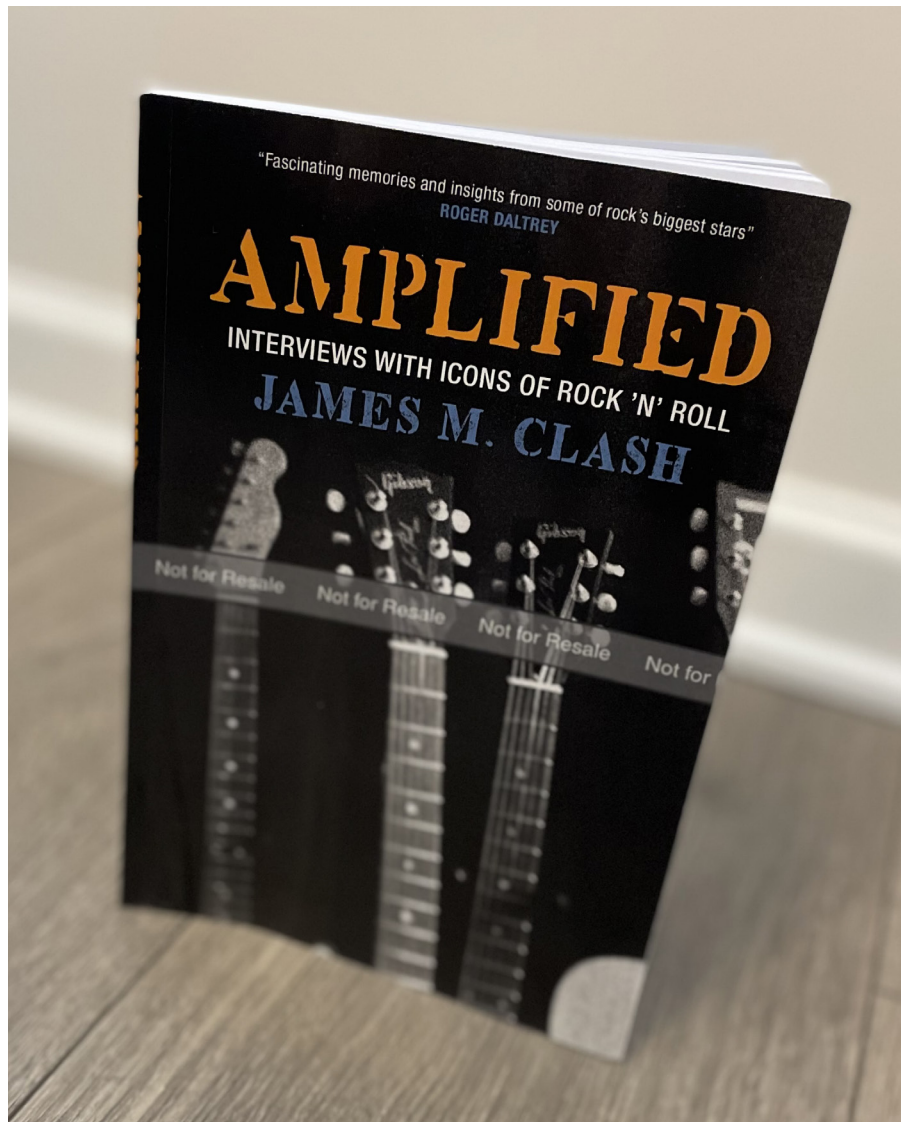
stories [about history] are seldom the factual stories."

Using the example of the bridge that he walked on in his youth, he noted that the rocky area around the bridge with "the granite boulders that were cut and then the signs that were [installed by the county] there, were some of the story but not all of the story, not the most interesting parts of the story." So, his advice is to always dig deeper.

Wayne hopes that readers will be encouraged to look for the hidden history in their own neighborhoods.

Evidence that there is a HoCo audience that does care about local history was on display at their first two author events, one at Backwater Books on Main Street in old Ellicott City and another at Historic Savage Mill. Coming this year, several author events are lined up, including January 24, 2024, at Busboys and Poets in Columbia at 6:00 PM; on February 27, 2024, at the Kings Contrivance Village Association at 10:30 AM; and April 5, 2024 at the Howard County Historical Society Lunch and Learn at 12:00 PM.

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



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM CLASH

In his new book, *Amplified*, Jim Clash—pictured above with *The Who*'s Roger Daltrey (top)—shares interviews with icons including Daltrey, Cream's Ginger Baker (lower left), Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson (lower right), and others. Clash is a Laurel High School graduate and frequent contributor to *Voices of Laurel*.

New Book by Laurel's Jim Clash



BY KEVIN LEONARD

A new book by frequent *Voices of Laurel* contributor, *Forbes* magazine writer, and Laurel High School graduate (Class of 1973) Jim Clash has been released. *Amplified* is a compilation of Q&A interviews Jim conducted with some of the icons of rock 'n roll. The *Forbes* name gave him access to the likes of Roger Daltrey of *The Who*, Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce of Cream, Mickey Dolenz of *The Monkees*, John Fogerty of *Creedence Clearwater Revival*, Grace Slick of *Jefferson Airplane*, and many more.

Besides rock stars, during his career Jim has interviewed a variety of notable people from astronauts to racing car drivers to scientists. His experience conducting probing interviews served him well in *Amplified*. In the book, Jim skillfully interviews a

number of rock stars who are rumored to be difficult subjects, such as Baker, Art Garfunkel, Fogerty, and Bruce. The stories he elicits in these conversations are remarkable. For example:

- Baker pulled no punches in his criticism of, among others, *The Beatles*, *Led Zeppelin*, and *Kiss*. But Jim manages to show his softer side when Baker teared up discussing his legacy.
- Ian Anderson of *Jethro Tull* talked about the technical difficulties in recording "Locomotive Breath."
- John Fogerty recalled CCR's appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* when the music was prerecorded but he sang live.
- Grace Slick talked about *Jefferson Airplane*'s set at Woodstock that started at 6:00 am.
- Roger Daltrey recalled *The Who*'s 1967 appearance on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* when drummer Keith Moon loaded his drum kit with far too many explosives for a dramatic ending. The explosion destroyed the set and caught Pete Townsend's hair on fire.

There are many more stories in the book. *Amplified*, a fascinating behind-the-scenes look with some of the most important performers during the golden age of rock 'n roll, is an Amazon best-seller. The book is available on Amazon.com.

They Said What?



BY JIM CLASH

Imagine as a teen at Laurel High School listening to your favorite rock music on the radio, then later meeting and interviewing the very rock stars you had listened to. That's what I've been fortunate enough to do over the years as a *Forbes* journalist. My chats with those musicians are included in my new classic rock book, *Amplified*, in their entirety. But here, I'm recounting some of the more amusing highlights from those chats.

Art Garfunkel: With Art, I was star-struck, being a long-time fan of the film, *The Graduate*, to which Simon & Garfunkel wrote the musical soundtrack. Also, this was the guy who was one of the two voices in "Sound of Silence," the song of the 20th Century. I fessed up to my admiration up-front.

Art, with his relaxed attitude, put me at ease right away, and we had a nice exchange. In the middle of it, though, probably due to nerves, I accidentally called him "Paul." Now while Paul Simon had been his lifelong partner in musical crime, sadly the two don't much get along these days. I kept talking, hoping that he didn't notice my guffaw. Five seconds later, he said, "Jim, I heard that." I started to apologize, and profusely, but he stopped me abruptly, saying, "Don't worry, it happens all of the time." We both laughed.

Another thing about Art: Now that he's bald and sans his signature sixties afro, he doesn't seem as tall as you might remember. In fact, standing next to him backstage, he and I surprisingly were the same height, about 5'10". Another reason Art looked so tall: he's most always pictured with Paul Simon, who, in reality, is very short—only 5'3".

Grace Slick: When I interviewed the iconic Jefferson Airplane singer by phone, she lacked any filters, to a degree refreshing. When I told her that we, collectively as teens, adored her as a kind of sixties sex symbol, she immediately disagreed. "I had kinky black hair, which looks odd on a White person, and blonde eyelashes and eyebrows," she said. "I had to put on makeup so that my eyes matched my hair. I have no tits and, from the knee down, my legs are very, very short. How do you work that? Proportion. You wear boots that come up over your knees so it looks like the lower part is longer."

Another thing Grace told me was that she was not impressed with The Beatles when they broke in America on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. She thought it silly that grown-up men were singing about wanting to "hold your hand" and "she loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah." But when she first saw Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones, more counterculture and bad-ass, she thought, "Now that's the stuff there."

John Fogerty: At Laurel Junior High School, I remember skipping down the hallways with classmate Bobby Jeschelnik, singing, "It ain't me, it ain't me, I'm no fortunate one..." John Fogerty, of course, wrote those lyrics as part of "Fortunate Son." He also wrote the lyrics to a slew of other Creedence Clearwater Revival hits including, "Who'll Stop the Rain," "Proud Mary," "Green River," and "Bad Moon Rising." That last tune has an oft-misquoted lyric: "There's the bathroom on the right." In reality, John is singing, "There's a bad moon on the rise."

When I brought up the amusing anecdote to John during our conversation, his sense of humor immediately kicked in. "People show up at concerts with 'there's the bathroom on the right' signs and a little arrow pointing to the right," said John, laughing. "It gets confusing. Do they mean my right or their right? When I'd sing that line, I'd point to my right. But, as any good first-grade teacher knows, you have to point to the student's right. So nowadays, I point to the left, which is actually their right."

Ginger Baker: Ginger, rest his soul, was known for his split personality. Sometimes he was warm and charming (he actually teared up when I asked about his legacy),

other times he was cranky and aggressive (his love/hate relationship with Cream bassist Jack Bruce, for example, and his breaking the nose of director Jay Bulger during the making of the 2012 documentary, *Beware of Mr. Baker*).

When I spent the day with Ginger at his horse farm in Parker, Colorado, he was mostly on good behavior. But that didn't stop the greatest drummer of the sixties from blunt tirades about things he didn't like. When I brought up the popular show band, Kiss, for example, and all of the money they were generating at the time by reuniting, he was direct.

"These people dress up in spandex trousers with all of the extraordinary make-up. I find it incredibly repulsive, always have," said Baker. "I've seen where Cream is held responsible for the birth of that sort of thing. Well, I would definitely go for aborting [laughs]. I loathe and detest heavy metal. I think it is an abortion."

Ginger is not too keen on American tea, the beverage, either. "The instructions printed on the bag say to pour boiling water over the tea," he points out. "How simple is that? No, they bring you an empty cup with an unopened tea bag—how nice—and a pot of water that is hot, but boiling it isn't. So, tea you have not. It's the boiling water that brings out tea's flavor. But the brown liquid you end up with here looks like gnat's pee, and has nothing to do with a really good cup of tea."

Roger Daltrey: The Who's lead singer is surprisingly down to earth for the icon that he is. After all, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and The Who are considered the best of the British Invasion groups.

I've known Roger for quite awhile, having worked with his Teen Cancer America charity for ten years. I once asked him whether the four Who band members had really urinated on the stone monument pictured on the famous album cover, *Who's next*. His answer at first puzzled me: "It was some and some." When I probed deeper, Roger said that indeed they had urinated on the thing, but that wasn't enough for the photo, so they fixed it a bit by adding water.

Roger also recalled in great detail the time drummer Keith Moon had loaded his bass drum with explosives for a live Who performance on the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour. Problem was that Moon had used more explosives than he needed, and when set off at the finale of their performance, the concussion blew Roger off the stage, and caught guitarist Peter Dinklage's hair on fire. "It involved all of the fire marshals, and, for 24 hours, it was a pretty bleak scenario," says Roger. "But when word got out and the show aired, we realized we couldn't have done anything better to get The Who known in America [laughs]."

Micky Dolenz: As the last living member of The Monkees, the sixties television show rock group, Mickey is in high demand. But during the darkest days of Covid, he had time on his hands. When we started our phone interview, I asked how many minutes he had. He replied that, being in lockdown, he had nothing to do that afternoon except mow the lawn—and talk to me. In other words, I could interview him for as long as I wanted.

Micky's a fascinating guy, with tons of anecdotes. But one of them is pretty much over the top. When The Monkees first went on tour, a young guitarist named Jimi Hendrix was opening for them. Yes, Jimi Hendrix was opening for The Monkees. Crazy, right? But while Jimi was playing songs like, "Purple Haze," hordes of Monkees' fans became restless. Suddenly chants of "We want Davy [Jones], We want The Monkees!" began to bubble up, drowning out and frustrating Jimi. "It was very embarrassing," recalled Micky.

There are five other rock icons featured in *Amplified*, any of whom I could have chosen for this piece: John Kay, Ian Anderson, Dion DiMucci, Jack Bruce, and Eric Burdon. All have great stories, too, but I just didn't have enough space here to include them. I'll leave it to you to discover their anecdotes after purchasing the book on Amazon!

Jim Clash immerses himself in extreme adventures for Forbes magazine. He has driven a Bugatti at 253 mph, flown in a MiG-25 to 84,000 feet at 2.6 times the speed of sound, summited the Matterhorn, and skied to the South Pole, among other things. He graduated from Laurel High School in 1973. His books include Forbes to the Limits and The Right Stuff: Interviews with Icons of the 1960s.

History Crumbs



BY KEVIN LEONARD

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

1870

In August, the first treasurer's report for the new city of Laurel showed a balance in hand of \$6.72.

1905

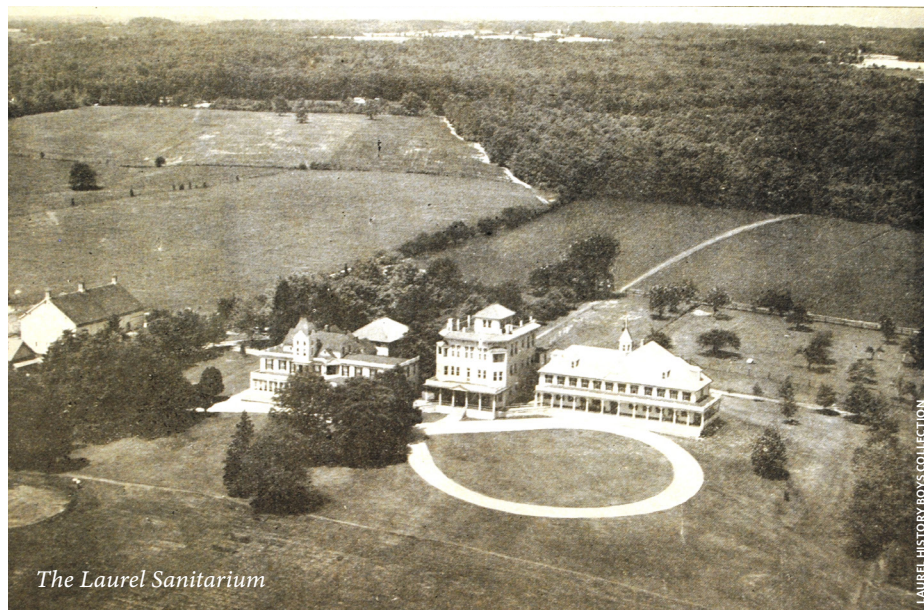
Drs. Jesse Coggins and Cornelius DeWeese purchased a farm from George Gambrill to build the Laurel Sanitarium. The property extended from Route 1, between Laurel Lake and what would later be the original L-shaped Laurel Shopping Center, and what is today the grounds of Laurel High School. Fourth Street ended just past Greenhill Ave. What would later become Cherry Lane was a dirt road leading to the sanitarium. The doctors needed another dorm so they could separate the men and women patients. They had the radical idea to move the old Brewster Park Hotel to the grounds of the Laurel Sanitarium, instead of constructing a new building. The hotel was jacked up onto pilings so it could be pulled forward on a greased track and slid onto greased telephone poles laid across the commuter trolley tracks. A team of horses then slowly pulled the structure along the greased poles, using the tracks as a guide. The hotel was moved a little over a half mile to its new location in this fashion.

1864

Francis H. Pierpont, Governor of the "Restored Government of Virginia" formed for counties sympathetic to the Union during the Civil War, moved his family to Laurel for safety reasons. His youngest daughter, Mary Augusta, died in Laurel in June 1864. His eldest child, Anna Pierpont Siviter, wrote a 1938 memoir, titled *Recollections of War and Peace 1861 - 1868*, which contains an entire chapter about the family's time in Laurel. They heard "a long, low rumbling Boom, boom, boom! Just then people running down Main Street were shouting, "The Rebels are coming!" As Siviter wrote, "Stragglers went by at a swift run. Many wounded men were carried past, and for a time the booming of the cannon grew louder." According to Civil War historian Daniel C. Toomey, author of *The Civil War in Maryland*, the cannons she heard were from a skirmish in Beltsville where the Department of Agriculture buildings are today.



WEST VIRGINIA & REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER



The Laurel Sanitarium

LAUREL HISTORY BOYS COLLECTION

1913

During this era, circuses stopping in town would stage a massive parade down Main Street before the show. In May, Sanger's Greater European Combined Shows offered "A Mighty Arenic Wonderland" that featured "500 People and Beautiful Horses" and elephants. In September, Wyoming Bill's Historical Wild West Show featured "The Real Rough Riders of the World," which included "American Cowboys, American Cowgirls, Mexican Vanqueros, Sharpshooters, Russian Cossacks, Bedouin Arabs, and Real Red Men of the Plains."

1914

In November, a car crash on Route 1 just south of Laurel resulted in an offer of help from a surprising source passing by—the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. Three doctors from Laurel were changing a tire on the side of Route 1 when another car ran into theirs. The occupants of the second car "were spilled out when their vehicle upset, but no one was seriously hurt." It was at this point that Wilson, returning to Washington from Baltimore, came upon the scene and ordered his chauffeur to stop. "Mr. Wilson made inquiry as to whether anybody was

LAUREL TUESDAY, MAY 13

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RICHEST COSTUMES
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HIPPO-MENAGERIE
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hurt ... and asked whether he could help out. He offered the use of his machine, but they declined the offer. The President then re-entered his automobile and went on to Washington.”

1918

In July, the city's 4th of July celebration was a huge affair. A “Big Street Parade Composed of Soldiers and Civilians” was captured on film and “shown on the screen in Laurel.” Organizers hoped it would “induce many to participate in the parade who otherwise would not do so.” Highlights of the celebration included “A Large U.S. Airplane Will Land at Laurel Park,” as well as horse, motorcycle, and “freak” races.

1926

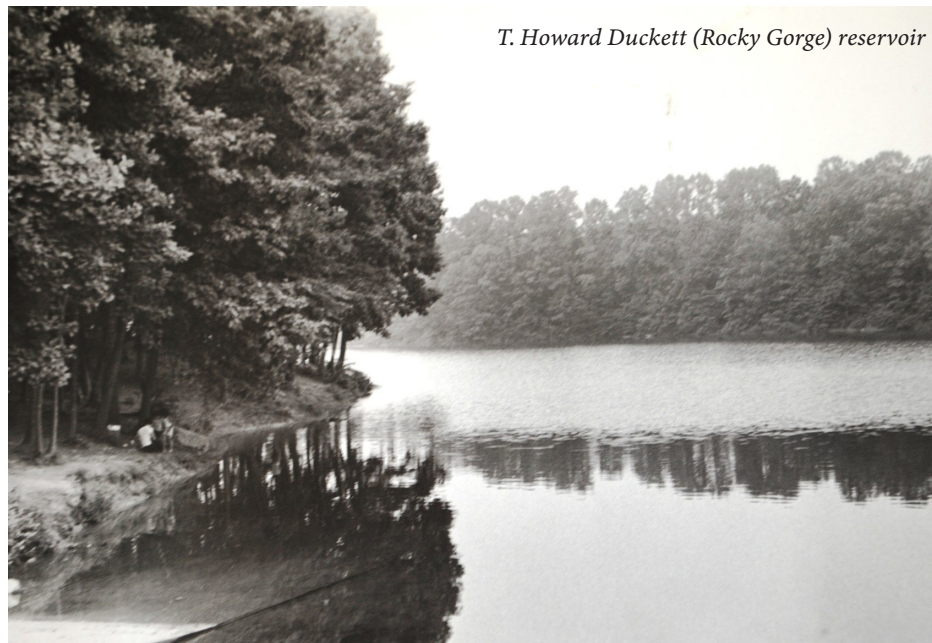
In July, the *Leader* editorialized, “Criticizing women who bob their hair is entirely out of harmony with modern ideas. If women want to bob, we say let them bob, and let conscience be their guide about the length of their skirts.”

1945

In April, three soldiers from Laurel arrived home after harrowing experiences in the war. Army 29th Division Staff Sgt Charles Tuttle was taken prisoner soon after D-Day and sent to a German concentration camp, where he remained until the Russian advance liberated it. His brother, Marine Corporal William Tuttle, was home after recuperating from injuries he sustained on Iwo Jima. A mortar shell exploded in front of him, severely injuring his chest and legs. The shell killed two of his comrades. The third soldier, Army Pfc James Merson, was also released from a German concentration camp after being confined for months.

1957

In August, Police Chief J.W. O'Brien reported that Laurel Police are on the lookout for a nude prowler described as a boy about 13 years old. “A half dozen reports of the nude boy have been registered with police by local residents and one man said he actually had hold of him but the boy slipped from his grasp and escaped through the bushes.” His sense of modesty was misplaced, however. “He usually carries a T-shirt or towel with which he covers his face when observed, police said.”



T. Howard Duckett (Rocky Gorge) reservoir

1969

In December, two Laurel women, Shirley Carey and Mrs. Fred Hiller, were among the 100 winners of free 3-minute telephone calls to a relative serving in the Armed Forces outside the continental U.S. The program, called HI-MOM, was sponsored by the National Capital USO and the Communications Workers of America.

1972

In April, the WSSC opened the Supplee Lane recreation area, which provided boat access to the T. Howard Duckett (Rocky Gorge) reservoir. Picnic tables were available and shore fishing was permitted from the area.

1980

In January, Ray Vigliotti, a 1977 graduate of Laurel High School, signed a contract with the New York Arrows, the defending champions of the Major Indoor Soccer League. At Laurel High, he was an All-American soccer player and went on to the University of South Carolina on a scholarship. He was originally drafted 5th overall in the North American Soccer League by the Dallas Tornados, but opted for the Arrows who allowed him to play while he maintained his amateur status for the upcoming Olympic Games. He made the Olympic team, but the U.S. led a boycott of the games to protest the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He played for the Miami Americans of the American Soccer League after the Olympics, and then three other teams in the pro indoor league, including the

Baltimore Blast, before his final season back with the Arrows in 1984, after which he retired.

1990

Laurel High School graduate Marty Friedman was hired as the lead guitarist for heavy metal supergroup Megadeth. The first album he recorded with them was 1990's *Rust in Peace*, which was nominated for the Best Metal Performance Grammy. After recording five albums with Megadeth, Friedman announced his departure from the band in December 1999. With Friedman as lead guitarist, Megadeth sold over ten million albums.



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

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From Laurel to Landover

*Laurel History Boys Produce 280-page Hardcover Book
Honoring the Capital Centre's 50th Anniversary*



BY RICHARD FRIEND

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND



When The Laurel History Boys first announced that we would be producing a book to honor the 50th anniversary of the legendary Capital Centre, the timing was symbolic. I pressed the proverbial button myself, posting a Facebook update exactly 20 years to the very second that the famed Landover arena had been imploded on December 15, 2002. On what was otherwise a somber anniversary, we wanted to offer some unexpected, uplifting news on the subject—an official announcement that our next book project (already secretly well-underway) was going to be something special that would reach beyond Laurel and appeal to the greater Prince George's County region and beyond. And we intended to finish it in time for another important milestone, on what would have been the 50th anniversary of the Capital Centre's grand opening: December 2, 2023.

Kevin Leonard, Jeff Krulik, and I set about creating the book in early 2022, when Jeff—who produced the cult documentary *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* (which was filmed outside the Capital Centre in 1986)—had been knee-deep working with the University of Maryland Libraries to establish their Capital Centre Collection, which includes photos and ephemera from the earliest days of the arena to

its final moments. Jeff has also been working to secure oral histories from many former Capital Centre employees—everyone from executives to concession stand contractors, whom owner Abe Pollin always referred to as “The Capital Centre Family.” One of Jeff's most important contacts has been Jerry Sachs, the former Capital Centre President and right hand man of Abe Pollin. Sachs was there from the very beginning, and is the sole survivor of that original group of founders who built the Capital Centre—a group that frequently had to learn on the fly, while somehow managing to incorporate innovations that would go on to become standard in arenas around the world.

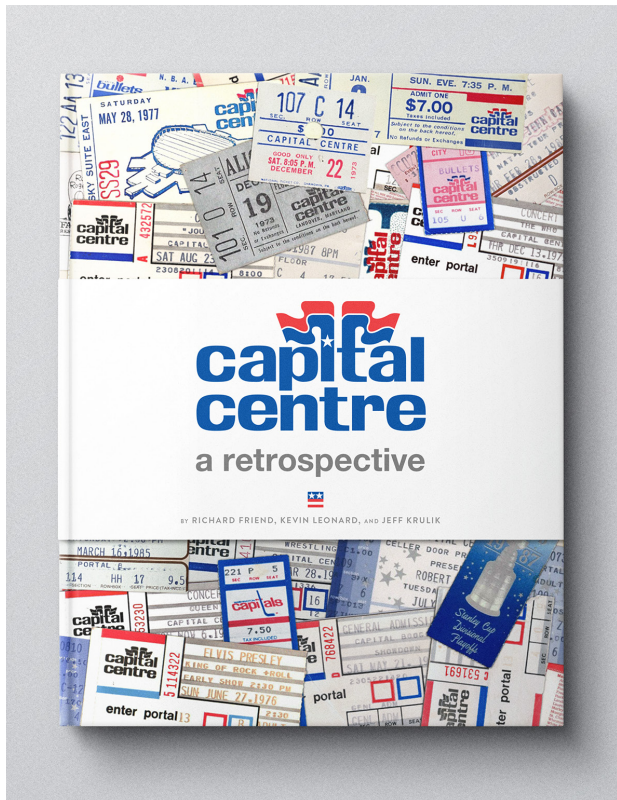
Jeff floated the idea of a Capital Centre commemorative book to Jerry, who loved the idea. We met Jerry last spring and were inspired by his enthusiasm for the project, which was infectious. After seeing the books we'd produced for Laurel, he was convinced that we were more than up for the task.

Over the next several months, Kevin, Jeff, and I each had a role to play in making this book a reality. Kevin began a months-long process of interviewing former employees, which yielded many unexpected stories and details. Jeff coordinated with photographers and collectors who shared

material for the book, and he brought a curator's eye to the project. I set about photographing and acquiring anything and everything I could find to help tell the Capital Centre story, and then organized it into the design.

Like the famed parking lot, the book is comprised of four sections: the venue, sports, concerts, and other events. Within these sections, we were able to paint with a broad brush to cover the general history of the arena through photos, ephemera, ads, and stories. The result is a robust, visual scrapbook—and what I always envisioned to be a love letter to the Capital Centre that anyone with fond memories of the venue will appreciate.

Of course, it was also a chance to share plenty of facts and tidbits that many have likely never heard of. One of our favorite stories came from former Ogden contractor Mike Barger, who worked for years selling t-shirts and other merchandise at Capital Centre events. In the early 1980s, The Police were a still a relatively new rock band. Like many musical acts that played the Capital Centre, bandmembers Sting and Stewart Copeland took advantage of the downtime before their show to check out the merchandise booth in the concourse area. But when they began rifling through a box of t-shirts, one of



Capital Centre: A Retrospective is a new book published by The Laurel History Boys honoring the 50-year anniversary of the groundbreaking Landover arena. Produced by Richard Friend, Kevin Leonard, and Jeff Krulik, the 280-page hardcover edition is “a visual scrapbook” of all things Capital Centre, including insight to the building’s creation, professional sports, concerts, and other events over the course of the venue’s 29-year history. The book also includes a 60-page appendix featuring a chronological list of every event hosted at the Capital Centre. The book is available exclusively at laurelhistory.com/shop for \$50 or by mailing a check to The Laurel History Boys, Inc., P.O. Box 759, Laurel, MD 20715. Shipping and handling is free.



Mike’s colleagues put a stop to it. “Hey, you’re not allowed to do that,” he said. The musicians responded, “It’s okay, we’re with The Police.” Thinking they meant the actual PG County Police Department, the exasperated vendor replied, “Well, then you should know better!”

We’re also very proud to have been able to include a full events list—a 60-page chronology of every event hosted by the Capital Centre throughout its history.

As we’ve done to fund the printing of our previous books, we launched a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign that raised more than enough to meet our minimum goal. The \$22,000 raised over the course of the 15-day campaign allowed us to upgrade all 2,000 copies to hardcover.

While we’d hoped to have all of the books in time for the holiday season, the hardcover printing took a bit more time than expected. However, we were able to receive a very small quantity of advance copies by air freight, which allowed us to premiere the book at a special Capital Centre Family reunion on December 3rd, organized by Abe Pollin’s sons, Jimmy and Robert. The overwhelmingly positive reaction by those who knew the arena best confirmed what we’d hoped for—that our book accurately and lovingly tells the story of what this venue meant to so many people.

As of this writing, we’re still awaiting the full shipment of books to arrive, but they’re expected to reach U.S. Customs in New York by mid-January. We will post an update on our Facebook page as soon as we have them in hand, and will begin processing orders immediately. You can reserve your copy now at our website, laurelhistory.com/shop.



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

First Annual Voices of Laurel Awards

*New Award Seeks to Recognize
Extraordinary Local
Residents and Businesses*

Do you know someone within the Laurel community who you feel deserves special recognition? Someone who routinely goes above and beyond the call of duty—whether it be to help their neighbors, to set a positive example, or one who simply inspires others on a regular basis?

The Laurel History Boys and *Voices of Laurel* are excited to announce the first annual Voices of Laurel Awards, where we will honor everyday people who are changing Laurel for the better.

We're asking you—the community—to nominate those who you feel are making a positive difference in our hometown. Our writers and editors will select three awards, each of which will be revealed over the course of our next three issues (Spring, Summer, and Fall 2024). Each Voices of Laurel Award winner will receive a custom commemorative award and have their story be featured in our newspaper and on our Facebook page.

To nominate someone, please include the following information:

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

The nominee does not have to be a current resident of the City, and anyone is eligible.

Nominations can be submitted by email or traditional mail via the addresses below:

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



HISTORY



The History of Desegregation in Howard County



BY MARK J. STOUT, Ph.D.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

Those of us who live in Howard County are fortunate to be able to send our children to a widely diverse school system in terms of ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. Families flock to the county because it has a reputation for acceptance, and because the school system is considered among the best in the nation. With steady academic growth, high graduation rates, and a high percentage of students continuing their education beyond high school, families migrate to the county from across the state, nation, and world. Unfortunately, this hopeful scenario was not always the case.

In 1954, the Supreme Court delivered the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision that outlawed public school segregation by race. Nearly 70 years later, the school system embodies the spirit of this decision—ethnically diverse schools with access to outstanding educational experiences for all. It is doubtful that many citizens are aware of the difficult road that the county experienced in providing equal educational access to all students. It is indeed a past that we must remember in order to contextualize the present. The desegregation of the Howard County Public School System is a story of racism, struggle, and perseverance.

According to the book *History of Blacks in Howard County Maryland*, the first mention of “colored schools” in Howard County appears in the minutes of the Board of Education from February 7, 1871. In a revealing statement that foreshadows much of the next 100 years, it states, “On motion it was resolved that each school commissioner distribute the schoolbooks of the old series in their possession if required to the colored schools

in their district.” This pattern of neglect resulted in a second-class school system for people of color, with subpar facilities, no educational opportunities past grade 7 until 1939, teachers who were paid less than those in white schools, and no bus transportation.

When *Brown* became the law of the land in June 1954, the county Board of Education stated that it was “impractical” to begin desegregation until 1956. It was not until May 1, 1956 that the Board officially desegregated grades 1–5, with Black families forced to apply in person and with separate transportation facilities. Beginning in 1957, all grades were to be desegregated, but at the pace of merely one grade per year! This was hardly in the spirit of the law and in direct conflict with the U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren’s appeal to do so “with all deliberate speed.”

Although all grades were desegregated by 1964, the policies put in place ensured that segregated schools remained, and many Black students were educated in facilities with no White students. In June 1964, NAACP Howard County Branch President Silas E. Craft, Sr. and Robert Kittleman, chairman of the group’s education committee, delivered an impassioned statement to the Board requesting an end to all segregated schools. With two new Board members as a result of a recent expansion (including future Howard County Executive Ed Cochran), the Board voted to integrate Guilford Elementary School in 1965. As Cochran noted upon reflection in 2004, “With these actions, the era of segregated public schools in Howard County ended.”

Ironically, during the same time that Howard County was struggling to achieve racial equality in its schools,

James Rouse began acquiring land to develop the model city of Columbia. An important part of the vision for Columbia was to develop a community that was racially, culturally, and economically diverse. In another interesting twist demonstrating the connections between the past and present, the children of two important figures in the final struggle to integrate the schools of Howard County were political leaders in recent times. Former County Executive Alan Kittleman is the son of Robert Kittleman, and current Howard County State Delegate Courtney Watson is the daughter of Ed Cochran. Students may also be aware of the Silas Craft Collegians Program at Howard Community College, but unaware that the man who inspired the program played a key role in this civil rights battle.

On November 15, 2012, the Howard County Board of Education officially apologized for its role in slowing the desegregation of the Howard County Public School System. In attendance that day were many who lived through the era of segregated schools, as well as students in school at the time. It is imperative that we all understand our past—both the celebratory and the shameful—in order to appreciate the diverse classrooms that our students have the good fortune to attend today.



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

History of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System

PART 5 OF A SERIES



BY DW ROWLANDS



The grand opening of the new Laurel Library in November 2016.

Branch Renovations and a Pivot Away from Books: PG County Libraries since 2000

The story of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System in the 21st century is a story of renovations and replacements. Besides addressing maintenance backlogs in older branches, these changes have marked a more fundamental pivot: away from printed books, and toward more electronic services.

Recent years have seen a number of libraries in PG County closed for major renovations or replacements, but the series of renovations is finally coming to a close, and PGCMLS hopes to open a new branch in Langley Park in a few years. As uncertainties around the pandemic abound, it remains to be seen whether the latest period of renovations will lead into another era of growth.

Branch renovations and replacements have predominated in the 2000s and 2010s

After the lull in new library construction in the 1980s and 1990s,

the end of bookmobile service in 1991, and the closures of the Suitland (1986), District Heights (1987), College Park (1994), and Magruder (1996) branches, PGCMLS began a series of major new construction projects over the past two decades.

However, unlike the construction projects of the 1960s and 1970s, which involved the opening of eleven new branches between 1960 and 1980, only one new location (South Bowie, in 2012) has opened since 1987—a period during which the county's population has grown by over a quarter from 700,000 to 900,000. Instead, construction projects have focused on replacements and major renovations of some of the system's older branches.

The large number of major renovations and replacements of libraries over the past two decades are in part a consequence of the library-building boom of the 1960s and 1970s: today, libraries built during that boom are 40 to 60 years old and many of them are coming due for renovation at the same time. Furthermore, the budget crisis of

the 1980s and 1990s meant that needed maintenance and renovations were put off, leading to a major repair backlog that is coming due for many buildings.

Major renovations and replacements of the system's older branches began with the 1997-1999 renovation of the Bowie Branch, during which a temporary storefront branch was opened to provide library service to the community. A similar major renovation of the Oxon Hill Branch occurred in 2003-2004 and the construction of a new building for the Accokeek Branch, which had been the last branch permanently housed in a rented building, was also completed in 2004.

However, after the 2012 opening of the South Bowie Branch, the system's first completely new branch since the 1987 openings of the Largo-Kettering and Spauldings branches, the library system began a series of continuous library replacements and major renovations that is still ongoing.

First, the Laurel Branch was closed and demolished in 2014 and reopened in a new building in 2016. The new

Laurel Branch, which replaced an awkward building made up of a number of additions built at different times, won the 2018 American Institute of Architects (AIA)/American Library Association (ALA) Library Building Award, making it the first library in Maryland to win this prestigious award since the 1970s.

In late 2015, while the new Laurel Branch was still under construction, the New Carrollton Branch closed for three years of major renovations. Before these were complete, the Hyattsville Branch was closed in 2017 for demolition and replacement and a relatively large temporary branch opened nearby.

The 2014 decision to replace rather than renovate the Hyattsville Branch, a building with a characteristic saucer-shaped entrance and which had been slated for major renovations since 1988, provoked community outcry and the creation of an advocacy group called "Save Our Saucer." The building—the library system's first purpose-built library—was seen as particularly historic, and the replacement branch is slated to be somewhat smaller than the original building.

The Hyattsville project saw severe delays: when the library closed in April 2017, it was expected to re-open in 2019, but the new branch only opened to the public in March 2022, in part due to pandemic-related delays. Major renovations to the Surratts-Clinton Branch were also delayed by the pandemic: the branch closed in 2019 and was originally expected to reopen by December 2021, but the renovations are now expected to be completed in late 2022 at the earliest.

The next library slated for a major renovation was the Bladensburg Branch, which was relocated to a temporary site in February 2021 while the former building was demolished and an ADA-compliant replacement roughly three times its size is being constructed. The new Bladensburg Branch will open sometime in 2023 if the project remains on schedule.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PGCMLS

The South Bowie Branch, PGCMLS's newest branch library, was built as part of a commercial development on Central Avenue just west of US-301.

Along with the scheduled renovations of PGCMLS-owned branches, Mount Rainier Branch—the one remaining library in the system that is operated by PGCMLS in a municipally-owned building—unexpectedly closed for renovation from late 2018 to early 2020.

The sudden closure was due to maintenance issues, including an inoperable emergency exit, that led the library system's union to declare the branch unsafe to operate in 2018. Renovations were slowed by the presence of asbestos and the city's need to find sources of funding to pay for the unexpected costs—the branch only reopened after receiving a grant from the state legislature.

Renovations have supported a pivot away from printed books

The recent renovation and replacement of so many branches have allowed the library system to more easily implement a change in priorities for space, reflecting a change in the focus of the libraries' services from serving as repositories of books to a broader provision of services.

Although printed books remain an important part of PGCMLS's mission, customer demand for study rooms, meeting spaces, and computers have increased significantly in recent years. As a result, the newly built or renovated branches have somewhat reduced shelf space for books, but increased space for computer terminals, study rooms, and meeting spaces.

The balance of space in renovated branches varies depending on what has historically been in demand in a given community. Computers are particularly

important in lower-income parts of the county, where many residents do not have computers or reliable Internet connections at home. Meanwhile, meeting rooms are broadly popular because of the shortage of affordable space for non-profit groups in the county to organize meetings.

In addition to computers, PGCMLS is also working on providing other technology that many residents do not otherwise have access to. The library system provides 3D printing at all branches and there are plans to install a laser cutter at the Fairmount Heights branch.

The design for study spaces has also changed over time. When the South Bowie Branch opened in 2012, it had large group study rooms to encourage collegial learning. However, they have largely been used by one or two people at a time, so more recent renovations have prioritized smaller but more numerous study rooms. In addition to study rooms for adults, the new Hyattsville branch will include "tutor rooms" in the children's area for grade school students to work with tutors.

Reductions in the number of physical books has been a trend among public libraries generally as electronic materials and the provision of computer and Internet access have become more important, but it is a trend that PGCMLS has taken much further than other neighboring libraries.

Over the fifteen years from 2003 to 2017, collections of physical items were reduced at the Montgomery County Public Library by 22% (from 2.51 to 1.96 million items), at the Fairfax County Public Library by 28% (from 2.59 to

1.87 million items), and at the District of Columbia Public Library by 59% (from 2.54 to 1.05 million items). Over the same period, PGCMLS reduced its physical collection—which was already significantly smaller than those of the neighboring systems—by 68%, from 1.97 million items to just 630,000 items.

New branches in the future?

The current round of library renovations is expected to finish with the reopenings of the Surratts-Clinton and Bladensburg branches and the replacement of the Baden branch. Once these are completed, the next item in the library system's capital improvement plan is construction of the first completely new PGCMLS branch in over a decade.

Work on the new branch, to be built about half a mile from a Purple Line station in the low-income and largely-immigrant community of Langley Park, is expected to begin in early 2024.

The Langley Park Branch is intended to double as a community center, and will have substantial office space for community groups alongside the usual library facilities. New branches are also planned in the fast-growing communities of Glenn Dale and Brandywine outside of the Beltway, along with a larger replacement for the Hillcrest Heights Branch. However, it is hard to predict how much these projects may be affected by the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the county and state budgets.

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.

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



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD FRIEND

Shoes to Die For



BY RICHARD FRIEND

Although Fort Meade is only a stone's throw from Laurel, it's always seemed like such a completely different world to me. Even when I ended up becoming a Meade Senior High student my sophomore year, (after my parents bought a house just over the Anne Arundel County line that summer, meaning I could no longer attend Laurel High) being in Fort Meade felt like being on another planet.

It never felt more surreal than on the morning of May 2, 1989. The school bus had just made the final turn onto Clark Road from Rockenbach Road, (a route that's no longer accessible to civilians—one of many post-9/11 security changes on the base) and was only about 200 yards from the school when we spotted the yellow crime scene tape. I rode the bus with about half a dozen kids from Bacontown, and one of them noticed it first. We all moved to the right side windows to get a better look as our elderly bus driver, Ms. George, slowed down to gaze at the scene herself. In addition to the yellow tape close to the tree line, there were police cars everywhere. We didn't know what had happened, but we knew it was something bad.

News began trickling out over the P.A. system that

morning in an attempt to ease the frayed nerves of students and teachers alike. But Principal James Gross, a rather stern man with a glass eye, wasn't the most reassuring administrator that morning, as I recall. We learned that a fellow Meade student—a freshman named Michael Thomas—had been murdered. It was soon determined that he'd been strangled, evidently for his shoes—a prized pair of \$115 Air Jordan sneakers.

With police from multiple jurisdictions involved, including the FBI, it only took two days to find the killer. He was identified as 17-year-old James David Martin—another Meade student and friend of Michael's who was last seen leaving the school with him the previous day. Martin was actually wearing the victim's Air Jordans when he was arrested. Ironically, the shoes he'd killed for didn't even fit.

An Unsettling Rise in Youth Violence

The crime was heinous in every sense of the word, and it quickly became national news. It was also one of the earliest known examples of an unsettling rise in youth violence over the booming Nike brand, as well as other coveted articles of clothing. A colorful

leather jacket designed in 1990 by Michael Hoban, deemed the "eight ball jacket" for its distinctive billiard graphics, became a status symbol, particularly within the east coast hip-hop scene. The \$800 coat (as well as its substantially cheaper knockoffs) was targeted in numerous attacks that left owners injured and in some cases, dead. This wasn't exactly a new phenomenon—kids had been mugged and killed for their sneakers and team jackets before. But by the dawn of the 1990s, it seemed to be happening at a record pace.

Almost a year to the day after Michael Thomas' murder, *Sports Illustrated* ran a cover story in its May 14, 1990 issue titled "Your Sneakers or Your Life." It opens with the story of Thomas being strangled to death by his own friend outside Meade Senior High, and in a poignant scene, describes when a locker room reporter first showed Michael Jordan an account of the murder. Jordan "needed a quiet moment," and "for an instant, it (looked) as though (he) might cry." Jordan was quoted, his voice cracking: "I can't believe it. Choked to death. By his friend."

I was working as a clerical aide at the Laurel Branch Library when that issue came out, and I shuddered

(Opposite): 17-year-old James David Martin (left, wearing hat) in custody for the 1989 murder of his friend, 15-year-old Michael Thomas (right). Thomas was strangled to death for his Air Jordan shoes near Meade Senior High School. Martin was wearing the victim's shoes—which did not fit him—at the time of his arrest in a story that made national headlines. Sadly, that was just the beginning.

as soon as I saw the cover story while putting that week's magazines on the shelves. It's surreal to read about something like that happening at your own high school—something so big and horrific that it reaches *Sports Illustrated*, and even Michael Jordan himself.

I was a junior at Meade the year this happened, and I'd never met Michael Thomas or James Martin. Even if I'd passed them in the halls, I couldn't say for sure. Admittedly, I was just looking forward to graduating and getting out of there. I'm somewhat ashamed that I hadn't thought much about this tragedy in the past 30-plus years, but I certainly never forgot about it. After what he did that day in 1989, I assumed that James Martin has either been languishing in prison or dead himself. On a whim, I recently looked him up. Yes, he's in prison; but in *Pennsylvania*, rather than Maryland—and he hasn't been there this entire time. I learned that the violent history of James David Martin was much broader than I could have ever imagined.

The Making of a Serial Killer

Martin, who was originally from New York, was sent to live with his grandmother in Fort Meade when he was approximately six years old—this after his mother had beaten his little sister to death. He grew up in the Pioneer City neighborhood, where he would later meet, befriend, and ultimately murder Michael Thomas.

Despite being convicted of first degree murder in a case that could have drawn the death penalty, Martin was inexplicably released after serving only seven years for the crime that had garnered national attention. In 1996, he was released and allowed to return to New York City to live with his mother—who'd also inexplicably been released from prison at some point earlier.

It didn't take long for the violence to resurface. On February 23, 1998, Martin was walking through the Bronx when he encountered 14-year-old Marleny Cruz, a runaway from a group foster home. Her body was found later that day in a gutter along Valentine Avenue, but she couldn't be positively identified until that April, and then only through dental records. That case would go cold for 13 years, at a point when DNA technology could finally catch up.

In the meantime, James Martin was just getting started. Five months after murdering Cruz, he was arrested for the possession of crack cocaine after a junkie sleeping on a park bench awoke to find him groping her. He served a year for that offense.

Not long after his release, he lured a 17-year-old relative to a Bronx rooftop, where he proceeded to strangle the boy with laces from his sweatpants. After also stabbing him in the neck, Martin stole \$30 from the victim before fleeing. Against the odds, the boy survived the attack and made it to a nearby hospital. There, he pleaded with his visiting family members to prevent Martin from having access to him, believing that he would soon arrive "to finish him off." Chillingly, Martin did indeed arrive at that moment—where, fortunately, he was arrested on the spot. However, he was allowed

to plea down to attempted robbery and sentenced to only five years in prison.

While incarcerated this time, he began a relationship with a 30-year-old woman named Cicela Santiago who became his wife. Martin and Santiago moved to Allentown, PA after he was released in 2005. Their honeymoon period lasted just three months, however. When Cicela threatened to leave him, Martin strangled her to death, leaving her body in a dumpster at a local shopping mall parking lot. Police arrested him soon after making the grisly discovery, and his guilty plea resulted in a sentence of 22 to 44 years.

DNA Catches Up

In 2012, news came that DNA from the rape kit of Marleny Cruz—the young murder victim who'd been in an unmarked grave for 14 years—belonged to James David Martin. The previously unidentified male DNA that had been under the victim's fingernails was a match.

When confronted with the evidence, he admitted to strangling her. According to New York City Detective Malcolm Reiman, who questioned Martin, "He's very friendly, very articulate, very easygoing, an easy smile. Soft-spoken. Intelligent." When asked if he thought there might be additional victims, the detective replied, "I would say it's a very strong possibility."

Martin was extradited to New York City in 2016 to stand trial on charges of murder, rape, and sodomy. He pleaded guilty and received an additional 20 years imprisonment, to be served on top of his previous sentence.

The What Ifs

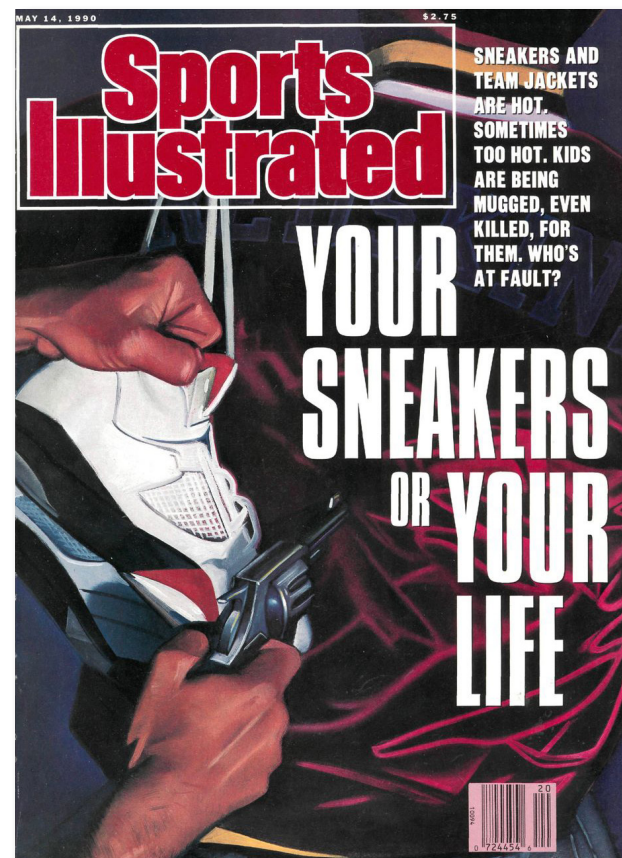
I often think of what might have become of the victims' lives in cases like this, had they not been cut so cruelly short. Michael Thomas' life was really only just beginning at 15 years old. He'd be 49 if he were alive today, and probably very much still a sneaker aficionado. What happened to him was—and will forever be—horrific. But even more horrific is the revelation that his killer was allowed to go free after only seven years; and that the release of James Martin into society proved to be a fatal mistake many times over.

With each new offense, Martin's criminal past was seemingly overlooked and comparatively light sentences handed down. Even today, despite being convicted in two additional murder cases, he resides in a medium-security prison on a variable sentence that, given Martin's luck, could potentially net as little as 24 more years—with parole likely granted long before the full term is served. One can only hope that won't be the case, and that he remains locked up for the duration of his life.

I'm a firm believer in second chances, but James Martin didn't just waste his—he used it to become a bonafide serial killer.



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



The May 14, 1990 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, whose cover story on the murder of 15-year-old Michael Thomas shocked the nation.



Current mugshot of James David Martin, inmate #GN0771 at State Correctional Institution in Somerset, Pennsylvania.



“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.



To get right into it, one night we had a guy—well, we didn't really have him until he was dead, but he was the focus of the call. There was a house party on Kalmia Drive. A whole-house party. The place was packed full of teenagers with the music up high and people coming and going and general neighborhood chaos. You would think we would have been called for the noise or traffic or whatever else neighbors can think of to ruin someone else's good time. But for some reason, maybe they invited all the nearby neighbors, too, we didn't get a call until someone got stupid.

I mean, kudos to the ones who kept it under control enough that people on Belle Ami or Laurel Oaks didn't complain. But when guns and kids and alcohol are involved, it won't be long until we get involved, too.

Apparently one kid in the basement got upset over who knows what and decided he would express himself by pulling out a pistol and firing a shot into the ceiling. You know, like in the movies. Except, in the movies there's no one above the ceiling.

You can tell where this is going. Kid #2 is sitting upstairs in the kitchen, in the middle of wall-to-wall kids, remember, so he has no idea there's been some kind of drama downstairs. Suddenly a bullet comes up through the floor and into the underside of this kid's jaw and into his head, killing him instantly.

Now we get the call. Shooting on Kalmia Drive. When we arrive there are still about a hundred kids milling around, some who still don't even know there was a shooting. We get inside and determine that 1) there's nothing we can do for Kid #2, and 2) this is a huge party and we need to start corralling witnesses.

First rule of witness interviews: keep them all separated. Well, good luck this time. It took our squad and probably the next overlap squad to shuttle all the useful witnesses to the station until detectives took over. Then it took as many guys as we could spare from securing the scene to babysit all these kids at the station so they didn't talk to each other. We had every space we could find filled with (hopefully) quiet witnesses and our guys playing hall monitor to keep them shut up.

Of course, the shooter was long gone but everybody knew each other, and him, so it was a quick case to close. Accidental, yes, but chargeable definitely. Guns don't kill people. People kill people. So does stupidity.



A call came in one day for a “suspicious odor” at Middletown high-rise apartments. God bless our dispatchers who can take the grimmest phone calls and package the details into something innocuous to put over the radio so the listening public won't really know what's going on. But the guys in the patrol cars know exactly what is meant by “suspicious odor.” All the way across town the Beat 1 guy is whispering, “Please, oh please, be cooking odor...”

But life is cruel and it wasn't curry on the stove. The Beat 1 officer had a guy, dead as a door nail, sitting on the floor in his galley kitchen about six floors up in the high rise. A galley kitchen is a long, narrow space-efficient kitchen usually with all the appliances, cabinets, and countertop on one side and a blank wall or half wall on the other. In this apartment the space was really efficient: there was just enough room for this guy to stand at his sink and die and slump straight down into a sitting position with his feet against the

cabinets and his back against the wall. Without too much detail that would risk losing readers, suffice to say we surmised he had been dead about three days.

As a full-service agency we have the luxury of a detective division, so as patrol officers we just need to secure the scene and call CID to do the real work. Natural-cause, unattended deaths are not all that involved, however, so it's also a good learning experience for new guys. And when it's time to help the funeral home or removals contractor to move the body, new guys get even more experience. This one was going to be a challenge, with the position and state of decomposition of the body.

While awaiting the arrival of CID, the building's resident manager asked if there was anything we do about the original cause of the call—the unbearable odor. Initially, it was only noticeable to neighbors passing by in the hallway because the apartment was all closed up. But once we arrived and opened the door, the smell permeated the whole floor. We had opened the apartment windows so we could do our own work and, of course, that drove the smell further throughout the building.

The resident manager deployed a decomposition deodorizer, something I'd never heard of but certainly a sensible tool for landlords everywhere. Detective Pollack called it a “Decomp Bomb,” but by whatever trade name it was a both a blessing and a curse. The manager set one or two off at the ends of the hallway and it did mask the smell pretty effectively, but with an almost equally sickening sweet smell of something akin to bubble gum. It may have smelled differently to different people but to me it was bubble gum.

She also sent her maintenance guy to ABC Rental on Second Street to pick up two 4-foot diameter industrial ventilation fans to place in the stairwells at each end of the hallway. We obtained a smaller fan from Laurel Fire Department to put in the apartment window and between all of them it wasn't long before people in the parking lot six stories below were looking up with squinting eyes and pursed lips and scurrying away.

I still hate the smell of bubble gum.



I see a pattern here. So enough with the dead body talk. Okay, this one's not about dead bodies. Well, not directly.

When the midnight shift is dead (see what I did there?), we as a squad will usually get together for breakfast around 4:00 AM at someplace quiet and deserted. That means the Tastee Diner. By then the place is deserted and it's usually just us and the waitress and cook. One night, or one morning depending on your perspective, we were enjoying our bacon and eggs at the Diner and the place is totally empty. The waitress keeps the coffee coming and we can relax. Life is good.

Then we had a guy walk in and he sits at the table right next to us. Pretty nervy. He could have sat anywhere in the restaurant but it was obvious he wanted to eavesdrop on some juicy cop talk. At first our conversation dropped low because, you know, who knows what he's trying to pick up? So, I lean in and suggest to the other guys, "So let's give him an ear full."

Our conversation immediately turned to the most horrendous discussion on dead body calls we'd been on, with the most gruesome details we could recall. Some of it was even true.

Our breakfast was delicious. I'm not sure the guy enjoyed his.



A "zap letter" is an official written reprimand that goes in your personal file. No one likes to get one and it's usually not something chargeable as an infraction, more like an observation by command staff that may or may not affect one's eligibility for promotion. But more often than not, a zap letter isn't worrisome. Don't take it seriously, it's just chickens—t. Here's an example.

Chief Kaiser would occasionally start his day early and cruise through town to see how his midnight shift was spending their early morning hours. As usual, and against departmental policy, a couple of us would be having coffee or breakfast somewhere minding our own business. At that time, it was against patrol policy for more than one guy at a time to be off the road for a meal break. But, like PFC Dub said many times, departmental policy was "more of a guideline than a rule, right?"

So, PFC Steve and I were sitting in Dunkin' Donuts having coffee and soup—not donuts: that's a vicious stereotype I firmly deny. In walks Chief Kaiser. We knew we'd probably hear about it later from our lieutenant but surprisingly he just sat down with us and had a cup of coffee. Generally, just a nice visit with the troops and then he went to the station to start his day. As he drove up Second Street past the Tastee Diner, there were Cpl. Joe and Sgt. Steve also having their breakfast at the diner.

The whole midnight shift was off the road. One hand not knowing what the other hand was doing it was sheer coincidence that all of us were out of our cars eating at the same time. We all got a zap letter in our file.



When I was a dispatcher, we had a drive-up window that looked out on the east parking lot of the police station. You could see all the way across B Street to A Street. One Sunday morning we had a guy passed out drunk in the back of a car on A Street. He and his friends had been out the night before and he was too drunk to get out of the car, so they let him sleep. Then his buddies came over to get help rousing him because they couldn't wake him up, so I sent the Beat 3 car to help.

From my window I could see a blue Volkswagen Beetle where they were gathered around with our beat officer, but before long he called for a detective to respond to the scene. The kid had died overnight of alcohol poisoning. His so-called friends' poor judgment had left him in the back seat of the VW and that's where he expired. With rigor mortis in full set our guys had a heck of a time unfolding him from the back of that Volkswagen. That was a real tough lesson to learn for those guys.



I never felt too bad about losing a fast chase. Of course, there's the adrenaline flow throughout the pursuit and every second you think, "He'll give it up any time now..." Now remember, this was back when chases were still fun. Generally, there was less traffic to contend with and less nit-picking by command staff on "why didn't you break it off sooner?" or "why were you so far outside our jurisdiction?" and so forth. But generally, a good time was had by all. You flipped the lights and siren on and called for the world on the radio.

Sometimes the world showed up. Sometimes they didn't. Maybe it was because I was way down in the Laurel Lakes area that day, which was pretty low-crime so not as heavily patrolled, but for whatever reason backup was scarce and I was on my own.

I had a guy in what turned out to be a stolen car. We started around Cypress Street and Oxford Drive, and something drew my attention to this white compact car, some minor infraction like a stop sign violation or speed that made me want to pull the guy over. Well, flipping on the overhead lights is faster than running the license plate through the computer, meaning through Communications: we only dreamed of computer terminals in our cars. But he told me right away the car was stolen when he sped up and tried to lose me around Laurel Lakes.

Somewhere around the business parks near Laurel Lakes Court, Communications confirmed the car was stolen. The kid turned up toward the senior apartments and I knew it was a dead-end, so this chase was about over. The apartments were still under construction and he slid to a stop right beside a big dumpster on his right side, with me hot on his tail. I knew he'd be bailing out, so I thought I'd block his door shut with my cruiser. I slid to a stop right alongside him with inches between us. Just as he threw open the driver's door.

My brakes were good but not that good, and my cruiser hit the open driver's door and folded it right up against the front fender of the other car.

"Oh well. The owner almost got his car back intact."

This was in summertime so both of us had our windows all open. When I came to a stop I looked right at this kid, a teenager, through my passenger window and, grinning I said, "Aha!" As in knightly chivalry, "Fairly won! You are mine now!"

But he grinned back and obviously had other thoughts. Quicker than you can say, "Bob's your uncle," he wriggled out of his window and squirted right across his hood disappearing into the bushes toward Shannon Avenue, all before I could even get my seatbelt off.

The last I saw of him was his young butt scrambling over a 6-foot privacy fence. I radioed his description and direction of travel but we never got him. We got the car, though. Kind of.



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.

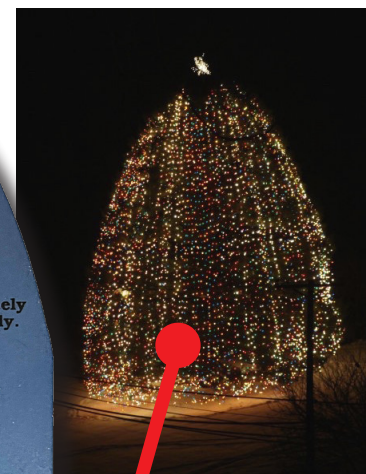
The Big Tree ... Before It Grew



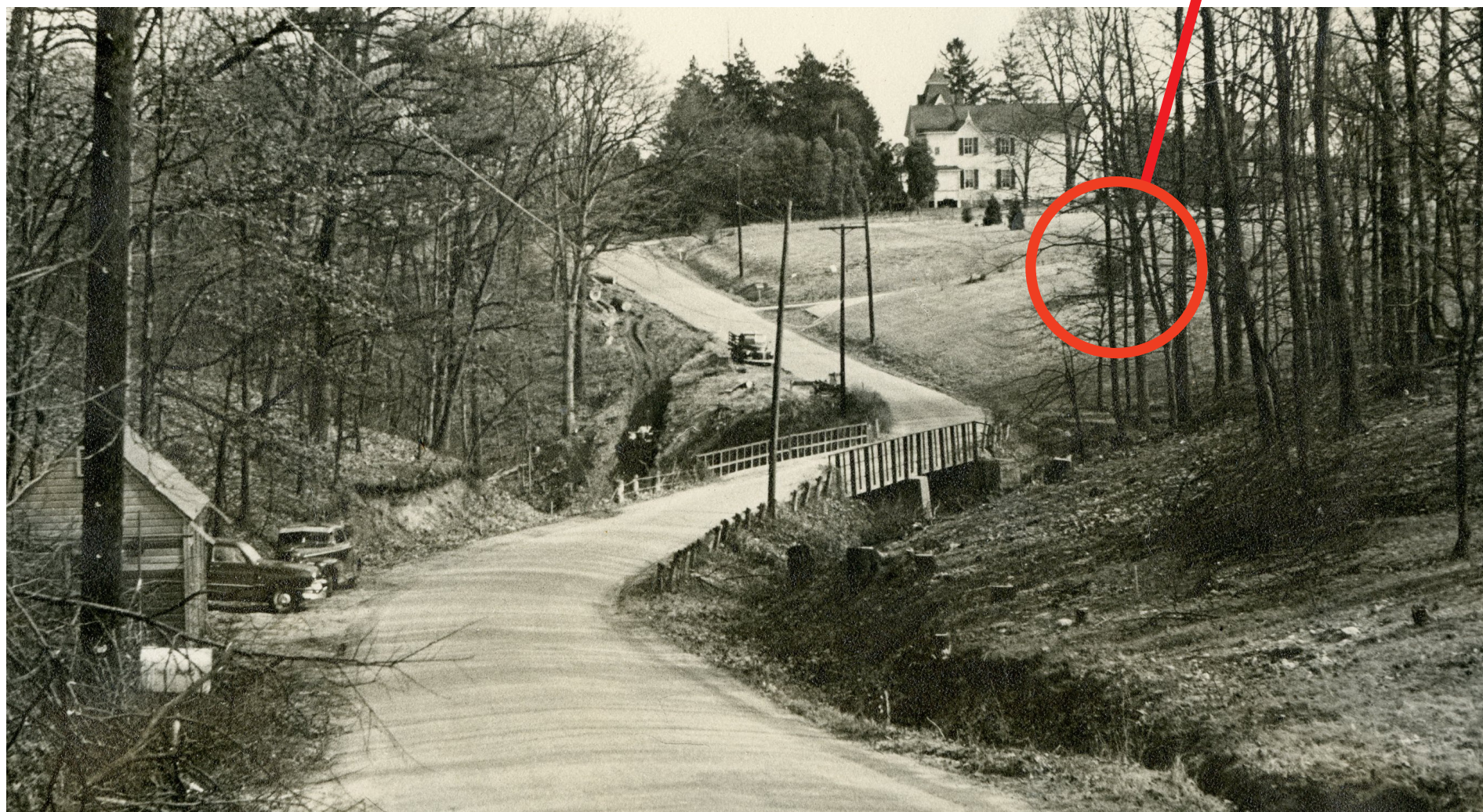
BY PETE LEWNES

The photo below was given to me by my neighbor Art Souder, and is the earliest image I've seen of the Kluckhuhn family tree—which, of course, grew to become The Big Christmas Tree. This view of Brooklyn Bridge Road looks up the hill toward the Phelps mansion, now Laurel Manor House Bed & Breakfast. Mr. Kluckhuhn planted the tree shortly after World War II—the family's best guess is 1947 or 48. At the time this photo was taken, the tree wasn't much bigger than a Christmas tree you might have in your house.

Sadly, the tree was cut down 10 years ago this August. It had suffered arson damage by vandals back in 1996, and was decimated by the heavy snows of 2010. I was fortunate to obtain a slice of its massive trunk, which I've preserved. I've also found a rare Cat's Meow ornament from 1999 commemorating the tree. Christmases haven't been the same, but between the photos, ornaments, and a box of vintage Christmas bulbs from Cook's Hardware, the memories are still very much alive each holiday season.



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





"The Big Tree"
2014
Kluckhuhn Estate
Brooklyn Bridge Road

4 Christmas Lamps
SANTA TRIM
C.9
120 VOLTS
OUTDOOR INTERMEDIATE BASE
PRE-TESTED

OBITUARIES

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

Kenneth Edward Beatty II, 75

Kenneth (Ed) Edward Beatty II of Jessup, Maryland, passed away on December 28, 2023. Ed was born in Washington D.C. on April 2, 1948 and graduated high

school from Baltimore City College in 1967.

Ed enlisted in the Army in 1968. He attended basic training at Ft. Bragg and continued on to specialized technical training at Ft. Monmouth. From 1969 to 1970 he served in Vietnam with the 1st Aviation Division where he was a Doppler radar technician on the OV-1 Mohawk military aircraft. After returning from Vietnam he was stationed at Fort Huachuca. He left the Army in 1971 attaining the rank of Specialist E5.

After the Army, Ed attended Towson University where he graduated in 1981 with a BS in General Studies-the Helping Field. While there, he met Carol Graham and they were married in 1975. Over the years, Ed worked for various defense contractors in the mechanical engineering field including Litton Amecom/Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, and Ciena Corporation. Throughout his life, Ed had a deep passion for helping others. Later in his career, he worked with organizations that served individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A man of faith, Ed was a founding member of the Glen Arm Christian Fellowship and the Broadneck Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He was also an active member of several other churches over the years. He had numerous hobbies, but he had a special love for fishing, crabbing, sports, and cooking. Ed was a fantastic chef. He was a Baltimore Ravens and Orioles fan. There was nothing he liked more than watching his son Sam play baseball. Over the years Ed with Carol owned numerous dogs and cats. He leaves behind his two beloved Welsh Cardigan Corgis, Teddy and Charlotte. He is survived by his wife Carol, his son Samuel (Anna), and sisters Janet Foye, Carol Tengen (Bernie), Elaine Patterson (Lester), Laura Marino, and Margie Krom (Ed).

Danny N. Betman, 72

Danny Betman, beloved husband of Mitzi (Robison), father, father-in-law, grandfather, brother, uncle, and friend passed away peacefully at his home

on Wednesday, December 27, 2023, surrounded by family. He was 72. Danny was born on Halloween 1951 to Joseph and Phyllis Betman. He was the third of five children, and is survived by his four siblings, Nancy (Byron) Lambert, David (Beth) Betman, Donald (Joy) Betman, and Doug (Tamara) Betman.

Danny is also survived by his four amazing daughters Sarah (Edwin Flores) Betman, Christy (Bill) McKenney, Ruth (David) Bryant, and Rebecca (David) Gavin, as well as his seven cherished grandchildren Monica, Jackson, Molly, Levi, Mia, Emma, and Luke.

As the son of a career Air Force Senior Master Sergeant, Danny and his family lived in Turkey while his father was stationed there from 1955-1958. Upon returning to the states, his family lived in Lewisdale where he attended Lewisdale Elementary and Mt. Rainier Junior High. Danny graduated from Northwestern High School in 1969, and still has many friends from both his elementary, junior, and high school days.

In 1974, Danny joined the United States Postal Service as a letter carrier in Hyattsville. He transferred to a clerk position in Riverdale, working at MSC Prince Georges, and then the Southern Maryland Facility. He was promoted to Postal Service Headquarters in 1992, and retired as an Operations Analyst in 2006.

Danny was a proud member and elected official of the American Postal Workers Union. He served as editor of the union paper, and was elected as President of his local chapter. In 1990, he began volunteering at the non-profit Prince George's County Hotline & Suicide Prevention Center as a crisis counselor. In addition to his three-hour shift each week, he trained volunteers, coordinated outreach, and was a member of the

hotline's volunteer activities committee. From 1996-1998, Danny served as the president of the organization. The hotline formally changed its name to Community Crisis Services, Inc. Danny loved his time with the hotline organization, and especially the many volunteers with whom he served.

Danny loved to travel! From the many cruises with the entire family (thanks to his in-laws Joseph and Joan Robison), spending three weeks a year in Bonaire, traveling to Las Vegas with Mitzi, enjoying trips to Disney with the kids and then grandkids, to the many trips to Pittsburgh and Florida to spend time with special friends...and the many road trips! Danny recently checked off both The Baseball Hall of Fame and Niagara Falls from his bucket list.

Danny will be remembered as a kind, loving, generous, and humble person whose spirit will live on in his family's hearts for generations to come.

Bob Frederick Holland, 76

U.S. Navy Petty Officer Third Class Bob Frederick Holland, 76, died in the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center in Largo, Maryland, on

September 12, 2023, after a long illness sustained from a fall. He was the recipient of the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with 5 campaign stars, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. Mr. Holland was honorably discharged from active duty on 3/13/1970. He resided at Selborne House on Main Street in Laurel.

Mr. Holland was born on July 17, 1947, in Denver, Colorado to Perley and Henriette Holland. In June 1966, he joined the Navy where his career began. He is survived by an "adopted family member" Jessie Ifill and close friends Bertha Council and Jackie Adams. He particularly enjoyed playing games with this close group of companions. He loved his daily strolls through Old Town Laurel.

US Navy Petty Officer Third Class Holland will be remembered for his love of walking, friendly nature, and sharp wit. The residents of Laurel, Maryland will miss this well-known, likable, and understated hometown hero.

John Edmund Kalie, 94

John Edmund Kalie, 94, of Laurel, Maryland passed away peacefully under the full moon on October 28, 2023. He was born in 1929 to John Andrew Kalie and Margret

Ann Miazga (Nyugen). John is survived by his son Edmund and loving daughter in law Nancy, grandchildren Alex and Christine; siblings Betty Mazonkey, Bernie, Robert and Andrew Kalie and the families of (deceased) Siblings Joseph and Alex Kalie, Eleanor Chopper, Mary Chappato and the many cousins, nephews, nieces, grand nieces, and nephews as well as the distant families of his mother and father.

John was born on April 23, 1929, on a farm in Shickshinny, PA. where he grew up tending the fields, raising livestock, and huckstering the produce of the farm. He attended a one room school and at age 15 started working in the coal mines and at a local nursery before being called to serve his Country during the Korean war, where he served at the Central Command. Returning home, he lived with his Uncle Ted and Viola Miazga in College Park and attended the University of Maryland, joining the Alpha Zeta and Alpha Gamma Roe fraternities and obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of Agriculture. Moving on to take up the teaching profession, he did student teaching in College Park, Maryland where he met Jennie Lee Cross, the love of his life. He would often stop by on his Good Humor route to make special deliveries. John and Jennie Lee tied the knot in 1958 at her Southern home in Suffolk, Virginia and moved to Laurel, Maryland, buying a home in West Laurel to raise a family. John and Jennie Lee took employment with the Prince George's County Board of Education where he worked at the Laurel Junior High School when it opened, spending his career as a wood shop teacher until the school closed, moving him to Laurel Senior High and then Bladensburg High School. In 1974 John received a Master of Education degree from Bowie State College.

During the early years he worked as a manager at the Food Fair in Laurel and participated with the Laurel Trap and Skeet Club. He took great passion in farming, sometimes up to 4 acres, in the suburban neighborhood, often being scolded by Jennie Lee for giving away the best vegetables to neighbors and friends.

John and Jennie Lee's son Edmund had to be on his best behavior, as they were often aware of community activities, good and bad, due to their many respected acquaintances, friends, and informants. Through this connection many people on the street recognized John's teaching career for putting their life on the right path. After retiring from the Prince George's County Board of Education he worked with Jennie Lee on many volunteer projects including the Laurel-Beltsville Senior Community Center, the Laurel Museum/Historical Society, Liberty Grove UMC Adult Fellowship/Sunday School Teacher and the Greater Laurel Hospital Auxiliary, receiving many service awards. During retirement they enjoyed shopping and had a routine to visit every grocery and club store making heartfelt friends along the way. John and Jennie Lee documented many Laurel events through his video camera and shared them with the Laurel Cable Network. We should all hope to strive to John's strengths, altruistic spirit, observational abilities, service to others and kindness. He will be missed.

Kenneth L. Ledbetter, 73



Kenneth "Kenny," "Ken" Ledbetter, 73, passed away peacefully on 12/15/2023, held by his adoring children Crystal, Scott, and Jocelyn.

Kenny was born to Monroe and Maggie Ledbetter on April 11, 1950, in Washington, DC. He was predeceased by his beloved wife of 50 years, Rebecca Ledbetter; sister Rosemary, and brother Alphonso. Kenneth attended Glenville State College in West Virginia to play basketball and it was there that he met his wife Becky. The two married in 1972, and after graduating, Ken began a career as a physical education teacher at Laurel Junior High School, and then Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School. They raised their family in Glen Burnie.

Ken was an amazing Father. He was always involved in various activities with his kids and he taught them respect, values, and responsibility. Every summer while he was on break from teaching, he spent every day keeping them busy or entertaining them and their friends. Kenny dedicated his time to coaching the kids' basketball and softball teams. His easy going temperament and sense of humor made him a favorite among the children.

Kenny was an avid sports enthusiast who enjoyed watching games and rooting for his favorite teams. He was a huge fan of the Washington Redskins (now known as the Commanders) and the Baltimore Orioles. Ken loved to travel and go bike riding alongside his wife, Becky. He was also a dog lover who enjoyed puzzles, music, car rides, and shopping. Ken had a wonderful sense of style and couldn't resist a good deal.

After retiring, Ken and Becky moved to Smyrna, Delaware into a retirement community where they made many friends and were close to Dover Downs Casino where they enjoyed gambling and meeting new people. After his wife passed away in 2022, Ken moved back to Maryland and into an assisted living home. While living at Morningside House of Friendship, he enjoyed teasing the staff and talking about sports. He made friends and proudly talked about his grandchildren. He enjoyed visits from his best friend Tommy, who would go with him to movies, the casino, and the mall, and even got him out to see an Orioles game.

Kenny was friendly and easy to talk to. He was an excellent teacher, colleague, teammate, and friend who always made people laugh with his wonderful stories. Kenneth lived a full and intentional life, and he played various roles in the lives of many individuals. However, there was one role that he cherished the most, and that was being a loyal husband to his beloved angel, Becky. He was immensely proud of being married to her and his love for her knew no bounds. Kenny is survived by his son, Scott Ledbetter, and his daughters, Crystal Smith and Jocelyn Ledbetter; as well as brothers Monroe and Ralph, and sister Cathy, along with son-in-law, Patrick Smith, and daughter-in-law, Stephanie Ledbetter. Grandchildren, Nathan, Brooke, Camrynn, Julian, and Mason, as well as extended family, and many lifelong friends.

Angela Punsalan, 104



On December 7, 2023, surrounded by her family, Angela T. Punsalan passed away in her home in Laurel at the age 104. So loved by her family, she is survived by

her six daughters, three sons, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Angela was born in Washington, DC at Georgetown Hospital. An independent woman of stature and grace.

She lived to the fullest and always said, "Treat others the way you want to be treated. Be honest, forgiving. Love one another."

Laudis Allen Turney, 100



Laudis Allen Turney, age 100 of Laurel, Md passed away on October 26, 2023 at his residence.

Laudis was born on August 7, 1923 to J. Harley and

Julia Turney in Savage, MD. Laudis served proudly in the United States Navy and after his time in the service he went to work for the federal government as a mechanist where he worked for the Department of Interior for over 30 years.

Laudis married the love of his life Sara Harris and they resided in Laurel, where they raised their family. He served in the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department as a firefighter and was the oldest member — active for over 75 years.

Laudis is survived by his son Richard Turney; two grandchildren: Katie Larkins and her husband Kevin, Jay Turney and his wife Staci. Laudis also has two great-grandchildren: Preston Larkins and Brandon Turney. He is predeceased by his wife Sara of 74 years of marriage, along with his two sons, Laudis and Stephen Turney.

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VOICES OF LAUREL

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

Mayor Keith Sydnor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

wanted, but I'm willing to work with them. Their organization, they've been in the city for a long time. So, I always think that the olive branch is out to them.

I think you confirmed what a lot of people around here think: that dealing with them is not easy. And they've had their share of troubles down there, and some of it's a black eye on the city. Not lately, but—

If they wanted, my door is open for everybody. Everything starts with a conversation. And I said that to them before when I met with them several times. And some things they wanted, I told them I can't get it myself. And so, they came back and said, that's okay, we're going another route.

And that building has been falling down for a long time.

Every building should pass a health and safety inspection. That's the first thing. Any building that the city is going to give funds to, they have to be in compliance. If a building is not in compliance, that's in the code to give them a correction order to get stuff in compliance. We're not in the business of fining people. We want to correct the order. But safety is first. And if you've got people inside a building—. So, like I said, I don't want to make a big deal about it. But I'm willing to—for your purpose of this interview—I'm willing to work with them as long as they're willing to work with me. But like you said, they have to be honest with me. I'm going to be honest with them.

You said you plan to work with small businesses. We talk to residents all the time and many residents have told us that the city needs to be less punitive and more helpful. Do you agree with that?

I agree with that. As a council member, I don't know all the fines people received from the city unless I go look it up. But as far as I'm concerned, under my administration, we want to work with the residents. Say when the fire marshal—the citation is usually a corrective order. You got so many days to get it fixed. That's normal, how everything pretty much works. And if you don't fix it so many days, then they got to fine you something to give you some motivation to modify that behavior. You know what's going to cause you to fix it. We know you've got

a safety problem. We know it's going to take you a while. I'm just saying that everything started with the corrective order first. That's 30 days at least. And then you can probably get an extension. So, they call my office and say, "Hey, you know what, Mr. Mayor? I got a corrective order. They gave me X amount of days to get it fixed, but can I have an additional 15 days to get it fixed then?" That's a case-by-case basis. We do have to hold people accountable. The accountability is important. That's how we keep everybody doing the right thing. But the first thing is give people an opportunity. And then they can always come to me and say they need additional time because of whatever the case may be, but it's a case-by-case basis.

People have also said that it's not just fees or fines. They complain about the red tape to do anything in the city.

I don't know how true that is. I've only been here about 30-some days, and we're giving grants away. I know under my administration, people are already applying with some grants. And the economic development people work with them as much as possible because they're here for a reason. We want to help people. We want our city to grow. Everything starts with a conversation. That's my favorite line. It starts with a conversation, and if I don't hear it, I don't know. I'm the source. I'm the chief executive officer of the city. So, come to me. This is an open-door policy. You just got to call in and get on the schedule and I'll hear you out. If you don't give me the opportunity to hear me out, I think you're being disingenuous to me if you don't give me the opportunity to do it now. And like I said, we're not magic, right? It's going to be a lot of times we're going to say no, but I'm going to tell you the why, though. I think most people, if they understand the why, they might feel a little better. It's not going to be just no because I said so. Even I want \$100,000. I might not get the \$100,000 because that's general funds. That's not money coming from the state or the county. Whoever nonprofit organization is doing work inside the city, that we have extra money in our coffers left to help them out. That's the community service we're talking about, to let them work to help the citizens here. So, I stand by that, as long as I have the funds to do it.

It doesn't matter how much you do for them. Some people will still complain. I'm aware of that. [laughs]

I'm sure you are. All I'm trying to say is you've got a long road ahead of you to try to change that thinking.

Yeah, but as I say, give me a chance. Right? If you don't come and talk to me—. You said the old administration did that. The old administration is gone. This is new.

And that's a good point, because this all is carryover.

Exactly. I'm here now. I'm here until four years. And so give me an opportunity.

Let me move over to the council. How come the city doesn't provide a legislative orientation to council members?

When I came on the council in 2017, they gave me a briefing. I went around to all the department heads, presented what they want to do. But oftentimes the council work is a lot of work to get done on your own. You've got to learn this job yourself. That's really not a—

I'm strictly talking about the legislative process to introduce bills and get legislation done. Don't you think it would behoove the city to give them a running start? It doesn't seem to me to be something that you guys should have to learn on your own.

No, what I'm saying is that there's three branches, right? And that's a good question that you brought up. The council isn't really in charge of the city. They make the policies of the city.

But I don't think a lot of people get that.

But they make the legislation. I don't have a vote but all I have is veto power. But if the council, if five members or four members of the council say this is what we want, that's the majority speaking for the people. The people elected us, they entrusted us to speak for them on their issues and stuff. Everything starts in the work session. If you've got legislation, if you pass the work session, it goes to the first public hearing. If it doesn't get out of the work session, then it's dead right there.

I get that, but I don't know if a lot of the council does. That's my point.

Well, I'm telling the council that. This council that just got elected, I told them last week and we're having a retreat on the 27th, and the things I'm going to talk about are how to run an effective council meeting along with the council president. That's one of the things on the retreat schedule. So, you've got an idea. You've got a vision. It starts in work sessions. You get three of your council members to say they agree to it. It has to go to the public hearing by city charter.

But I don't think most of the council knows that.

But that's the council member's fault.

Well, how would they learn that coming into the job? Where do they go to learn that?

I learned it from reading the city charter and reading the orders and all that stuff. Our job is to continue to learn. But the basic thing is the work session. Nothing goes on without coming to the work session. So, if you want some legislation written, you have to put it on the work session. The clerk will help you write it and all that type of stuff. But it's your idea and they put it into the format they need to go on. But if it don't pass the work session, if you don't get a majority of your council to agree at the work session, it can't go to the first public hearing.

I just don't understand why the city doesn't do more to educate its council members. Why waste all that time trying to learn when you can just do a PowerPoint and show how it works?

I say different because we go to the Maryland Municipal League every summer. We send all five councilmen to Ocean City, and they've got intro classes for first year council members. They're teaching you all this type of stuff: how every council has different rules and stuff like that.

At the work session last week, when the resolution about naming the multiservice center—correct me if I'm wrong here—you implied that you wanted to see a vote without discussion?

No, that's not true.

Okay. Tell me what you meant there. I told them they were talking about something that wasn't on the agenda. The agenda is set. When you run an effective council, it's got everything you want on the agenda. We always have a discussion. You have to have a discussion. But if you're bringing up stuff that's not on the agenda, then that's disrupting the council meeting. That's not how you run an effective council. So, either you talk about it in the work session and it goes if everybody agrees. People said some stuff that wasn't pertaining to the issue. And I want us to get away from that because that's a waste of the people's time and that's not really being productive. So, the resolution states anyone, any citizen, can name a building or a street, whatever.

I know all about it because we went through it.

Exactly. So now it comes before the council at the work session. If the council says we don't want it, it's dead right there.

By vote?

We don't really vote. It's just that—in a way you do. But if you don't want it to go further. The president will ask if anybody's got any objection to this going further. If anybody says no, then anybody else got an objection? But if everybody's cool it goes.

It sounded like you just wanted to cut it off.

No, no, no, not at all. I just stayed on the agenda. Cause we get the agenda seven days in advance. Legally supposed to.

Let's go to the city code. Have you considered taking a look at that, overhauling it, simplifying it?

It's a whole lot of stuff.

That is a horrible document. You can't understand most of it. It's riddled with typos and errors. That section 6 that caused all that kerfuffle with the elections, it kept referencing a section that's not even in there anymore.

We're going to look at the election code again. We're going to look at the codes. Everything, anything that pertains to trash pickup, election, all has a code. I'm saying this whole book, Laurel city code, that's a whole book of stuff. There's no way you can memorize all this stuff. So,

you go to the section you want to work, and then you discuss that. So yeah, we have to look at the Board of Elections thing. We're going to. That's going to be one of the first things we're going to clean up. So, we're aware of that.

But you don't have any plans to look at the whole code and try to clean that up? There's a whole book—. We've got to pinpoint what the issue is.

Even if it's from an editing aspect? Are the references up to date? Are there typos?

I would look at it, yeah. I don't know when. I can't give you no time period. I know I'm going to look at the election stuff first. We're going to clean that one up first. We know that was a big deal. So, we're going to pick out some things that we think we need to look at.

The controversy about the Board of Elections and how they fined some candidates: did you think that all of their actions were fair and justified?

I'll say this. Let me be very clear. If I say this right, the Board of Elections is a whole entity, so they have their rules, their regulations. And whatever they follow, they set according to their guidelines. We have to follow that. So, I'll speak on that. They were created as a whole government body that said we're going to manage the elections. And so, they're like the police or the judicial branch. So, we had to follow their rules. So, they told me stop. I was campaigning in May when I thought that's what we do. They told me to stop, I stopped. So, I follow their orders until they get the order. So, I just follow what they say. I don't want to say they were right or they were wrong. Whatever guidelines they got according to the Board of Elections. That's why I say that's one of the first things we want to do. We want to look at guidelines on how we can do things better, more efficient. I don't want to penalize people for—. I want to make running for election easy for individuals. But they are the governing body. But the council can't really control each other on that one.

No, that's not what I'm suggesting at all. I know, but I don't—

But section 6, especially, is ambiguous. It lacks any specificity. And why was every violation \$1,000—the maximum? Yeah.

There didn't seem to be any common sense being applied here. Thomas Matthews had \$1,300 in his campaign fund, and they fined him \$1,000. Well, you might as well take him out of the race. So now he's got 300 bucks.

I don't know, I didn't look.

There just didn't seem to be any fairness or common sense to what they were doing. I just wondered if you had anything to say about that.

My answer to the Board of Elections—they are the supervisor of elections. And so, we'll look at the legislation and we can make any changes and recommendations. We will look at that. That's my recommendation.

The sense around town after the election was that there was a lot of optimism about all the new blood in City Hall now, but do you think that would extend to these boards and commissions? I don't know if you've even thought about it yet. I haven't really thought about that yet. I have appointed new people to certain committees. I appointed three people so far: one person to the Planning Commission, one person to the Ethics Commission that put in and wanted to be—. And I interviewed them. One person to the Board of Appeals.

At the candidates' forum you said you plan to evaluate all the city employees. Department directors.

Okay. The directors. Has that process started?

Yeah, it started. Interviewing them this week.

And you also mentioned putting employees on a six-month probation. Is that everybody that you're going to be interviewing or how's that?

That's the directors. Directors are the department heads that serve at the discretion of the mayor. So that's your police chief, the DPW director, communications director. I feel that six months—I say probation, I mean six-

month evaluation. I'll probably confirm a couple of them. I'm gonna confirm the city administrator. I appointed the city administrator and the deputy, Christian Pulley and Joanne Barr. They should get, if the council confirms them tonight. Hopefully they do. Those are my first two. And then everybody else I'm interviewing, talking to them, and they should be confirmed. I'll go before the council on the 22nd of January.

Do you still feel that marijuana use by employees is cause for dismissal?

I do. I think that marijuana is a schedule 1 drug, and I say we have to talk to—. Let me be very careful with that. With a schedule 1 drug, meaning the federal government says it is illegal, I think the federal government needs to take it off of schedule 1. You know what I'm saying? So it's like recreational use. And the State of Maryland passed it for recreational use.

Right. Or medicinal.

Medical is different. But I do think that if you using it, you know why it's still federal. It's complicated. But I do advocate for it to come off of schedule 1 drug. Once they come off a schedule 1 drug, it's easier because it's recreational, like alcohol. I'm saying you can go to work, right? And if you're drunk and I can get you a fit for duty test. But it needs to come off the schedule 1 drug first. Until it comes off the schedule 1 drug testing, I advise employees to refrain from using marijuana.

You also promised to appoint a Latino liaison. How's that coming along?

We talked about that. That was one thing we talked about. We said that we want to go to a multicultural liaison, that we encompass every other ethnicity inside the city. So, I think that's a better plan. It's not going to be a paid job. It's going to be like one of our committees are. Like we got the education advisory committee, we got disability committee, we got the tree board. So, it'd be a committee like that, a multicultural committee. That way a representative from each ethnicity in the city can talk about their concerns.

[This interview was edited for clarity and space.]



Perry Koons, a writer and illustrator, will be releasing *The Kid From 5th Street Creek* later this year. It is a collection of treasured memories from his childhood on Fifth Street in Laurel. His children's books are available at Amazon.com, and you can see more of his work on Facebook and Instagram @KOONSPERRY, and on Pinterest @perrykoons.