

The MONTEBELLO Voice

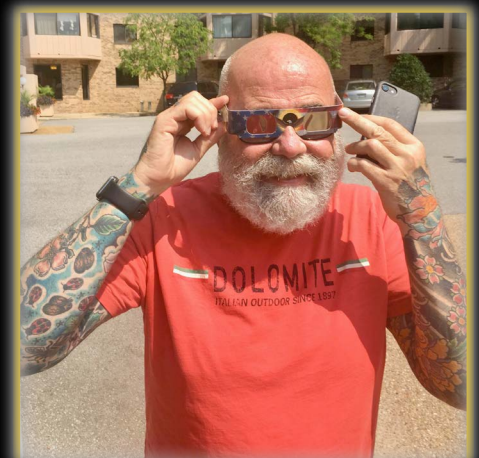
an independent gazette

night and day

August 24, 2017



August 21
Solar eclipse gazers





New Building 1 residents Nat and Anna Halvorson recently became first-time parents with the birth of their son Everett James. Everett was born at GW Hospital June 23 and weighed in at a healthy 10 pounds. Everett has daddy's long legs and mommy's nose and eyes. In addition to stroller rides around the community and meeting neighbors, Everett enjoys "discovery time" on the sun porch. He's ready for football season and has been told to cheer for the Michigan Wolverines and the Houston Texans.

Everett is the first grandchild on both sides and his over-the-moon grandparents have already visited from Houston, Texas and Portland, Oregon. Undoubtedly, Everett's future will include lots of forested hikes, learning to kayak, and a taste for TexMex!

Cassette tape art

I am finally ready to part with my old music tapes. I've seen many beguiling and imaginative art creations (on the right) out of magnetic ribbons. If you're feeling artsy and it's a new medium you'd like to tackle, email me at *The Montebello Voice* address. – Mikhailina Karina



The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you: musings, travels, announcements, photos, book reviews, commentary, memoirs, essays, analysis, poems, suggestions, club news, recipes, and free ads

A twice-monthly publication for the residents, by the residents

Cover eclipse photos by Azita Mashayekhi, Raymond Houck, Holden Coy, Mikhailina Karina, Angel Jensen, and Carole Appel

The **MONTEBELLO** **Voice**
an independent gazette
Alexandria, Virginia

This publication accepts no funding or oversight from advertisers, residents, or the Montebello Condominium Unit Owners Association. All opinions are encouraged and reflect the diversity of views in the community. All articles and photographs come from Montebello residents. To receive or contribute to this email-only gazette, contact montebellovoice@cox.net or visit on the web at www.montebellovoice.com.

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Board discusses marketing strategies for Montebello

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Is Montebello one of the area's best-kept secrets? In spite of four hilltop high-rises on one of the county's busiest thoroughfares, some people think Montebello could do a better job marketing its uniqueness.

At the August 22 Board of Directors work session, director Guido Zanni requested a budget of \$15,000 to "develop a marketing strategy so that our identity and our amenities are known to those looking for a condominium," he wrote in the budget request. "Unless we aggressively market Montebello, owners will continue to lose equity."

Zanni said that Montebello is at the risk of becoming "just another condo in Northern Virginia," where new one-bedroom condos without views are selling for \$600,000. "We need to market our uniqueness," he said as he listed the attractive grounds and desirable amenities.

"Unless we aggressively market Montebello, owners will continue to lose equity," Zanni said, citing unchanged sale prices for H models during the past several years.

He proposed a seven-point plan that includes extensive use of social media, virtual tours of models and amenities, consulting with marketing and branding specialists, sending out press releases, and partnering with other IDI developments.

The board was receptive to Zanni's proposal. Director Raymond Goodrich said the budget should be doubled for a long-term "digital strategy."

Director Bonnie Daniel said she affectionately refers to Montebello as a "grand old lady" because of the community's elegance and stature. But the reality is that nearby dazzling new developments are going up and attracting a younger population with modern amenities – and higher prices. "If we really want to see what we are up against, see the plans for Huntington Club," she said. The dramatic plans for redeveloping Huntington Club condominiums by IDI are available at <https://www.streetsense.com/portfolio/huntington-club>.

"Younger condos and older ones that are rehabbing are our competition," said board president Greg Bender. "We really need to get the word out

that Montebello is a great place to live. We have to make sure that what we have to offer competes favorably with younger construction."

Director Daniel said there was no point in reinventing the wheel because an exhaustive study of problems and solutions already exists in the Promoting Montebello report published by the Communications Committee in 2012. Based on interviews with Realtors, the report studied barriers to selling at Montebello and possible solutions for overcoming them. It is available on the association website at http://www.montebello.org/document_view.asp?id=1106.

Director Lauren Pierce, who has served on the Communications Committee, said improving the website remains one of the committee's top priorities.

While the board was supportive of addressing this issue, no decisions were made beyond Zanni's proposal for an aggressive marketing campaign and getting the community involved in this effort.

During the residents' forum, Carole Appel asked the board to consider putting in an air hockey and a foosball table in the vacant space in front of locker rooms. She said this inexpensive amenity, from \$50 to \$150 on Craigslist, would "attract more younger people who live here." Otherwise, many people get the impression that Montebello is an "old person residence," she said.

President Bender acknowledged the suggestion and responded it would be considered along with an update to the Community Center Master Plan that was created five years ago. He said a town hall meeting on the master plan will be held sometime this fall.

On the subject of town halls, Bender announced the community is invited to attend one on September 5 at 7 p.m. to discuss the data communication network. 📍

Photo by Jane Prugh



Get ready for a new look around Picnic Hill and Community Center entrances – let us know what you think

By Lynn Tjeerdsma, Montebello Board of Directors Vice-President and Grounds Committee Liaison

Montebello owners and residents will soon have a new landscape unfolding around Picnic Hill and the entrances to the Community Center. Last year a Board of Directors-initiated ad hoc committee spent several weeks with a landscape architect developing a new landscape plan for the area, and the newly formed Grounds Committee has continued working diligently on the project.

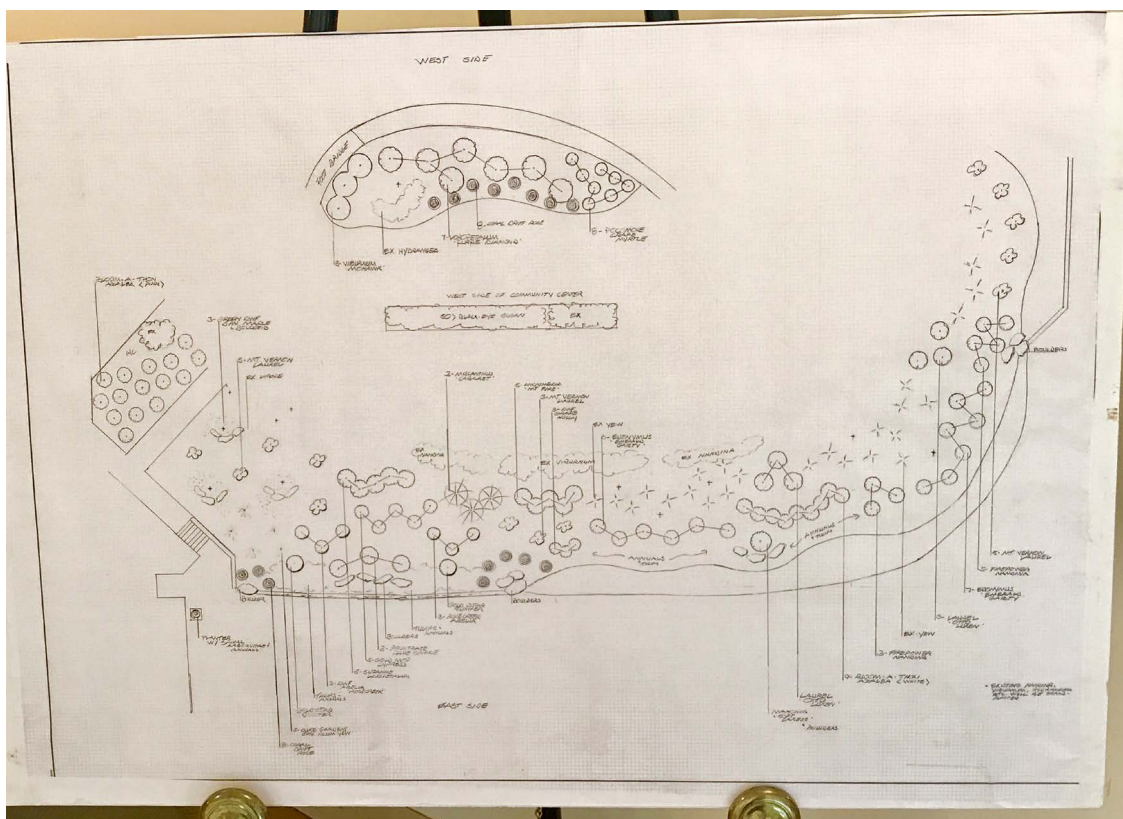
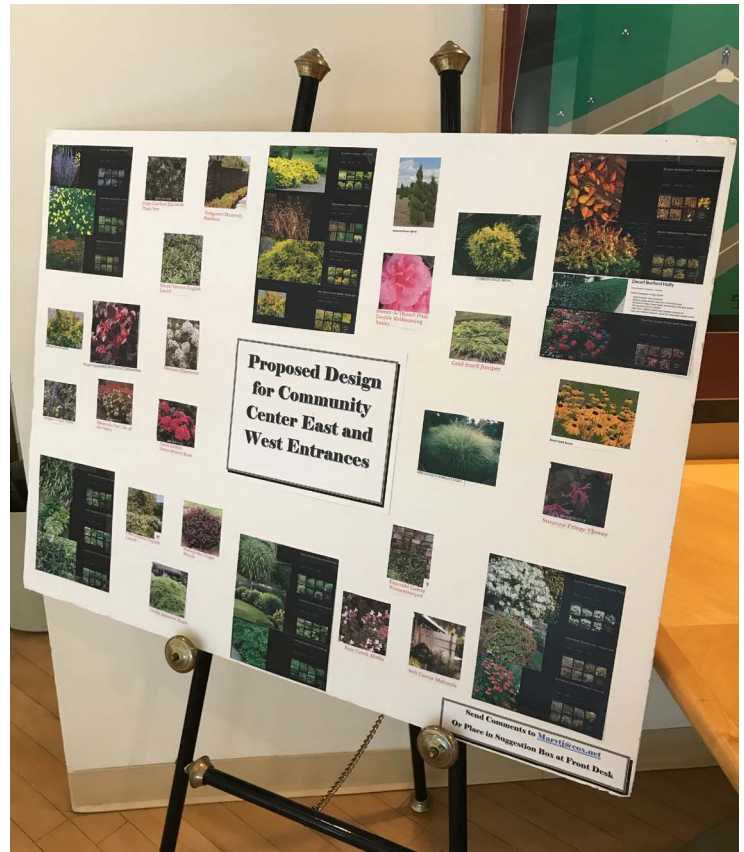
Montebello owners may review and comment on the landscape proposal which is on display at the Community Center office. A suggestion box is located near the display.

Picnic Hill and the Community Center are focal points viewed most often by Montebello's owners and residents and the BOD has agreed that a modest upgrade and renovation to

existing shrubbery, trees, and plants is in order. Our new sprinkler system will ensure that any new plantings will be adequately watered and the Grounds Committee will keep a careful eye on future landscape maintenance of the area.

I am very pleased to be the BOD liaison to the enthusiastic and energetic Grounds Committee, which has already displayed a "can do" spirit and willingness to tackle the many landscape challenges around Montebello.

Photos by Mary Tjeerdsma



Anyone desiring to participate in making Montebello's grounds, lawns and woodlands even more beautiful and attractive are invited to attend future Grounds Committee meetings, which are held the first Thursday of each month in the Building 3 Party Room.

Be on the lookout for new splashes of vegetative color, an improved woodlands landscape, and volunteers working to make this all happen – all thanks to the new Grounds Committee. All are invited to be a part of this exciting new Montebello Committee. 

Draft budget proposes 6% condo fee increase, lists needed expenditures

The following memo appears exactly as you see below on the association website at http://www.montebello.org/document/291357578memo_to_f_and_b_to_present_the_2018_draft_budget_2.pdf?12422

Date: August 11, 2017

Memorandum to: Finance & Budget Committee

From: Treasurer Doug Kleine and General Manager George Gardner

Subject: Draft 2018 Budget Proposal

Attached for review is our working draft proposal for the 2018 upcoming fiscal year. The budget as drafted proposes a 5.92 % increase in assessments. Approximately 1.82% of this increase is an increase to reserves while the remaining 4.10% increase is for proposed operating budget programs as outlined below.

1. Contribution to reserves increase is \$154,500, the increase to reserves is to catch up on reserve funding to assure the funds needed to address our aging infrastructure over the next five years. The committee has already received our proposed reserve project listing, proposing the work to be done over the next five years.
2. Approximately \$22,000 is proposed to give the association an upgraded community management information system called Buildinglink. This system is a significantly improved tool to upgrade our capability to manage community resources and to bring our information systems into the 21st Century. (This is GI Acct 6166).
3. Approximately \$56,197 is budgeted to pay for Group Health Insurance Benefits. This represents a 15% increase in Health Benefits. It is expected that the truer cost may well be in the 9-10% range but the 15% amount is used here until better numbers can be obtained from our Broker in October, prior to budget finalization. (This is GI Acct 6740).
4. Approximately \$50,000 is budgeted to pay for probable increases to our operating budget landscape maintenance contract as we go out to bid in 2018 for the landscape maintenance services being provided. This is the routine landscape maintenance program of on-going monthly grounds maintenance. (This is GI Acct 7235-202)
5. Approximately \$169,813 is proposed for a planned 2.5 % increase to staff salaries for our 60 association employees, as discussed in depth by the board, this total also includes merit pay for performance awards, to recognize service excellence . (This is GI Accounts 6705, 6727, 6735, 6783). GL account 6735, Engineering, includes a new position for Landscape Director, to manage our Landscape Management Restoration Program and Landscape maintenance contracts. Payroll taxes increase by \$40,229 to pay for these salary increases (GL Acct 6791).
6. Approximately \$25,000 is proposed to fund the Employee Incentive awards / Recognition program. This program is being upgraded from a 2017 budget level of \$3,500 to pay for new initiatives to incentivize and recognize the contribution of our most important resource, our employees. As part of our new Customer Service Improvement Initiative, an Employee Service Improvement Planning effort ---- led by both employees and management ----- has developed this program to better recognize employee customer service and job performance efforts. A copy of the detailed program

justification will be available by August 31st as it is in final preparation. (This is GL 6731).

8. Approximately \$25,000 is budgeted for employee training and development programs. During the current year we have provided specialized training classes and development efforts for 13 staff members plus group training for 19 other employees. Management has done an assessment of proposed training for 2018 and the \$25,000 will enable us to continue to support these programs. Training and professional development dollars are some of the best dollars spent by the association. (This is GL Acct 6330)

The remainder of the operating budget is reflective of individual program cost increases and decreases that are incorporated into the overall proposed 6.15%* budget increase.

We look forward to discussing these 2018 program initiatives with the committee.

** This is a typo. It should read 5.92%. Also, there is no item 7.*

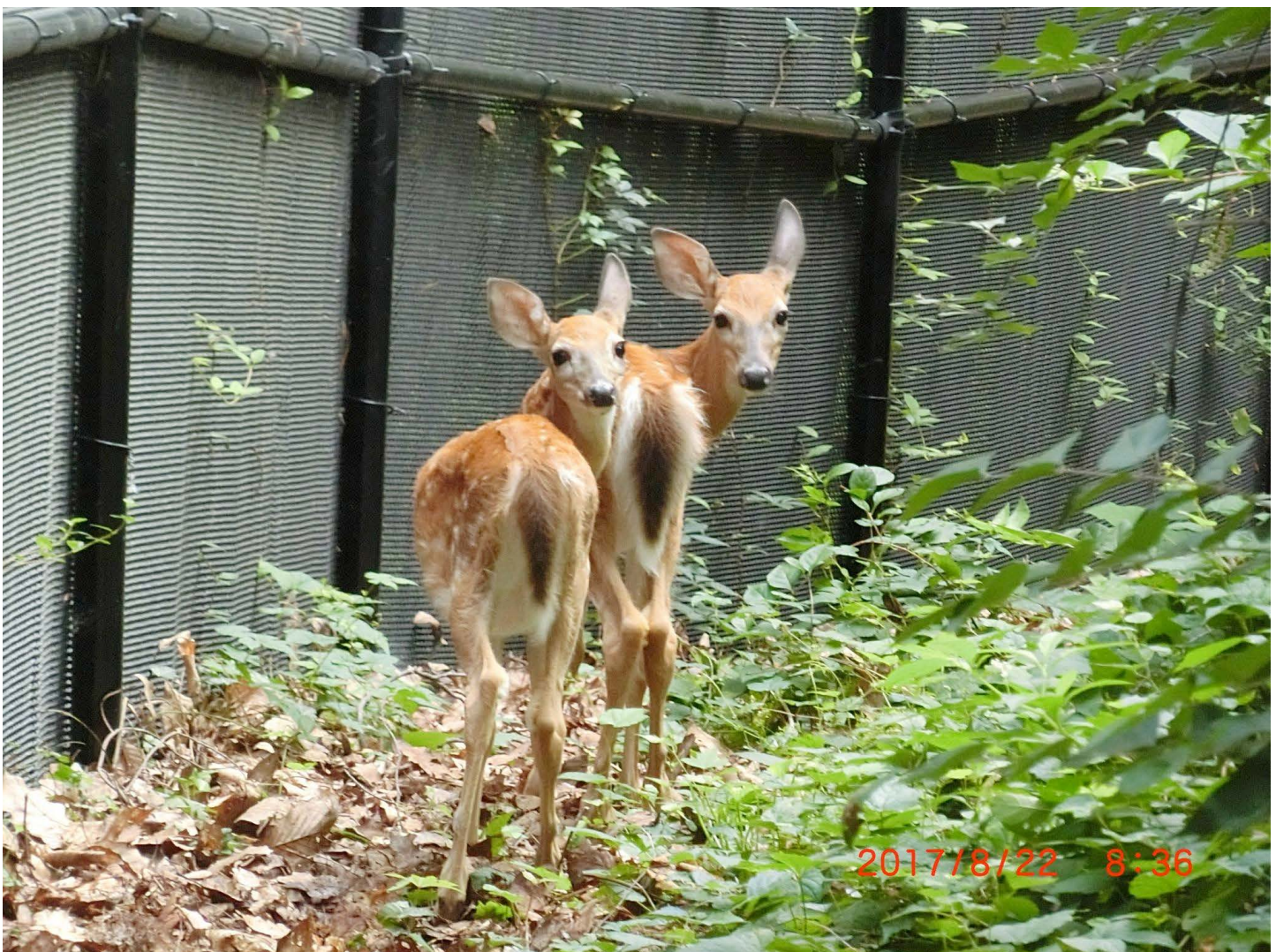


Photo by Bill Bryant



Anna and Ernesto: “We touch people” with beauty, harmony, and joy

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Their uncluttered home is a rich fusion of two ancient cultures: Anna’s Armenian roots and Ernesto’s Andean heritage. Numerous family photographs, artwork, books on a variety of subjects in several languages, musical instruments, and cultural mementos blend into a tapestry that tells the story of two people who celebrate and respect each other’s background and passions.

When Anna visited Chile to meet Ernesto’s family, she says the people reminded her of Yerevan with their friendliness. Likewise, on the several visits to Armenia, Ernesto says “Yerevan reminded me of my childhood” that he no longer finds in his native Santiago.

Recent transplants to Montebello, Anna Hall and Ernesto Bravo welcome a visitor with a small cup of strong, aromatic Armenian coffee and bowls of sweets and fruit. They speak lightly accented English, but neither knows the other’s native language (Anna is fluent in Russian and Armenian; Ernesto speaks Spanish). Yet they have found the universal language of love, beauty, kindness, and bringing happiness to people through the touch of their hands.

Ernesto owns Gigi’s Pet Salon in Arlington, where he grooms many dogs and a smattering of cats. Anna is a master aesthetician with clients in Washington, D.C., and Alexandria. Both are in the beauty business, although Ernesto laughs that Anna’s clients don’t try to bite her.

They met five years ago at Tyson’s Galleria, where Ernesto was accompa-

nying an opera singer on a guitar and a pan flute. During the break, when other people were talking with Ernesto to buy CDs, something intrigued him about Anna. “You wanna grab something to eat?” he asked her. “We just clicked,” he says.

During the course of their first non-date date, they found how much they’d had in common: both were recently divorced, had 15-year-old children, no immediate family in the area, parents who were teachers, and had grown up under repressive regimes in their native countries.

Anna came to the United States with her son 15 years ago when she married an American man in Maryland. She graduated from a university in Yerevan with a degree in electrical engineering, but the 1991 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan thwarted her professional aspirations and she took

an administrative position in human resources with the Armenian Air Force. She found that she enjoyed working with people, not circuits, and graduated from a beauty school in Virginia as a skin care therapist. Her 20-year-old son, Mushegh, is studying physical education, with an emphasis on kinesiology, at Towson University outside Baltimore.

Soft-spoken with a warm smile and a gentle touch, Anna emanates intelligence and compassion. Her honey-hued satiny complexion is proof that her treatments work. It's not difficult to imagine how in the anonymous privacy of her treatment room, she strips her clients' artifices to uncover their inner and physical beauty that emerges after the treatment. Relaxed in a quiet room with just the touch of Anna's hands, people frequently open up and talk with her about their lives. Over the years, she's become close friends with many of her clients.

Taking good care of the face is important because that's what people see first, she says. And since the beginning of time, "ladies want to look younger." Anna derives great satisfaction from her work because "it makes me happy to see people happy. After a treatment, people see the results: the glow, the decongestion of skin."

Ernesto is much chattier than Anna as he recounts how his journey to dog grooming began at the veterinary clinic operated by his older sister and her husband in Santiago. Both his parents

were biology teachers and he was expected to go to a university. He had good grades and his parents were disappointed that he ended up being the only one in their family without a college degree and living so far away from home. "But I felt it was okay because I like to work with my hands," Ernesto holds up his hands with long, tapered fingers. "He can fix anything!" Anna appreciatively adds.

At 19, Ernesto had become a very good veterinary assistant. "I had a gift for assisting during surgeries," he says. But since most surgeries took place on the weekends, it cut into his social life that included playing music and enjoying barbecues with his friends. In addition, Ernesto says that animals' organs have a very strong "sense" or odor that permeated his nostrils and stayed on his clothes. "I could not sit down to a barbecue that smelled just like the kitty cat in surgery," he says.

Knowing animals literally inside and out, Ernesto began working for a pet groomer in Santiago, where he



Anna Hall in a traditional Armenian outfit

bathed and trimmed dogs. In contrast to the dogs he works on here, Chilean dogs live outside and are not as friendly as American dogs.

A friend of Ernesto's moved to Virginia and reported that pet grooming was "huge business" in the States. In 1994, at 23, Ernesto sold his car and other possessions to finance a six-month sojourn to the States "to get some knowledge and then go back." He initially worked as a bus boy to improve his English and was then hired by a pet groomer, who was so impressed by his skills that she sponsored his permanent status.

Ernesto named his grooming salon Gigi after his daughter, Angelica, whose nickname is Gigi. "Everything we do is for our children," he says. Now 20, Angelica is studying nursing at NOVA and



Ernesto Bravo plays two of his Andean instruments. He performs at local venues and private events. Go to www.ernestobravo.com to see some of his recent gigs.

plans to transfer to George Mason University's nursing program. On the weekends, she helps out at the salon, where she answers the phone, "Gigi's Pet Salon. Gigi speaking."

After 27 years of working with dogs, Ernesto says "each dog is unique. You feel them, each dog belongs to a family and has a gift and a purpose in life. They release our stress, make us happy."

Naturally, the question of aggression and biting comes up. "With aggressive dogs, you do as much as you can." He doesn't keep track of all the times he's been nipped. In general, he has less trouble with big dogs because they give a warning before biting, whereas little ones can bite repeatedly. It's their normal reaction to not liking something, so he doesn't take it personally. The key is to build trust with each animal. "The most dangerous species is human," Ernesto observes.

Although most people don't think that cats need grooming, Ernesto says some felines develop arthritis in their necks and cannot clean themselves. Whereas it takes from an hour to an hour and three-quarters to groom a dog, he says cats "allow you 15 minutes." They protest by peeing, pooping, scratching, and hiding. Since most cats he sees are indoor pets, their summer shedding lasts year-round and he just "helps nature" with removing excess fur.

Ernesto has observed that the chowchow dog breed "is the same personality as a cat. It's unpredictable, independent, and doesn't follow commands." (Perhaps it should be rebranded as a chow-meow.)

With most international couples, cuisine is one of the first cultural exchanges. "Anna is a very talented cook,"



Ernesto and Anna overlooking Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2016

Ernesto states with affection. Anna has introduced him to borscht (an Armenian version of the Ukrainian staple), lavash, dolma, and the thick coffee in tiny cups that caps off many meals. For his part, Ernesto has brought fish dishes and pisco sour cocktails into Anna's orbit.

Anna and Ernesto's cultural exchange goes far beyond food and drinks. "He is more Armenian than me!" she laughs. Ernesto says his parents didn't impose religion on their children and let them find their way when they grew up. As a result, he was never baptized or attended church. But something about the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is part of Oriental Orthodoxy, captured his imagination and made him want to practice this faith. "The first time I went to Armenia, it felt completely spiritual," he says. "Ye-

revan is a city of art on the street, fountains, statues. The people are really kind, they care about each other and welcome strangers."

Anna explains that as Ernesto learned about Armenia's history, he saw that the church was the only institution that remained a strong constant during centuries of invaders and conquerors, it was the only institution that safeguarded Armenia's language and culture. Ernesto felt a connection to this ancient tradition and was baptized at a church in Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed, war-torn region. An elaborate, large Armenian cross hangs on his chest. Ernesto has learned some Armenian and can sort of follow along when Anna gets together with her Armenian friends.

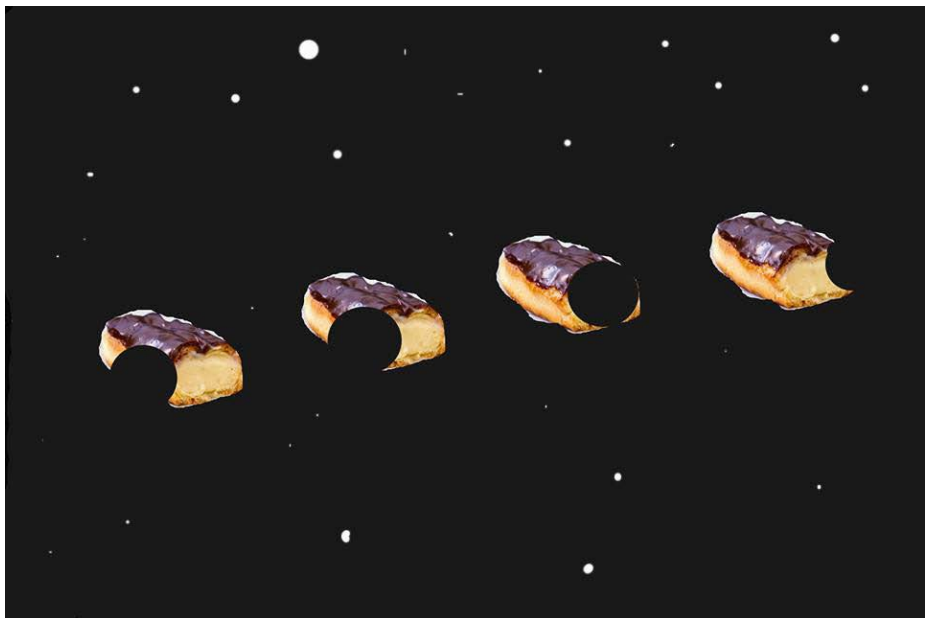
And Ernesto connects with Armenia in another universal language: music. A self-trained musician, Ernesto brings out the *charango*, a 10-string guitar-like Andean instrument that was custom-made for him in Argentina. He has brought Andean music to Armenia and performed folk tunes with local musicians. Playing what he calls the Andes to Romances repertoire, he moves from old Andean folk tunes to Spanish-language modern classics. He also plays the *queena*, a pre-Columbian vertical flute; *zamponas* pipes, the *bombo* drum, and guitar.

Anna and Ernesto are just one of numerous couples who make Montebello a welcoming multi-cultural community with a rich mosaic of colors, flavors, and sounds. At the end of the day, it about celebrating what unites us. 🍷

eclipse



Photos by Rachael Bright, Azita Mashayekhi, Joel Miller, and Lucas Colon



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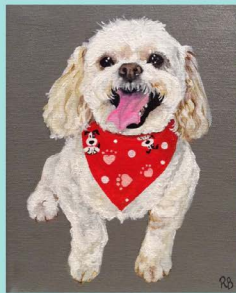
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Aug. 5 – Sept. 8
Montebello Café

*The Finishing Touch
Adorning the Female Crown*

Photo Exhibit by
Dian McDonald

Opening Reception
August 5
4 – 6 p.m.

Chess Game Night with Chess Club

All Levels! All Welcome!
Beginners to Grandmasters!
Play! Share! Learn! Practice!
No Commitment! Just Fun!

4th Thursday
of Each Month (generally)
C.C. Card Room
7:00pm to 9:30pm (latest)

Bring your own Chess Set if you like! – And, if you're brand new to Chess, but you'd like to check out our Chess Club while playing a relatively "quiet" or "cerebral" game that *doesn't* "compete" with the ancient game of Chess from a *noise* perspective, you may bring such a game and hang out with us! (Examples of Games that partner well with Chess: Scrabble, Checkers, Othello, etc.)

Contact Lisa J. Stedje at lisa@stedje.com and/or Nick Nickerson at fxnixson@gmail.com for more information.

In Honor of the Eclipse...

Kids Club

last Blast & Potluck

Friday August 25th. 4-7 PM
Please bring food to share
Outdoor Pool

MONTEBELLO FILM SOCIETY and AIM ART IN MONTEBELLO

Invite you to our film & discussion

THE MONTEBELLO

MID-AUGUST LUNCH
THURSDAY AUGUST 31 7:30 P.M. PARTY ROOM 2

Pranzo di Ferragosto
Written, directed & starring Gianni Di Gregorio

In mid-August the citizens of Rome usually leave the heat of the city and seek the cooling breezes of the seaside or mountains. Those who remain in the city usually have good reason. So opens this story about middle-aged Gianni who, residing with his 93-year old mother in a very old condo, finds himself responding to some unusual opportunities to offset mounting debts. What unravels is a story about the lifelong appetite for friendship and the restoring, convivial power of sharing a meal together. The film is in Italian with subtitles.

See the trailer here: <https://tinyurl.com/yaqyppxw>

Marsha Weiner will introduce the film and lead the post-movie discussion

final glance



Growing up on a farm in semi-arid South Dakota, my parents' livelihood depended on rain, which often came in the form of thunderstorms rolling across the prairie. I grew up always looking westward for signs of a coming thunderstorm that would offer our crops a reprieve from the summer heat. I slept in an upstairs bedroom with a window facing the west. I placed my bed in front of the open window so I could fall asleep watching for flashes of lightning off in the distance, hoping to be awakened by the sound of cracks of thunder from nearby lightning and rainfall. I grew up fascinated by thunderstorms and I am to this day. It's been 45 years since I've lived in my boyhood home, but while staying there on August 17 I once again had the thrill of watching a thunderstorm roll across the prairie.

Text and photo by Lynn Tjeerdsma