

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

bewitched, bothered, and bewildered

March 8, 2018



Photo by Azita Mashayekhi

Community Center and party room renovations

By Mary Tjeerdsma

As one of many Montebello residents who are pleased and excited about the Board of Directors (BOD) decision to move forward with remodeling and updating the Community Center and the party rooms, which was discussed at the February 27 BOD meeting, I strongly urge the BOD and management to consider making renovation of the Community Center (CC) the first priority.

The Community Center complex is one of Montebello's biggest assets, and a focal point for the entire community landscape. The on-site café, bar, beauty shop, bowling alley, and billiard and card rooms, as well as the swimming pools and tennis courts, are all valuable marketing tools for promoting Montebello as a premier property in Northern Virginia.

Accordingly, I believe the BOD and management should take all necessary steps to pursue completion of the CC before renovation of the party rooms, as the CC is so much more visible and is utilized considerably more by residents, visitors, and potential purchasers. Another important fact is that we should not delay the CC project too long as the cost will continue to rise.

I ask how many of you who have chosen Montebello as a potential home over the past several years were shown a party room by our Realtors as one of Montebello's assets? Instead, I am sure you were given a tour of the CC complex and shown how it greatly contrib-

utes to an enjoyable life at Montebello.

At the February 27 BOD meeting a discussion was held regarding party room and CC renovations, and it was explained that because CC offices would need to be relocated to a party room that it was, therefore necessary to renovate the party rooms first. I disagree with this rationale, as I believe a newly renovated party room used as office space would suffer unnecessary wear and tear during the months used as an office.

I suggest it makes more sense to install the necessary wiring, Internet capability and other needs in a party room so the space would be adequate for office use during renovation of the CC. After the CC has been completed, the party rooms could then be renovated and the offices moved back to the newly remodeled CC.

Additionally, at the BOD meeting an agenda item included costs for replacing existing CC and restaurant chairs or refurbishing/reupholstering existing ones as an interim solution. Given the expense for reupholstering, then disposing of them later on a secondary market at a substantial loss, it makes more sense and is another strong argument for renovating the CC before the party rooms.

I encourage others who share my concerns and who believe the CC should be renovated before the party rooms to share this message, or your own message, with Montebello management and the BOD. 📧



**French lessons
Conversation**

**Grammar and Vocabulary
With a native French teacher
and Montebello resident**

**Private & semi-private sessions
In person or via Skype
Tailored to your needs and goals**

**Marie-Christine Bonzom
(703) 329-0307
mcbonzom@cox.net**

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.

Editor & Designer.....Mikhailina Karina
Contributors.....Marie-Christine Bonzom, Tillie Cassidy, Pamela Copley, Azita Mashayekhi, Dian McDonald, Virginia Nickich, John Powers, Richard Titus, Mary Tjeerdsma, Mark Woods

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

What it took for one person to receive the American diversity visa

By “anonymous 7+ year resident of Montebello, 15+ year resident of U.S., and proud immigrant U.S. global citizen”

I just saw this letter, Re: immigration, a clarification by Ralph Johnson [who wrote], “It is never my intent to make an incorrect statement.” [*The Montebello Voice*, February 22]

Ralph is incorrect and his response is not based on any research or facts, it seems.

I am not sure if I want to become a target of neighbors, so I would prefer to remain anonymous in a clarification response to his response. Or perhaps it is time to write my immigration story, finally, as you had requested earlier.

Before I arrived in the U.S. in January 2003, I paid several nonrefundable hundreds dollars to the U.S. embassy in [home town] to process my application for a student visa, without a guarantee of being granted one. Several of my highly qualified, well-off friends were denied such visas multiple times, practically donating thousands of dollars to the U.S. government for temperamental U.S. embassy interrogators to traumatize and humiliate them. Thankfully,

my visa interrogator was highly professional and nice. She liked my file and my responses and granted me a student visa.

In 2009, I applied for the diversity lottery visa. I was lucky. I got it, but only after an entire year of stressful waiting and non-responses from the State Department about when my lottery number would actually be available for processing. My number was at the very end of the selected ones. So, there was a slim chance I would miss the one-year deadline after selection for processing of my green card by the U.S. government.

In brief, my husband and I ended up spending thousands of dollars, most of which went into paperwork filings at the State Department, to finalize our green card paperwork following the diversity lottery visa selection.

Many diversity lottery visa winners are not college grads but they must have a high school diploma to qualify.

All diversity visa lottery winners pay for each and every minute of the time spent on their paperwork processing by federal employees. That is the only way these high sums of mandatory fees for each and every form submission during

the long processing period can be justified.

From the State Department website: *Before being interviewed, each applicant must pay the Diversity Visa Lottery fee. For DV-2019 and DV-2018 applicants the fee is \$330 per person. This fee is non-refundable, whether a visa is issued or not. Learn more about Fees.*

And chain migration is tough. It takes five years after the green card (via lottery) to be eligible for citizenship. It takes three years via marriage to become a citizen. Even after that, it takes years for sponsorship of a family member to be processed by the U.S. government, again after paying sums of money that can be equal to one’s annual salary or more in the (poor) origin county.

Neither my husband nor I have “chain-migrated” anyone and have not started the process to do so yet.

A simple Google search will yield this comprehensive list of fees for each visa type <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/fees/fees-visa-services.html#permanent>

However, that list omits the extra sums involved during each step. 📌

Guns in America: the point of no return

By Richard Titus

I overheard the following statistics at a meeting of the Mount Vernon District Democratic Committee:

- 50% of U.S. guns are owned by 3% of Americans
- 100% of U.S. guns are owned by 26% of Americans.
- The USA has more guns than people.

In the week since the Parkland school shooting, there have been two incidents in Maryland of students bringing loaded guns to school and in each case a police search of their homes found many more guns.

After each mass shooting incident gun sales go up.

When experts first began to warn us about global warming, some of them also predicted that by the time mankind got serious about dealing with the problem, the point-of-no-return would have been reached and passed. Similarly, the USA may have reached the point where the number of guns already out there prevents any solution to the problem. But maybe not. If we can make our ultra-right Supreme Court keep their noses out of it, action at the state and local levels might yet be effective. 📌

For detailed information and facts about the diversity visa program requirements, fees, and statistics, please refer to government websites:

**U. S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs**

travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/diversity-visa-program-entry.html

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

www.uscis.gov/greencard/diversity-visa

Bowlers wanted (with or without a matching bowling sweater)



Photo of Karen Shaw by Virginia Nickich

Are you a serious bowler or recreational bowler? Doesn't matter..WE WANT YOU! And you don't even have to wear a bowling sweater! Montebello has a Monday and Wednesday night league with four teams. If you can't commit to bowling weekly from September to mid-April, then consider being a substitute. Contact Mark Woods at mjddwoods@earthlink.net

Price tag for each party room doubles to 200K

By Mikhailina Karina

The last time the association priced the cost of redoing party rooms, the total bill for each came to \$100,000. At the February 27 work session, board president Greg Bender surprised the audience when he said the cost for renovating a party room with all the bells and whistles would now add up to \$200,000.

The construction cost was the largest jump, going from \$70,000 to \$130,000. The cost of furniture went up slightly from \$20,000 to \$35,000. The newest addition to the project would be an audiovisual system for \$15,000. And the contingency fund quadrupled from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

Bender said the plan was to redo the kitchens, lighting, ceiling tiles, floors and wall coverings, and the cooling/heating system.

"We need to decide as a community what we want to do," he said. "I hope we can come up with a consensus to finish the design to have Kerns [Group Architects] present the design to the community."

While balking at the new price tag, several board members agreed it was time to refurbish the party rooms and asked Kerns to continue working on the designs.

Bender said a town meeting in early April will let the residents see the proposed design and give feedback. 📖

Join your neighbors on Facebook

By Mikhailina Karina

Facebook is not just for Russian trolls, personal updates, and travel photos. Some people still use it to communicate in a polite and constructive manner. Montebello has a small private Facebook group that allows the residents to post queries about power outages, event recommendations, and community updates. The group's stated mission is to be a "non-political, non-confrontational exchange regarding the dwellers and dwellings of the Montebello Condominium community." This invitation-only group is not open to outside vendors or non-residents. If you are already a Facebook user and would like to join the civil conversation, send an email to group administrator, Joel Miller, at maxmax491@aol.com. 📖



Concerns about the new garage space transfer fees

By John Powers

In June 2017, a friend purchased a parking space in Building 1. When the seller went to the office, she was informed that a new transfer process was in place. The cost of the previous process was a \$50 fee for the reassignment of the limited common elements. The cost of the new process included an assignment preparation fee of \$442 and a title search of \$175 for a total of \$617 to the association's council who designed the process (a 1234% increase).

The rationale given for the new process was a) two parking spaces (not at Montebello) were sold when they were encumbered by a mortgage and b) one incidence at Montebello in which the documents "were not signed properly." The first, encumbered parking spaces, reportedly has never been an issue in Montebello's 37 years as the previous process required "If a seller has a mortgage on a Montebello unit, a release to sell a ga-

rage space has to be obtained from the lender." This seems to have solved that problem.

The second, documents not signed properly, is a bit more complicated in that the seller of a parking space signed just his name (John Doe) on the Amendment to be filed with the county when selling his space but when he

on file with the county recording the previous sale (the office has a copy of that Amendment).

It is hard to understand why a process is needed that increases the cost to the owners by this huge amount? There has been a lot of verbiage about risk management that makes little sense. Instead, the Board should always seek the least cost and least onerous solution to every prospective problem it encounters.

Further, the new process document opened with the statement that the "Board of Directors has directed the Association's legal counsel ... to advise the Association ... Condominium Act. When asked during the work session "when did the Board direct this and when did the Board approve this

process," the President of the Board stated that he did it. This was done apparently without consultation with the whole Board and not in an open session, which I believe is required. 🙄

The following costs currently apply to such transactions:

Title search of Transferring Unit	\$125.00
Title Search of Parking Space	\$ 75.00
Association Attorney preparation or review of Amendment to Declaration	\$400.00 or \$250.00
Association's counsel additional attorney's fees if necessary to resolve issues	Hourly at standard rates
Recording fees and taxes	As charged by the County Clerk
Courier fees	At cost, as necessary

Fee table from the Required Procedures for Transferring Limited Common Elements Parking Spaces Between Units (http://www.montebello.org/document_view.asp?id=3312, page 4)

had previously purchased the space, he had signed the Amendment as name, trustee (John Doe, trustee). Admittedly this is a problem, but it should be fairly trivial to compare the signature block of the seller in the Amendment to be filled with the county against the one

Café to get \$410 reupholstered interim chairs

By Mikhailina Karina

According to a February 22 memo from General Manager George Gardner to the board of directors, the 59 dilapidated chairs in the café need to be either reupholstered or replaced. [Board packet at http://www.montebello.org/document_view.asp?id=3312, page 44]. The discussion took place at the February 27 work session.

"Of concern are the costs for individual options the Association may pursue as possibly influenced by the planned community center master plan renovation presently planned for construction in 2019," the memo says. "One of our resident consultants has done considerable work in coming up with costs and

chair selections for three options:" reupholster only the seats with new foam and fabric for \$16,225; reupholster all for \$24,190; or purchase new Tivoli chairs for \$39,884.

Gardner writes that buying new chairs would not make sense at this time because "selected fabric and furniture design may pose limitations on the future redesign of the Café, including furnishings. While it may be possible to design around making a decision now, it is not recommended by management and at least one resident consultant. Our architect may also have concerns about a premature choice."

Therefore, he recommends the second option – \$24,190 for reupholstering the chairs. For 59 chairs, this

comes out to \$410 per chair. Buying new chairs would cost \$666 per chair. Funds for this unbudgeted purchase would come from the Contingency Reserve. At these prices, at the end of the café remodel, each chair would cost more than \$1,000.

"The Association will always have the option of selling the chairs on Ebay when it comes time to replace them in order to possibly recover some of the cost," the memo concludes.

One resident suggested the café purchase slightly used chairs, such as from a hotel or a restaurant undergoing a renovation, for this interim period.

The board will vote on the resolution to approve this action at the March 13 meeting. 🙄

Pratibha Srinivasan

gives voice to children with profound hearing loss



By *Mikhailina Karina*

A red-haired 4-year-old boy banters about trains in a typically adorable pre-schooler voice. Speaking in multiple full sentences, he explains the ins and outs of underground trains to two women at the table. An impish 3-and-a-half-year-old with tight curls sits in her dad's lap while singing the Do-Re-Mi song from *The Sound of Music*. And another 5-year-old girl in a yellow dress tells a made-up story. All these young children sound exactly like other children their age – except for one remarkable difference: they have profound hearing loss and rely on cochlear implants or hearing aids to hear the world around them.

The videos of these children are on Pratibha Srinivasan's website, *Equal Voice for Deaf Children*. Pratibha is doctor of audiology, a certified auditory-verbal therapist, and teacher of the deaf. For the past three decades, she has been teaching children with hearing loss to listen and talk. In fact, their speech is so flawless, they can go through life without anyone realizing their impediment. And this is exactly what Pratibha has been able to achieve with her clients.

Pratibha's interest in the deaf stems from growing up in Mumbai, India, where she volunteered in an orphanage that had several deaf children. After earning degrees in science and food engineering, she came to the United

States to pursue graduate degrees in audiology at Vanderbilt University. Although, at the time, it was thought that hearing and non-hearing people could not communicate, she followed the approach by pioneers such as Doreen Pollack and Dr. Daniel Ling who believed that children with hearing loss can learn verbal communication using technology and auditory-verbal therapy. She never wavered in her belief that children with all degrees of hearing loss can listen and talk. But how?

Profound hearing loss occurs in 1 out of 1,000 babies in the United States, she says. Before the modern advances in hearing aids, many children learned to talk by reading lips. A former member of the board of directors of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, Pratibha says Graham's father had taught his deaf wife how to speak; and then Graham had done the same with his deaf wife. This approach differed from that of Thomas Gallaudet. Gallaudet saw deaf students using sign language in France, which led him to bring a French teacher, Laurent Clerc, to the United States. Gallaudet and Clerc started the first school for the deaf using American Sign Language in

Hartford, Connecticut in 1817. And hence is the major philosophical difference between the two deaf communities – people using ASL and people learning to listen and speak. Parents choose either approach based on information they receive from their child's doctor and other professionals,

and availability of resources, she says.

"We learn to talk by listening," she explains. "The brain learns how to decode the information we hear." As an example, she says imagine going to another country without knowing the language. Just like a hearing person needs time to decode the sounds and the meaning of that language – in addition to learning to vocalize those sounds. Teaching a deaf infant to listen and speak follows a similar model, albeit with a lot more effort. "The auditory system is magnificent," she says. "Teaching deaf babies to listen and speak is the same process all babies use."

Babies as young as 6 months old, fitted with hearing aids or cochlear implants, come to her for therapy sessions. The therapy requires a lot of parental follow-through at home and ideally, must begin during the first year of life in order to master "the native mode of communication" with their families. By the time they are 5 or 6 years old, they can attend their neighborhood schools without any special education support and participate fully in the mainstream without limitations. Pratibha has worked with a girl with two cochle-



Pratibha conducts a therapy session with a young girl and her mother

ASL, she says, is that it is not standard English because it has a different word order; this problem becomes more apparent

when children learn to read and have to master another form of English.

Accessibility is a major problem in getting therapy for children with hearing loss, she says. Although most states cover therapy for babies, problems arise for children in rural areas where there may not be any specialized professionals in this field.

In addition to working as a therapist, Pratibha has been an advocate for

children with hearing loss. She founded the non-profit Chattering Children auditory-verbal center and auditory-oral school in Virginia. Over the years, she has conducted scores of seminars, workshops, and training programs in the United States and internationally. She now has her own practice under the name Smart Ears (<http://www.smart-ears.com>) that offers therapy services to parents, and training for professionals, and institutions that need help with teaching children with hearing loss to listen and talk.

Pratibha is the author of the 1996 book, *Practical Aural Habilitation for Speech-Language Pathologists and Educators of Hearing-Impaired Children*. In 1999, she founded Equal Voice for Deaf Children (<http://www.evdcweb.org>), which serves as a resource for families around the world who do not have access to a qualified therapist. The website includes a parents' guide, lessons, and resources for working with deaf children. 📖

ar implants whose parents are native Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch speakers. "She speaks all three languages, in addition to English," Pratibha says. "Research shows that over a period of time, children who can listen and speak perform better both socially and academically."

As someone who has dedicated her life to working with the non-hearing population, she admits she does not know ASL. The biggest problem with

Inspiring creativity with polymer clay workshops at Montebello

Several months ago, Pratibha Srinivasan began hosting monthly polymer clay workshops for the residents. Each month, a small group of women (men are warmly invited and encouraged) gather around the table to roll, slice, and sculpt colorful polymer cylinders to fashion beads, flowers, and decorative items. It's play-dough time for grownups who still like to play.

"I've always liked to do things with my hands, such as drawing and painting," Pratibha says. "But I needed tactile feedback." She fell in love with polymer clay after attending a four-day workshop three

years ago. Numerous instructional YouTube videos later, colorful vases, plates, boxes, and sculptures are dis-

played around her home.

Polymer clay, based on polymer polyvinyl chloride (PVC), is model-



Pratibha teaching polymer clay techniques at a recent Montebello workshop



ing clay-like substance that does not actually contain clay minerals, but hardens upon drying or baking in a common toaster oven. This fairly inexpensive material requires just a few basic tools to create decorative objects. Pratibha says using polymer as a creative medium is very forgiving – just squish up the mistake and start over. “There is no such thing as a mess up, but it’s an opportunity to change.”

The process of creating with polymer clay is “calming and relaxing,” Pratibha says. “For me, the process of planning, creating, and watching something unfold is more important than the final product.”

“I’m very happy with Pratibha’s



workshops,” says Maria Carvalho. “I’ve been attending the three-hour workshops since the beginning and every month I learn a new technique. Montebello is very lucky to count on such a wonderful person in its activities group.”

Making creations out of polymer is not just for experienced artisans. “My 9-year old granddaughter Naina attended just one of Pratibha’s classes and loved it,” says Mala Kalyan. “In fact, she said that she wanted to come for all the classes. Pratibha was very kind to let her join the class and also give her the needed supplies.”

The next workshop will take place on April 3 in Party Room 4 from 6 to 9 p.m. It is free and open to all residents. 🏠

A small gallery of Pratibha’s polymer clay creations

cup of joe



cup of joe



cup of joe

