

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

Rock me, Amadeus

May 30, 2019



Photos by Azita Mashayekhi

By Sophie and Sarah Myers

Bad optics lead to bad impressions

By Mikhailina Karina

Over the years, I've heard numerous Montebello residents kvetching about the Board of Directors – ignoring residents' concerns, awarding lucrative contracts to cronies or relatives, making policy decisions in secret meetings, spending too much money. You know what I mean.

This editorial is not a board-bashing diatribe. It's not what I do and not who I am. In fact, after faithfully attending board meetings for the past four years, I've developed a lot of respect for how much time and effort our board members put into Montebello's governance. I appreciate their dedication to our community and professional expertise they freely share. Unfortunately, 99 percent of our residents don't get to watch the board in action; the same two dozen regulars show up at every meeting. So when people complain about the board being a shadowy plutocratic clique, I invite them to experience the board's work by attending meetings or joining a committee.

Because I attend the meetings, read board packets, and care about our governance, I feel compelled to express my dismay at the recent appointment of two people to the board. I want to be very clear that I have absolutely no issue with the appointees' qualifications or views. My problem is with the process by which they were appointed. I am well aware that Montebello's governing documents allow the board to appoint new members to replace departing directors. It happened before when someone died, resigned, or moved away. Although this nomination process is perfectly legal and has been practiced for decades, that does not make it fair or transparent.

In the most recent case, two directors replaced individuals who sold their units and moved away. But the optics of this situation make me uneasy. Several months before the most recent

board election, it was not a secret that two directors would be leaving their positions in the near future. If they had resigned before the spring election, we would have had five board openings and a transparent process of studying the candidates' credentials and meeting them at the candidates forum. Thus, the community would have chosen its governing body.

Instead, what appeared to happen was two about-to-depart board members kept their directorships mere weeks after the election, thus allowing seven members secretly choose two new directors from among five candidates. So excuse me for suspecting long-time board members for cherry-picking like-minded people to maintain the board's group think and status quo.

How many residents read the candidates' CVs buried in the board packet PDF? What criteria did the board use to choose these two individuals? What happened to our right to vote for our elected officials?

Again, I understand that our director replacement process is legal and with precedent. Directors are only human and others will die, resign, or move away in the future.

Rather than have costly special elections with paper ballots, I propose an inexpensive approach several others have been advocating: an online ballot (similar to what we do with 30-second surveys) to give the residents an opportunity to choose their governing board. Otherwise, nominating directors behind closed doors only perpetuates and reinforces the secret society image I hope the board would like to shake off.

The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you

Our next recycling date is Thursday, June 13. We are available to pick up items from your units on Wednesday, June 12 between 7 and 8:30 p.m.

If you are not available at that time, you may leave the items in front of your door and we will pick them up that evening. Otherwise, you are welcome to drop them off at our unit 2-615 any time between June 8 and June 12. Please make sure they are clearly marked with your name and unit number.

We accept all electronic and hazardous household items that Fairfax County recycles (and that fit in our van): electronics such as computers, TVs, phones, printers, cords, fluorescent light bulbs, rechargeable batteries (not alkaline, which must be disposed of in the trash), paint, solvents, articles that contain mercury, fire extinguishers, and aerosol cans.

For hazardous items, please make sure items are sealed and contents are marked. See Fairfax County Rules at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-trash/residential-materials>

To sign up, contact us at montebello_e_cycles@icloud.com and please specify your unit number. Thank you. 📧

The MONTEBELLO Voice
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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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Grounds Committee transforms planters

Text & photos by Jackie Fleming

At 10 a.m. sharp on a beautiful Saturday morning, 14 volunteers walked over to the three circle planters near building 3 wearing our newly acquired Montebello Grounds Volunteer shirts. Everyone was ready to dig in the dirt.

Previous to this moment, Chuck Amarosino, coordinator of the event, and Christine Blair, held a meeting on Thursday night to go over what we would be doing on Saturday. At the time I thought, "We need a meeting to plant plants?" It quickly became apparent that we did. Planting some flowers sounds simple, right? When I took care of and planted my gardens in Vermont, I just did it. Planted what I wanted where I wanted, but now I was no longer on my own, I was part of a team and we had to work together.

At the meeting, Chuck gave us the history of the committee, including a time of turmoil when it was disbanded for years. The resurgence of the club came last year when board member at the time Lynn Tjeerdsma strongly supported the renewal of the Grounds Committee. Virginia Hodgkinson be-



came the chair and the committee has been thriving ever since.

Some of the many activities the Grounds Committee has spearheaded are Weed Wrangle to remove the invasive plant English ivy and others, tree marking, nature walks to see how erosion has been corrected, and the beautiful plantings by the Community Center.

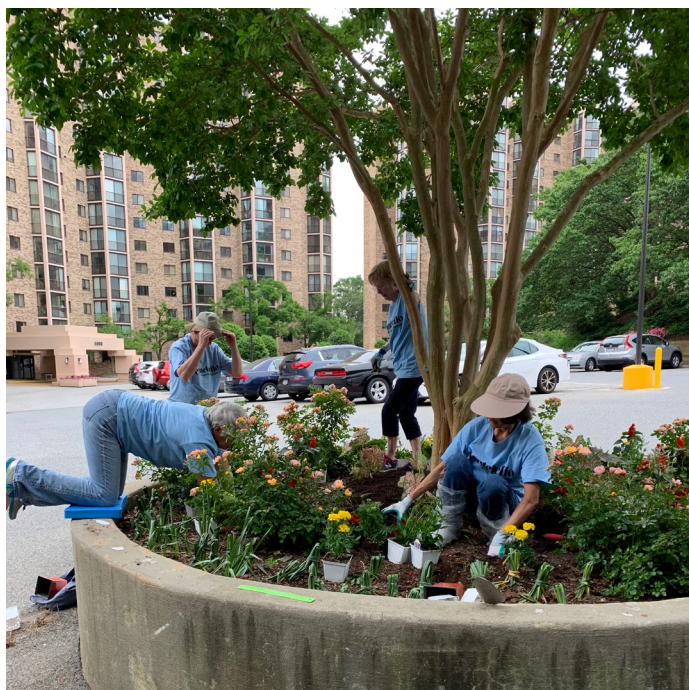
The end of the meeting was reserved for garden layout. We were all assigned a team, I was on Team A, and we discussed how we would plant the four varieties of plants going into the circle. We even discussed how far apart, 12 inches, the plants should be. We were ready for Saturday!

As I approached the planters on Saturday, I saw that many of the volunteers were already there and starting to arrange the plants. We

spent the first 15 minutes or so arranging the groupings and when we were satisfied they looked the way we had discussed, we started digging.

We planted caladiums first, closest to the crepe myrtle, and worked outward with salvia, angelonias, and finally yellow marigolds. It's been a while since I gardened and I forgot that it can be pretty strenuous work. The roots of the crepe myrtle were everywhere so digging a hole was hard work. Before long I had blisters on my palm. I could've worn gloves but part of the appeal of this planting was getting my hands in the dirt.

The smaller planters were done in an hour and more people joined in to help us finish the largest of the circles. Water breaks and cookies kept us energized. When all of the flowers were planted, a layer of mulch was added on top. The gardens were watered and we admired our work. We are all on watering and deadhead (removing dead blooms) duty for the summer but the sense of accomplishment when we stepped back to admire what we had just done was obvious. What a great way to spend a Saturday morning. 🍷



Women's Club



Photos by Dian McDonald

Women's Club



Photos by Dian McDonald


Opening Reception
Saturday, May 4
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.






A Show of Photos

by
Jon Kandel

Montebello Café
May 4 thru June 7







Chess Game Night with Chess Club

All Levels & All Ages!
All Welcome!
Beginners to Grandmasters!
Play! Share! Learn! Practice!




4th Thursday, 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 fnixson@gmail.com for more information.
* (e.g., most holidays and holiday periods are excluded.)

Make your move and stop by to see a joust! The Queen doesn't even mind tardiness!





and



Invite you to our film & discussion



THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS
THURSDAY JUNE 27 7:30 P.M. PARTY ROOM 2



In the late 1930s, in Ferrara, a group of young friends get together for afternoons of tennis and happy times. Some of them are Italian Jews and a rising tide of Fascism has imposed increasingly anti-Semitic restrictions in their lives. Barred from regular tennis clubs, they go to play at the grand, walled estate owned by the Finzi-Continis, a wealthy, intellectual and sophisticated Jewish family. Oblivious to the threats around them, life still seems to be sunny at the large Finzi-Contini estate, keeping the rest of the world at bay.

Joel Miller will introduce the film and lead the post-movie discussion.



Aestas's Garden

by Rachael Bright

Montebello Café
June 8 to July 6
Opening: Saturday, June 8
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.




final glance



Photos by Mikhailina Karina