

The **MONTABELLO** Voice

an independent gazette

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May 18, 2020



Addressing the groundswell of Montebello demand for a vote on the Community Center work

By Gregory R. Copley,
unit owner since 2002

Montebellans are indeed fortunate that owners in our community volunteer to serve on our Owners' Association Board and on its Committees. This is a thankless task which demands many hours of unpaid service. As a result, it is essentially only possible to be undertaken by owners who are no longer employed on a full-time basis.

But the fact that all those unit owners who are still working, or cannot afford the time to serve on the Board, have trusted their rights to a few representatives in no way diminishes their equal standing or control of the value of their assets. The Board, like the management and workforce of our facilities, hold no rights over the owners, and are not entitled to dispose or alienate our assets without consent. Certainly, there is no entitlement for any member of the Board or management to speak dismissively, patronizingly, or less than candidly to owners when discussing matters pertaining to our commonly-held assets.

The proposed Community Center work — for it can no longer realistically be called merely “renovations” or “repairs” — has become the nexus of concern by many owners over the unauthorized, rampant escalation of costs and the ambitious nature of the project. Around a quarter of the owners of Montebello units have already signed a petition calling for a formal vote of owners to be held to determine whether or not to proceed with the work, now estimated to cost \$7.9-million, and rising.

That would take the bulk of our reserves at a time of great economic uncertainty. Moreover, just because the funds are in our reserves does not mean that it is prudent for the bulk of them

to be spent on this project, which has many optional elements. Invariably, the reserves will have to be replenished; indeed, this is mandated by law. And there is only one way to rebuild those reserves: by raising condominium fees.

Our condominium fees have already risen disproportionately, and above inflation or cost-of-living rises, over the past decade. The number of our direct and indirect employees has also risen, arguably without a commensurate improvement in the lifestyle being afforded to unit owners. And those increases of staff have now placed what Montebello management regards as a strain on available office space at the Community Center, thereby triggering the demand for upgraded office space.

It is worth asking, then, what the benefits are to owners of this growth in staff and contractors, which in turn demands a reconstruction of our Community Center (ie: a center designed for the community of Montebello owners)?

But before we get to the merits of the work on the Center, let us first examine whether this unilateral commitment of the majority of our cash reserves to this project (at a time of great and protracted economic uncertainty) was, in fact, undertaken transparently in accordance with our own by-laws.

As one owner noted to me, the “renovations” were all claimed to be “replacements” and not “improvements,” to get around the need for a vote on the project by unit owners. However, Article 5, Section 5.6 states: “Additions, alterations or improvements costing in excess of one percent requires a majority vote.”¹ The

1 Section 5.6. Additions, Alterations or Improvements by the Board of directors. Except during the Declarant Control Period, whenever in the judgment of the Board of Directors the common

elements shall require additions, alterations or improvements costing in excess of one percent of the total annual assessment for common expenses for that fiscal year during any period of twelve consecutive months, the making of such additions, alterations or improvements requires a Majority Vote, and the Board of Directors shall assess all unit owners benefited for the cost thereof as a common expense (or Limited Common Expense). Any additions, alterations or improvements costing one percent

Cover:

Harper's Ferry, W. Va., by Alex Biero

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CC reno concerns

requirement for a vote under Section 5.6 applies equally to additions and alterations as well as improvements (the key word is “or”), given that there can be no subterfuge to get around “alterations.”

But even that does not get to the heart of the issue: are the proposed works necessary, or are they merely deemed by the Board to be desirable (in the Board’s opinion)?

Certainly, if certain work is undertaken which requires an alteration in, for example, some aspect of the HVAC system of the offices, then that would, or could, trigger the need to take down all existing ducting, and therefore require the removal of walls, ceilings, etc. In other words: if this, then that.

But we have had no discussion of the necessity for the work which triggers the construction of the whole house of cards. The case for a sweeping transformation of the Community Center based on the premise that we had to tear down the walls and ceilings

of the total annual assessment for common expenses for that fiscal year or less during any period of twelve consecutive months may be made by the Board of Directors without approval of the unit owners and the cost thereof shall constitute a common expense or Limited Common Expense, depending on the nature of the additions, alterations or improvements. Notwithstanding the foregoing, if, in the opinion of not less than eighty percent of the members of the Board of Directors, such additions, alterations or improvements are exclusively or substantially exclusively for the benefit of the unit owners requesting the same, such requesting unit owners shall be assessed therefor in such proportion as they jointly approve or, if they are unable to agree thereon, in such proportion as may be determined by the Board of Directors.

anyway may not be there. And certainly does not *have* to be there if we are to view this project in the light of the damage it does to our financial reserves at this particular time in the economy.

We are now reviewing all of the available studies on our facilities and reserves, undertaken in recent years by the contractor, FEA. What is significant is that these studies, in fact, show that virtually all the existing systems in the Community Center are in good condition, the highest level of approval by the surveyor, and *not* in need of replacement. So the survey engineers have indicated that they are aware that the Board has slated certain systems for replacement, but not because the engineers required the changes.

In other words, the bulk of the proposed work is based on the desire of the Board and our hired management, and not on a legally-required mandate to undertake work to conform to code.

Most owners agree on the need for constant maintenance and a steady investment in cosmetic and substantive improvement. But that is not what has been undertaken, unilaterally and without full consultation with the owners.

What is significant is that the outpouring of passionate concern by unit owners has been clear in articulating opposition to the project as it stands at present. What has been equally significant is the level of anger and vitriol — including verbal *ad hominem* slanderous and reprehensible abuse of my wife — by a couple of supporters of the “renovation.” Indeed, in our request for petition votes, as noted, there were about a quarter of owners who had thus far petitioned in writing in favor of a Montebello-wide vote on whether to cancel the project as it now stands. And there were only four valid votes which opposed this motion.

Some of the comments written to us by petitioners included²:

2 Full text of all correspondence is held on file.

“My wife and I have lived in Montebello since 2000 during which time condo fees have more than doubled. With the advent of the CC renovation project, the Board of Directors (BOD) wasted no time in ramping up the rate of condo fee increase. This project will be their excuse for future year increases by their own public statements. The BOD is brazenly conditioning owners to this mindset.”

“I expect we will see substantial decreases in property valuations and taxes in the very near future due to the impact of COVID-19. I have minimal expectation that the Montebello BOD will do the same for condo fees.”

“My wife and I have been owners at Montebello since [the 1980s]. We have been disappointed over the years with the low rate of increase in value of our unit. We believe the primary reason is the constantly increasing Condominium Fees. I believe the two reasons for this are the many refurbishings for which there has been little return of value plus the increase of personnel. The latest refurbishing is the \$7+ million for the Community Center. Another is the rebuilding the path in our wooded areas. Take a look at the cost of this simple project compared to benefits. We have a nice path. Perhaps that could be included as well in your request for cancellation. Another area of expenditure is personnel. The number of units or condos at Montebello have not increased but the number of personnel has greatly increased. Technology plus improved equipment should provide for less employees, not more.”

“This is the perfect time to cancel — or at least put the brakes on this huge expenditure. Life has totally changed in a very short time. The economy has been impacted forever. Also this project had so few people who even bothered to ‘pick colors and design features’ that, to me, says something right there. Our fees are going *way* high and we

CC reno concerns

seem to drop hundreds of thousands on questionable projects like 'invasive weeds' – let's get real. We don't need the Community Center renovations at this point in time. I agree, it will not add value to our homes."

"I never understood the need to do this renovation. It was sold on a false premise that the money was there and it wouldn't cost us anything. The advocates omitted the fact that the reserves would have to be made up which we are having hefty condo fee increases now and in the future. I personally love the way the lounge area looks with the two raised platforms. I would not object to tweaks on the order of about \$1M to do some minor rearrangements such as making a better use of the space in front of the locker rooms and perhaps finding room for two more offices."

"Do we know enough about the future to go ahead? Is the economy going to collapse completely? Will the recovery take months? Years? Will there be a second wave of COVID-19? Even the experts either disagree or admit frankly they don't know. Does it behoove us as a community to engage in an optional spending spree right now? Good sense tells me the answer is no. In the face of all the unknowns and maybes, I have to vote no. We just don't know enough to go ahead."

"Not only should the plans to renovate the CC be postponed, [but] the entire plan, including picnic hill, should be stopped, reconsidered, and if residents agree, renovations should be done incrementally, as required. Also, many owners would like to know how many employees have been added to the Montebello payroll in, say, the last 20 years: both office personnel, and maintenance, contractors, etc. After all, there are the same number of units, and the same amount of acreage. When we moved to Montebello 18-1/2 years ago, our hallways were vacuumed daily. That is not the case anymore. Our condo fees keep going up, and

past high cost renovations have still not amounted to property values here keeping up with surrounding condos."

"I have opposed these outrageous spending plans but have been voted down at Board meetings. Other condos do not have all of our amenities but our condo fees have to get under control."

"In recent years our condo fees have risen at twice the US rate of inflation. The Community Center project will make it worse. Given our history, we can expect that the project will cost more, take longer, and be more disruptive than promised, and, that life at MB won't improve anywhere nearly as much as promised."

"Please count me in, and thank you for doing this. My dealings with the board in the past regarding other unneeded, expensive renovations was beyond unpleasant, to include unprovoked personal drunken attacks/name calling of me, by board members in the community center bar ..."

"Let us know what else we can do to defeat the spending binge of some of the board members. They seem to live in a dream world."

"The vote should be single issue yes or no vote – no multiple options."

"I hope that in a democratic country, [and] a political ideology and system that Montebello residents reside under, the voice of the majority will be respected, heard and implemented. I am puzzled and surprised that Montebello owners are subjugated to the Board Members untenable, capricious expenditure project that the realities of the day cannot accommodate! What are we shy about? Is this democracy or autocracy?"

"I strongly believe that these renovations will actually do the opposite of what some people feel these renovations will accomplish. It will actually outprice us in the market and ruin all the great things about Montebello. No-one talks about the

increase in fees in other areas as well, if spending almost \$8M, restaurant rent would go up, hair dressers rent would go up, cost of meals would go up, etc."

"I was never in favor of the community center renovation and do not want MY reserve funds spent that way!"

"I was saddened to read the *Montebello Times* and the business as usual article [May 2020]. It is disheartening to be a resident and feel like you can never make a difference in the eyes and ears of the Board. Guaranteed to fall on deaf ears. The comment that we live in an 'affluent community' and we should be able to stomach the rate hikes was pretentious and assuming. I don't know if I want to live in a community that feels that way and am seriously thinking of selling my unit that my father owned since 1989."

These were just some extracts from a few of the respondents to the petition.

To be clear: the Board which made the decision on the Community Center project was in office before the current economic crisis hit, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but even then, the Board allowed the scheme to grow "like Topsy," without coherence or a sound economic or legal basis.

But the project must now be seen in the light of reality. It does not deliver what the owners of Montebello want, and is not, in fact, primarily about them, but about issues evolving from, for instance, the increase in staffing levels. That, too, is an issue which needs to be raised as it is part of the genesis for the works program.

Any Montebello owners who have not yet done so, and wish to, should send an email to Pamela Copley at PvonGruber@aol.com, noting their support for the demand for a vote by owners to cancel the Community Center project in its present form. 📧

by the numbers

COVID at Montebello – are we fortunate or prudent?

By Amy Friedlander

We have been fortunate at Montebello. As of this writing, we have experienced only two reported people infected (i.e., cases) with the coronavirus and no reported deaths.

But our good fortune was not preordained. On the contrary,

Montebello is about 36,000 people per square mile. Now we can compare our COVID-19 status with that of an area with a similar population density.

There is one jurisdiction in the United States with a population density similar to that of Montebello: Brooklyn, NY. And here are some comparisons between Montebello and Brooklyn:

wearing face masks and gloves; and (3) residents who have followed the Board's recommendations by staying in their units as much as possible, observing physical distancing recommendations and wearing face coverings and gloves when leaving their units.

The lesson, in my view, is clear: we have cultivated our good fortune. Let's

Localities	Land and Population			COVID Cases and Deaths as of May 16, 2020				
	Land Area in sq. Miles	Population	Population Density (Persons per sq. mile)	Cases	Cases per sq. Mile	Deaths	Deaths per sq. Mile	Cases per 1,000 pop.
Brooklyn, NY	70	2,570,800	36,824	51,931	747	6,383	91.84	20.20
Montebello	1/20	1,800	36,000	2	40	0	0	1.11

As Matthew Marlay informed us in his interesting “Montebello by the Numbers” articles in the January 19, 2017 and July 13, 2017 issues of *The Montebello Voice*, the median age of Montebello residents is 61.1 years, meaning that half of our residents are older than that and half are younger. In other words, over half of Montebello residents are at higher risk for developing serious complications from COVID-19 illness, including higher rates of death, than those under 61.

As the age of our population seems to predispose our community to severe consequences from the infection, population density can contribute to the spread of the disease. And Montebello has a high population density.

The population of Montebello is about 1,800 people in an area of approximately 1/20 of a square mile. This land area includes all of Montebello – buildings, roads, woods, everything. Since we occupy only 1/20 of a square mile, we have to multiply the actual number of people at Montebello by 20 (that is, 1,800 x 20). And this is how we know that the population density of

With a population density roughly that of Montebello (Brooklyn's 36,824 to Montebello's 36,000, or 1.0229 times), as of May 16, 2020 Brooklyn had 51,931 cases to our 2. Put differently, it had over 20 cases per 1,000 population to our 1.11. And it had roughly 2.5 deaths per 1,000 population to our zero.

I also looked at a few other jurisdictions but chose Brooklyn because the similarity in population density, given the risk of contagion posed by being in close proximity with other people, seemed to be the most relevant variable for this analysis. If you are interested in looking at the entire chart I developed, contact me at acfrie@cox.net and I will send it to you.

So why have we been so fortunate? In my view, our good fortune has rested on three mutually reinforcing pillars: (1) a Board that has given us accurate and timely information and recommendations on how to avoid getting infected with the coronavirus and how to avoid the spread of COVID-19; (2) staff that has implemented the Board's recommendations by sanitizing common areas daily three times a day while

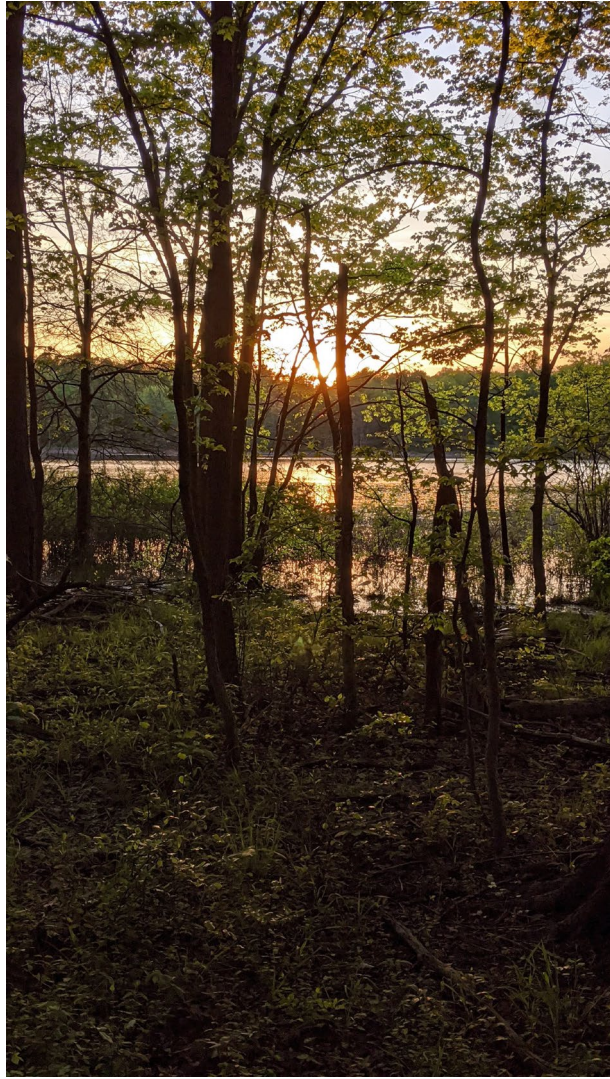
build a bright future for Montebello on the foundation of the constructive partnership of Board, staff and residents, as we look forward to a time when this difficult period is behind us.

In closing, I thank Matthew Marlay for the constructive partnership we have had in finding and analyzing the data for this article. It has been a true COVID-19-era partnership: we have never met, but we have worked together using available technology. I look forward to meeting him in person. 🍷

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

serenity



serenity



Foot bridge over Potomac

Photos by Alex Beiro

Wine 101

No such thing as a dumb question

By Paul Jameson

Over the years, I've gotten a fair number of questions about wine.

Perhaps you've always wondered something. Feel free to ask, and I'll see if I can give some sort of answer. To start things off, *Montebello Voice's* own Mikhailina Karina asked me five questions that I will reproduce here.

Q: *I've been in a number of homes where people have artsy wine sculptures on their dining room walls or cabinets because they like to display their bottles. When my husband saw this, he was appalled in his French manner — although beautifully displayed, wine bottles should not be exposed to the sun. Perhaps people would consider displaying empty wine bottles. We store ours in racks on the floor of our linen closet.*

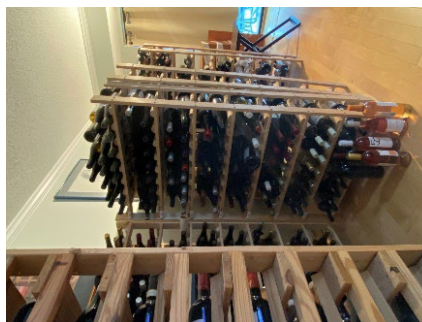
A: Sunlight is bottled wine's enemy. When I first moved into Montebello, and put my wines into racks in a bedroom, I soon discovered that the rising sun directly blasted the wines, so I put up some blackout curtains. Before moving to Montebello, I had opened over the years some really amazing wines, and kept a number of the bottles, like Bordeaux from the '50s, Château Lafite, Domaine Romanée-Conti, etc., and displayed the empty bottles. Alas, not something that survived the downsizing. Keeping some empty bottles of really special wine on display is fine, but if there's still wine in it, keep the bottle out of the sun.

Q: *Following up on storage, is there a compelling reason for wine fridges? Many large homes have them. What are optimal places and methods for storing wine, as well as other alcoholic beverages, in condos? One neighbor has a cart/bar in her dining room. This is a climate control question.*

A: I have a friend who spent \$12,000 on a wine cabinet that holds something like 300 bottles in a temperature-controlled setting. There may be about \$12,000 worth of wine in it, but he just doubled the cost of his wine. I have more than 300 bottles, and when I moved into Montebello, storing them in fancy cabinets did not seem like a good option. They are just stored on inexpensive racks in a bedroom that I curtained off from the sun (but the curtains can be opened when the sun isn't shining). In the winter I close the HVAC vent right over the wine so heat doesn't blast directly on the wines, and open it when air conditioning goes on in late spring, but of course entropy ensures that the temperature equalizes over the whole condo unit.

This is perfectly fine for virtually all wine. My wine cabinet friend, who previously had a temperature-controlled basement storage, once had a "dualing cellars" tasting. He and another friend had bought the same 1982 Bordeaux wines when they were first offered for futures. The other friend didn't take the fastidious care to store in temperature controlled settings that Mr. Wine Cabinet did. So we blind tasted the same wines from two different cellar conditions. The results were ... subtle. Sometimes the group consensus went towards the bottle less scrupulously stored. Sometimes the extra heat accelerates the maturing process so that the wines are more approachable.

I have a six-bottle wine refrigerator that I cycle a sparkling, a rosé, and four white wines through. It keeps wine not quite so blastingly cold as a refrigerator does, and they fit just fine in a Montebello condo.



As for other alcoholic beverages such as distilled spirits, they can be handled less delicately. Beer, just try to drink it up a few months after you buy it, but again, nothing special.

Q: *Cooking with wine. I buy very cheap white wine at Lidl or Aldi for my baked fish. I've heard chefs say you should use decent drinking wine even for cooking. But since the alcohol cooks out and everything gets mixed with sauces, is there a good reason? What are some good whites and reds for cooking? Which dishes benefit from them?*

A: Back in the day, upper class and upper-middle-class families would buy cooking sherry, which is basically sherry with salt added, so that the cook wouldn't swig from it. These days, even cheap Aldi wine is not really "bad" wine. I believe that the subtleties of really good wine get blasted out with cooking, and I'd be skeptical of someone who insists they can distinguish boeuf bourguignon made with Trefethen Pinot Noir and made with Domaine Romanée-Conti. For beef Stroganoff, I don't use cooking sherry, but use an inexpensive Amontillado sherry (and have at times used a New York "sherry" bought at Giant). If you really want to cook with an expensive wine, pour that wine into a glass and drink it as you cook, and pour something less expensive into the dish.

Probably not all dishes benefit from having wine added, but I say, heck, experiment.

oenology

Q: *Back to my husband's peculiar habits from his culture. Like his dad, he always places a rubber stopper on the bottle and pumps out air. I've never seen anyone else do it. What is the chemistry/physics behind it and should be people be doing it? Likewise, we have one of those pouring gizmos that look really cool and I pretend I can taste the difference. Again, reason to use them? And final related question, airing out wine in decanters.*

A: Wine in contact with air “oxidizes.” And here is where it gets complicated. Wine can be made in an “oxidative” or a “reductive” manner, and wine can even go through micro-oxidation, but that’s getting a little too much into the weeds. Once a bottle of wine is opened, do you want to expose it to more, or to less, oxygen? Those fancy pouring gizmos, which I confess to using from time to time myself, are meant to get more oxygen into wine, which has the effect of opening it up and releasing more of the aromas and flavors that make wine worth the extra money it costs compared to Coca Cola.

But like everything else, too much of a good thing becomes a not good thing, and at some point a wine sitting out and exposed to oxygen starts to taste not so very good. It’s been oxidized. Drink enough wine and you’ll know what that’s like. Once you’ve done your initial aeration of the wine, you want to slow down that process. There are multiple ways to do this. The easiest is to stick the wine in the refrigerator (stoppered in some way, of course). Wine lasts much longer (but not forever) in the refrigerator. For red wine, the wine is too cold to drink straight out of the refrigerator, so you either have to let it sit out until it reaches room temperature, or you have to stick it in the microwave for a bit. This takes some experimentation to get it right without cooking the wine, so you may lose some wine along the way.

Another way is to pump the air out. This tends to slow down but not stop oxidation, so it will last longer after be-

ing opened. My preferred method is to squirt some argon gas into the bottle. Argon is heavier than air, so it will sit between the wine and the air and block the air, without interacting with the wine. I either use a spray can, if I’ve uncorked (or unscrewed) the bottle, or I may use a Coravin, which pokes a hollow needle through the cork and replaces the volume of wine with argon. But nothing will keep an opened wine good forever.

Decanting has a similar effect as those aerator devices. It can be helpful for younger wines. It also has a positive effect on higher end wines. I once brought a 1982 Château Margaux to a fancy New York restaurant, and they decanted it and poured it. At first, I was underwhelmed and thought, “this is okay for a 1982 Margaux, but that’s about it.” But about an hour later, it opened up in the decanter and it was amazing. It’s always tricky to know how long to decant older wines, because they can oxidize and lose their charm, and while you can let oxygen into wine, you can’t take it out again. So I err on the side of not waiting too long after decanting.

Decanting is also useful if you have a wine with sediment. When decanting such wine, watch the wine flowing through the neck of the bottle carefully, and stop the instant you start seeing sediment about to flow out.

Q: *Let’s talk about wine glasses, i.e., the different shapes and sizes for whites, reds, and sparkling*

A: A company called Riedel makes different shaped wine glasses for different wines, and they go around the world putting on demonstrations that the shape of the glass really makes a difference. The glasses below are, left to right, for Red Burgundy/Pinot Noir, Bordeaux/Cabernet Sauvignon, White Burgundy/big Chardonnay, and now I forget exactly which white wine the last one is for. I don’t use these glasses very often. I only



have one each, so can’t share wine with others using those glasses.

My “everyday” glasses have one size for red, one size for white, and one size for sparkling wines. As you can see by the bottle next to them, they’re relatively large, so when you pour in a couple of ounces at a time, there’s plenty of room to swirl the wine and focus the



aromas. I bought them from Wine Enthusiast, and though they say they’re “unbreakable,” I’ve broken quite a few of them. But they’re not that expensive, and I have eight of the red wine glasses, which is about the maximum guests for a sit-down dinner in a Montebello condo. I do have cases of smaller sturdier glasses that I might use for tastings involving multiple wines at once, but that’s not something most people have to worry about.

You basically want wine glasses that are clear, without cut glass aspects, large enough, and inexpensive enough that you’re not heartbroken from the inevitable breakage.

Now we’ll find out in anyone has been reading these articles. If you have any wine questions, you can send them to me via *The Montebello Voice*. When we get enough questions to justify another article, we’ll do our best to answer them. 🍷

Quaker guns

By Raymond Houck

Fort Buffalo once stood in the area of Leesburg Pike near the Seven Corners intersection in the Falls Church section of Fairfax County, just south of Route 50 (Arlington Blvd). An earthwork fortification built by the 21st New York Infantry of the Union army in 1861, the fort was named for the troops' hometown of Buffalo, New York.

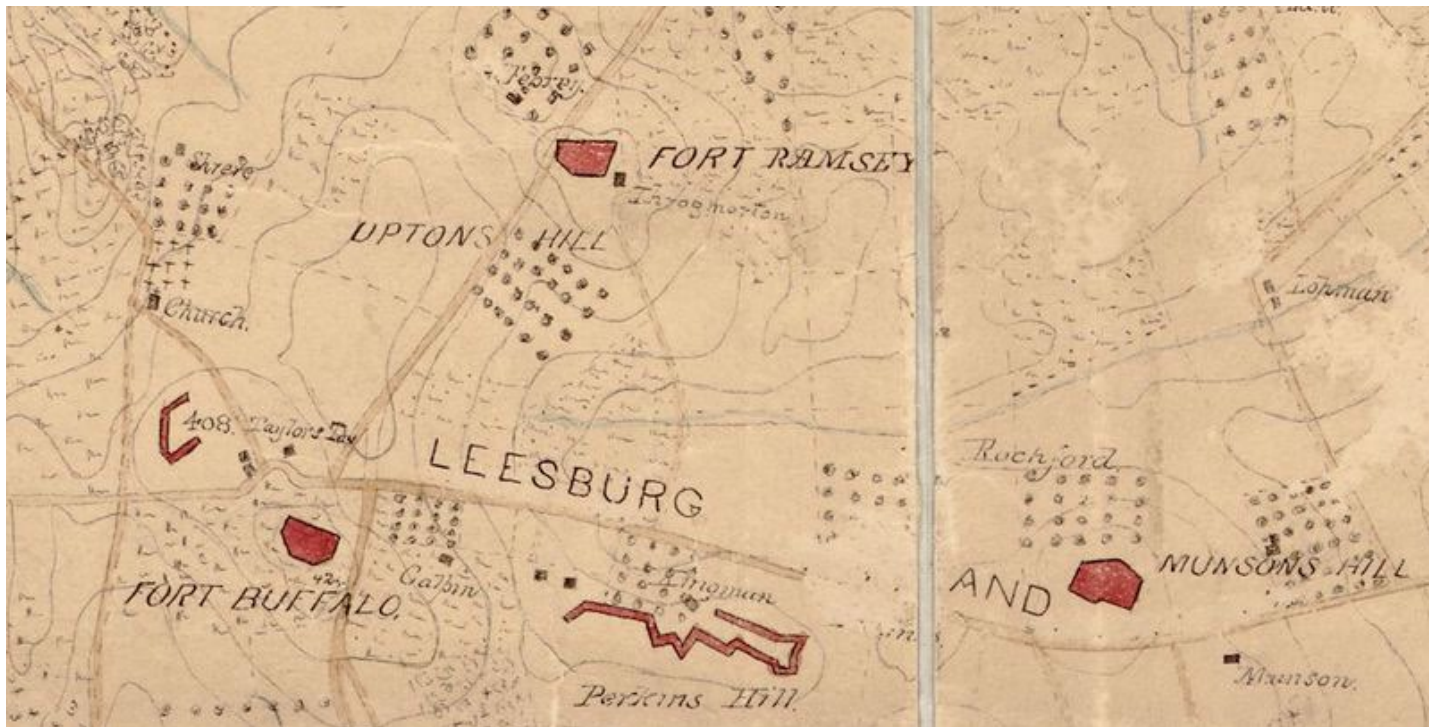
During the Civil War, a concentration of forts existed in the Seven Cor-

erate troops' encampment over on Munson Hill. The Federals sent aloft a balloon named "Union" that was manned by the country's first military aeronaut, Thaddeus Lower, on his first official mission. As Lower swayed over the area between Munson Hill and Ball's Crossroads in Arlington, Lieutenant Thomas Rosser, the commander at Munson Hill, had his artillery fire at the balloon. The Union quickly winched in the balloon, but not before Lower noticed the large cannons on Munson Hill.

Back safely on the ground at Fort

were non-violent, but they proved effective in deterring the Confederates from attacking their fort since they now believed it was heavily armed.

Fast forward to the 1950s, the Seven Corners Shopping Center and the nearby community were developed on land once part of, and surrounding, Fort Buffalo. If you are heading east on Leesburg Pike (driving from Falls Church City towards Alexandria), just after Route 50 you can spot the remnants of Fort Buffalo on your right, just before the Seven Corners Shopping Center on your left. High up on Buffalo



ners area and these structures were used in the Federal defense of Washington. Initially occupied by troops from the Union Army led by Brig. Gen. Irvin McDowell during the First Manassas Campaign, the fort was briefly occupied by the Confederate Army following the Federal defeat in July 1861.

In late 1861, the Union troops occupied Fort Buffalo. On reconnaissance, they noticed an ominous looking cannon aimed at them from the Confed-

Buffalo, Lower told his fellow soldiers about what he had spied from the air. Knowing they were outgunned and outnumbered, they devised a plan. They began cutting down large ash trees with thick trunks from the surrounding forest. After they cleared the trunks of branches and leaves, the soldiers tarred them black and mounted them on the earthen walls of Fort Buffalo. They called them "Quaker Guns" since they could not really shoot and

Ridge, there still stands a watch tower from the active days of Fort Buffalo, where once there were "Quaker Guns" to defend the fort. 🏰

Ah, the joys of pet ownership!

By Sarah Newcomb

My late rescue pets were the joy of my lifetime. My sweet Shih Tzu, Panda, and her Japanese Chin mix pal, Moose, both from the Alexandria shelter, provided me a lifetime of love, but also a lifetime of medical issues. Panda exhibited epilepsy a couple of weeks in. She later succumbed to a years-long battle with nasal cancer. Moose needed delicate spinal surgery initially and died of a brain tumor over a decade later. I was committed to supporting both pets with a lifetime of expensive, human-grade medicines they needed and administering meds on a meticulous schedule. Any late doses could produce a seizure for Panda.

I'm laying this out – not just to say how much I loved them both – but also to state that medically, welcoming my new pets, Kenji and Saki, was not my first rodeo. After what I thought were weird symptoms that Saki displayed as a puppy, she began to have full-blown seizures when she entered her second year. Then my second journey using human-grade anti-seizure, and meticulously administered medicines began.

Unlike my former pets, Saki has the most delicate little nose on the planet. Forget pill pockets. I began her program of anti-seizure medication twice a day by concealing her capsules in liverwurst. This had worked for decades for my previous pets. After several months, Saki's romance with liverwurst ended. When I wrapped her medication in a ball of liverwurst, Saki sniffed it, and it was “no-go.”

Undeterred (read “desperate”), I moved on to my back-up Plan B: peanut butter. This is usually a big winner with dogs. Peanut butter requires much more finesse and manual dexterity than liverwurst, which stays where you put it. Peanut butter wrapped around a

tiny capsule is good and slippery for me to hang onto.

The now-suspicious Saki, would only approach the offering at my arm's length so she precluded any possibility that I might grab her. Sticking out the full length of her neck, followed by the full length of her tongue, Saki tried to delicately lick the peanut butter off the capsule, without having to take the

the microwave, remove the soft butter and wrap the capsule. Presented with another gooey treat, Saki began her backing-up-extending-neck-and-tongue maneuver. However, I had created an extender from a Bounty paper towel. I put the butter-wrapped capsule on the end of the folded paper, and slowly proffered it at arm's length toward Saki's tongue-plus-fully extend-



Saki

capsule into her mouth. The result: pill plus peanut butter on the floor, the dog and the owner. Trying to gently push the capsule into Saki's mouth only yielded a dog with an icky, peanut-butter covered face.

Thank goodness for my years volunteering at the animal shelter, where I learned Plan C: butter. Soften pats of butter gently in the microwave. After allowing two minutes resting these in

Photo by Rubylett Photography

ed-neck. Bingo! The towel held steady long enough for Saki to lick up her medicine. Cheers abounded from my imaginary viewing audience.

Saki and I just accomplished one of two administrations of anti-seizure medicine that she requires on time today. As I clean up Plans A through C, I wonder: how many more are coming for us in the next decade? 🐾

strolls



Photos by Dian McDonald
The Montebello Voice

bloomers



final glance



Photo by Azita Mashayekhi