

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

study history

July 6, 2020



Update on the call to vote on the Montebello Community Center project

By Gregory Copley

Firstly, thank you all for your support for a call for the Board of our Unit Owners Association to authorize a vote on whether or not to proceed with the approximately \$8-million project to reconstruct the Community Center at this time.

As you know, the Board has rejected that petition, and issued an extensive statement to threaten petition signers so that they would remove themselves from the petition. A number of you have done so, and we know that others have told the MCUCOA that they wished to be removed from the petition list. Ideally, those who have advised the MCUCOA but have not advised us should confirm to me that they wish their names to be removed from the petition.

So this is a break-point in the campaign. A handful of Board members originally initiated the program, which has grown to around \$8-million of our reserves, and yet the Board refused almost a quarter of the owners who merely asked for a vote on whether it should proceed at this time due to the economic ramifications of the COVID-19 crisis.

However, legally, there was absolutely no case that the Board could make to suggest that all signatories to the petition would be liable for any legal action which someone might take to force the Board to call for a vote. That was a breathtaking display of brutal intimidation. Firstly, a legal challenge would (a) be undertaken only by individuals who actually commit to such a lawsuit, not by the signatories to the petition; and (b) would have had to result in a Board victory for the Board to then petition the judge to assign the Board's legal costs to be met by the plaintiffs, something which is very rarely successful, and then only in the case of a malicious or frivolous lawsuit (which this demonstrably would not be). In other words: unlikely to happen, even in the event that the lawsuit did not prevail.

The reality is that the dramatic lengths which the Board (or key members of it) have gone to suppress this simple request for a vote highlights that there is something very wrong.

The Board decided on this project; it was never put to a vote. The only votes and interactions with owners were on issues to do with color schemes and the like. So we had almost a quarter of the owners just ask for a vote, and the Board responds in this fashion, rather than answer our questions or allow owners to say yes or no. What does that tell you?

We sought some transparency in the process, and to understand why no open and competitive bidding was undertaken before spending the bulk of OUR financial reserves. Instead, we were met with vague platitudes and a stubborn refusal to answer specific questions. Or to allow a vote. What could motivate those few people who dominate the Board (and intimidate new members of it) to refuse requests for honest information, or for a vote? If they believe that they have a case that the CC project is in our vital interests, why not go for an open vote on it. After all, even if they were correct about the project and the majority of owners rejected it, would they be right to impose their view on the owners?

In drafting the petition, we were completely prepared to abide by the result of the vote. Clearly those few Board members did not want to risk our legally valid request for a vote.

What has concerned me is that the Board has, with its laughable, ad hominem diatribe against me, managed to intimidate a lot of Montebello owners into withdrawing from the petition. The tragedy is that so many people were prepared merely to surrender to intimidation like this, even though it will cost them dearly in financial terms over the coming years. Will the new CC be more pleasant than the present one? Probably. But why can't we make the decision ourselves? Who benefits from this enor-

mous expenditure, which actually gives a disproportionately small improvement in our amenities compared with the high cost of it?

As I have noted in the past few months, I have to get back to work, and this (as it has during the past 18+ years we have owned a unit at Montebello) means going back on the road to work with governments around the world. My wife and I have other homes in other parts of the US and the world, so arguably we can walk away from this issue. But many Montebellans cannot walk away. So I hope that this issue will raise awareness when it comes to voting for the Board members (or standing for the Board) in the next elections.

Thank you for your support, and warmest wishes. 🍷

Misha the Magnificent

Cover photo by Lisa L. Stedge

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Get it done

By Rebecca Long Hayden

At first I favored postponing the community center renovation because of the pandemic, but after reading many pros and cons, I changed my mind. Much money and time has already been spent on the project, plus if you carefully read the “pros,” it comes to light the money is ear-marked and legally can’t be applied to anything else (such as a reduction in condo fees).

Will condo fees go up? They always do, because of many factors, but the renovation isn’t one of them. The fees factored heavily in our decision to buy at Montebello, but we did an analysis of what it cost to live in and maintain our single-family home, what services and amenities are available at other condos in the area, and at what price. Montebello compared favorably, but the reality is, over time, fees will go up. We think Montebello has done a reasonably good job of controlling the rate of increase.

The question has been raised: “Will our lives be better to any measurable extent if the renovation goes forward?”

I’ll raise another question: Will our lives be worse if the CC closes down?

That could happen because the CC no longer meets county fire codes, occupancy codes, or if it becomes unsafe because other infrastructure improvements have not been made? This has happened to bridges, overpasses, and other infrastructures all over the country because those responsible put off improvements and repairs year after year after year.

As for redesigning the project to accommodate pandemic conditions *ad infinitum*, there are already better treatments, and scientists predict a vaccine within six months to a year. That may be optimistic, but the pandemic will end.

There’s a saying so common in Texas I don’t even know if it’s “bad” language: It’s time to “stop dickin’ around and get it done.”

PS – I originally agreed to sign, but by the time the petition arrived under my door, I had changed my mind, and

I DID NOT sign or return it. When I checked, I found my unit number was on the petition anyway. Anyone who, like me, had reservations after the fact should check the petition by contacting: Petitionenquiry@montebello.org 📧



Montebello’s much-lauded BuildingLink should be renamed the MissingLink. The image above, captured today, still harkens to the pre-COVID days with full schedules of events and activities last January. We’re in July. We have a new staff person who diligently sends out café specials every day. Could our award-winning communicators update the site to include current information that pertains to our reality: public health announcements, access to Montebello amenities, answers to common questions? Ditto for the lobby monitors that still beg Touch Me!! (Whenever I walk past them, Janet’s song from The Rocky Horror Picture Show comes to mind). – MK

Eight years, two rooms

By Bob Shea

Eight years in two rooms.....

no, that is not some court-imposed house arrest. Rather, it was the education plan for kids in my neighborhood attending Severance Grammar School in a very small town in New Hampshire.

The physical layout: A front door opening into a wide hallway with a classroom to the left and one to the right. The walls had lines of coat hooks; the ones to the left higher on the wall than the ones on the right due to the size of students. At the end of the hall were the boys' and girls' restrooms. Each classroom had about 30 desks attached to the floor – cast-iron frames with wooden desk tops and inkwell holes, and the seat of one student attached to the desk immediately behind. The classroom for the lower grades had small chairs that could be put into a circle for reading exercises.

Grades 1 through 4 were in one room, and grades 5 through 8 across the hall. One teacher in each room, an academic juggler, attempting to teach four grades simultaneously while avoiding chaos and maintaining her sanity.

My first grade teacher was Miss Jamroz. Starting my education, I had a stuttering problem. Her solution was to tell me, “Get away from me until you can talk correctly.” It worked. So much for years of special attention and speech therapy. Miss Jamroz left after that year.

In the second grade, our teacher was Miss Leary, fresh out of teachers’ college. All I remember about her was that she was young, blonde, and sat at her desk about once a week and cried. She did not return the next year being re-

placed by Mrs. Hart. She was the only married teacher we ever had at Severance. Looking back she was like a combination of your favorite aunt and a drill sergeant. She was in charge. There was no doubt.

As a young student, I had one goal in life. I wanted to eventually be the 8th

I was quiet, non-disruptive, and one less headache for the poor teacher.

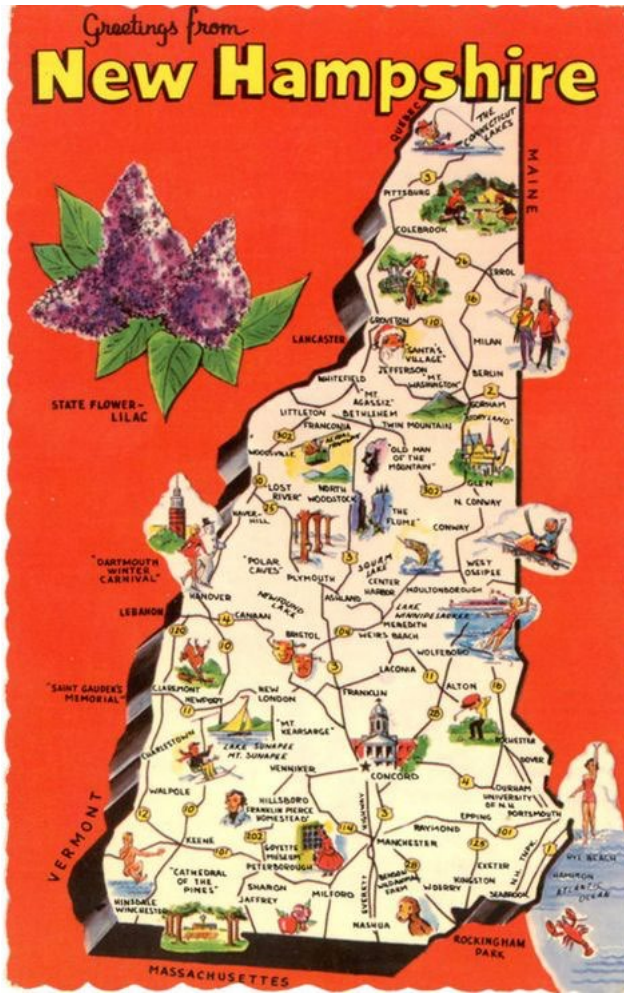
The big event was to move to the 5th grade, which meant a new classroom across the hall. Enter Miss Adela Pinas for the next four years. She lived in a boarding house nearby during the week and went home to Lawrence, Massachusetts each weekend. Her tasks were more challenging, for her students could not be given endless hours of cursive writing drills, coloring, or reading about Dick, Jane, Spot, and Puff.

Her solution was long columns of 5-digit numbers on the blackboard. Yes, real blackboards with dusty chalk and erasers. We had to copy the numbers, add them up, and turn in the results. Where they went, only Miss Pinas knew as we never got our work back. In September, we always had a writing project on “what I did last summer.” It too went into the black hole of academic work that Miss Pinas loved and controlled.

Once a month an itinerant school nurse showed up. I am not sure what Miss Cronin did except once a year she gave an eye exam in the hallway. I did not want to wear glasses so I would always be in the middle of the line, which allowed me to memorize the letters on the eye chart. I could have recited them for Miss Cronin with a paper bag over my head. I passed every year.

Once a week, Miss Kelly, the music teacher, arrived. The “big kids” classroom had an upright piano, and we learned season-appropriate songs after singing the musical scale for her. I was told to stand in the back row and mouth the words – a talented singer I was not.

There were morning and afternoon recesses in the dusty school yard. The length of the recess was determined by how frazzled the teachers were on a



grade boy who was in charge of putting the wood into the large stove that heated each classroom. My life’s goal was thwarted in the 4th grade when the town installed oil heat in the building. The first of my life’s setbacks.

I quickly learned that the way to excel was to do your work as you learned what the kids in the upper grades were doing. It always worked until there was no higher grade in the same classroom. I had found the library in the nearby city and always had a book in my desk.

schooled

given day. Some days we would have 45 minutes of dodge ball, red rover, and snowball fights. The girls skipped rope. Like the postman, neither rain nor snow or anything canceled playtime. Recess would end when Miss Pinas rang a brass bell with a handle, and we trooped back in, hanging scarves, mittens, and parkas on the proper hooks in the hallway.

We walked to and from school. For me about 15 minutes each way, and we went home for lunch. There were no school buses, or lines of moms in SUVs picking up and dropping off kids wearing backpacks of needed supplies. Most families had one car; dad used it to go to work, and mom stayed home. Life was simple, and we thought we were being educated.

At the end of eight years, there was a graduation at the town hall, combined with the other grammar school in the town center. There were 4 of us that year from Severance Grammar School, three boys and one girl. Someone made a speech; parents smiled; cookies and Kool Aid were served; and we were officially liberated from eight years in two rooms.

Educated? In some ways, but nothing approaching what today we know is essential. Being a blue-collar town, a suburb of a blue-collar city, we were prepared to go to high school and assume our predestined role in society. College was only something the “rich kids” thought about. Yet, there was a way out. I was the first Severance Grammar School graduate to ever go to college. Luck, mentors later in life, and a self-imposed determination not to go to work in the mills played a role.

I escaped despite the best efforts of Miss Jamroz, Miss Leary, Mrs. Hart, and Miss Pinas, or maybe because of them. Who knows? 🍷



*Photos by Joel Miller and
Dian McDonald*

Who wants to go for a car ride?

By *Raymond Houck*

During these days of social distancing and COVID-19 quarantine, one of our favorite and safe activities is to load our dogs, Abby and Walden, into the car and take a ride to some interesting place in the DMV area. Sometimes we have a specific destination planned, while on other trips where we end up is completely at random. Either way, our rides are adventures of discovery, and I often think back to when I was a young boy and my family started going on similar, short road trips.

We lived in an affluent suburb of Pittsburgh and had everything we needed in life. I was not sure why my parents wanted to drive into the past of old homes and places that were — what seemed to me — like memories of the bad, old days. However, as these trips continued, I discovered these rides were interesting, and I learned many fun facts along the way while gaining a better understanding of my parents and of my legacy.

As a boy, my family would occasionally go for a ride after church, which often turned into a much longer drive around Western Pennsylvania and beyond. It was always an educational trip filled with information and family lore. Often it was to visit relatives in the older neighborhood in Pittsburgh where my parents grew up. The area certainly was not glamorous — in fact, many of the houses were dilapidated and the local businesses closed — but my parents seemed to appreciate the history of those older parts of the city.

Another of my favorite drives was to visit relatives outside our region in places like Frederick, Cumberland, Hagerstown and Gettysburg. Of course, those trips included a requisite cemetery drive-by to visit the graves of relatives now passed and hear recollections

of their lives and how our family lived in the past. These stories as told by my parents and relatives were to remind us that the life we had did not just happen by chance. I gained an appreciation and an awareness of the exceptional lives lived by generations of my family that came before me and how my life was impacted by theirs.

One particularly memorable Sunday drive came after attending church with my mother and her mother. They decided as we pulled out of the parking lot, to leave right away and go visit Niagara Falls! We made a quick stop at home and Mom whipped up some sandwiches and snacks, put some soda bottles and ice in a galvanized bucket, and we were off. There was no GPS then, just an old creased map. We drove non-stop with occasional bathroom breaks as the need arose.

I do not remember how long we were on the road with my mother and grandmother alternating driving. As suddenly as we left, we suddenly arrived at our destination. Everyone hopped out of the car and stared at the spectacle of the amazing Falls. We took a few pictures, we all piled back into the car, and headed home. The scenery flew by, time and miles passed, we played games like car bingo and Twenty Questions. It was very late when we arrived home, and I climbed into bed exhausted but happy. Wow, what a day that turned out to be!

I knew our Sunday drives would eventually end someday. Now there are Abby, Walden, Holden and me on these spontaneous car rides — but the memories of so many amazing past adventures always accompany us, riding shotgun. 🐾



Photo by Azita Mashayekhi



Saturday,
July 11th
10 AM to NOON
Community Center

For the last 3+ months, many of us have been quarantined in our lovely apartments here at Montebello. The time for many has been well spent on a variety of “home - improvement” projects. One, that many of you have told us about, was to collect old documents that are no longer needed and must be shredded. Well, we have the answer for you. Montebello is pleased to announce that **Saturday, July 11th, between 10 AM and noon**, ProShred Security of Northern Virginia will be deploying a Shred Truck to Montebello. Bring your papers that need to be shredded and those documents will be shredded free of charge. The truck will be parked outside the Community Center and will take all papers to be shredded until noon, or until the truck’s four ton capacity is exhausted, whichever comes first. Below is a list of items that cannot be shredded so please don’t bring them.

If you have any questions, please call Bill Frank at 410-340-5581.

List of Items not to be Shredded

- ☒ Food items
- ☒ Plastic cups / bottles
- ☒ Paper cups (Fast food etc...)
- ☒ CD's / DVD / Blu Ray
- ☒ Computers, Laptops, Tablets, Phones
- ☒ Aluminum or Foil wrapping from foods
- ☒ Any liquids
- ☒ Plastic Notebooks
- ☒ Steel Ring Binders
- ☒ Media Storage Devices (USB, Flash drive etc.)
- ☒ Any cable items – (Power cable, Ethernet, USB etc.)
- ☒ Cardboard
- ☒ Batteries



Call for entries for AiM’s summer exhibit

With the partial lifting of COVID-related restrictions, Art in Montebello is pleased to announce that it will sponsor a summer art exhibit in the Community Center from August 1 to October 1.

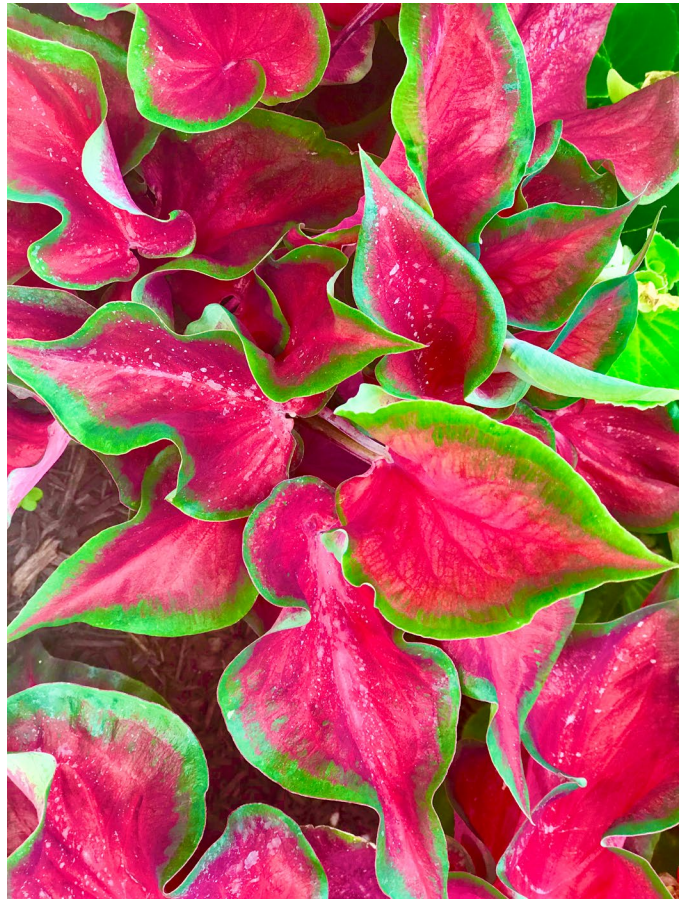
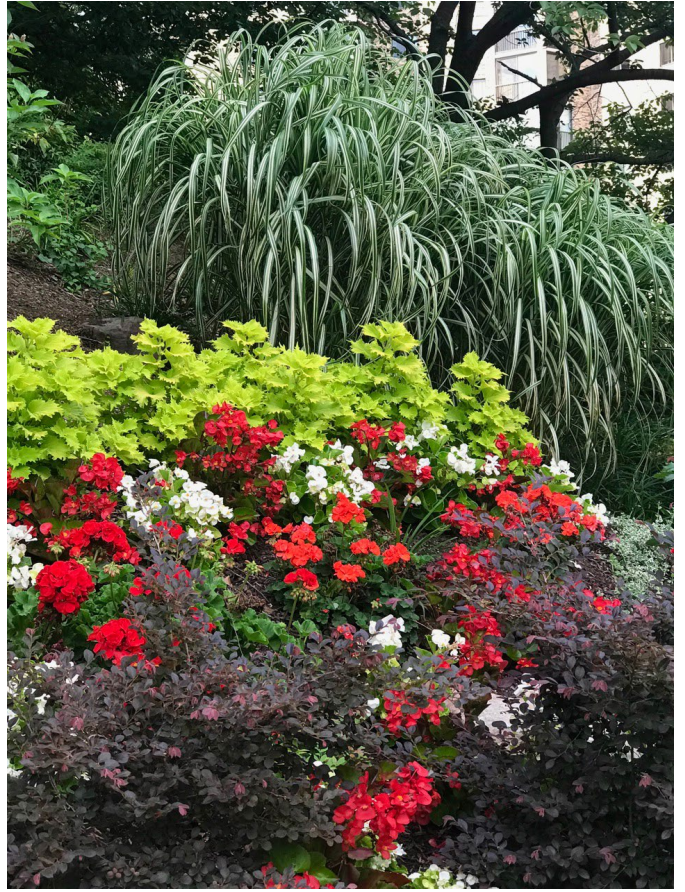
This exhibit will feature both three-dimensional art (e.g., sculptures, ceramics, jewelry, stained glass, etc.) as well as paintings and photographs. The opening of the exhibit will occur in two stages. On August 1, all accepted art will be displayed in the lounge on tables and easels. Residents and guests will follow a unidirectional path to allow for social distancing. Refreshments will be available. Following the exhibit opening in the lounge, paintings and other two-dimensional works will be hung in the café for the duration of the show.

The exhibit’s theme is Transitions and Changes. This theme is broadly defined and could include such subject matter as seasonal and other cyclical changes, COVID-related changes, emotional upheaval, psychological and interpersonal changes, social changes, and renovations. The exhibit’s curator is Guido R. Zanni.

Applicants may submit photos of up to three entries for consideration. Entries must be in JPG format and should include title, dimensions, medium used (e.g., oil, acrylic, stone, etc.) and a brief description of the piece, along with your name, building, and unit number. Submissions must be sent via email to gzanni@aol.com no later than July 15. Applicants will be notified by July 22 as to the status of their entries. All accepted two-dimensional works must be exhibit-ready with the appropriate hardware for hanging. Please note: the curator determines the location in which the artwork will be displayed. Accepted entries must remain on display for the duration of the exhibit and cannot be removed or substituted with another piece. Neither AiM nor the Association assumes liability for stolen or damaged artwork. Please contact the curator at 703-960-5874 with any questions you have regarding the entry process.

We look forward to an exciting and final exhibit in the Community Center. – Guido R. Zanni 🍷





final glance

Let America Be America Again (1935)

By Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed –
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek –
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean –
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today – O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned

That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home –
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay –
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again –
The land that never has been yet –
And yet must be – the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine – the poor man's, Indian's,
Negro's, ME –
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose –
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath –
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain –
All, all the stretch of these great green states –
And make America again!