

voices on the 37

Montebello COVID-19 reporting and virus spread mitigation

By Amy Frielander

It has been ten months since the presence of COVID-19 became widely known and we know now that the worst is not behind us. I appreciate receiving the occasional notices on the spread of COVID cases at Montebello, including the far-ranging January 14, 2021 publication, but believe that clarification of the guidelines the Montebello Homeowners Association follows for reporting on COVID at Montebello, more consistent reporting and more intense and systematic mitigation of the spread of the virus in our community are needed.

Not knowing what the guidelines are, I have resorted to a readily-available but notoriously error-prone method for gathering information: contacting other members of our community to find out what and when information is reported by our HOA. I have not received consistent answers.

A personal experience with inconsistent reporting: residents have received notices about cases and exposures, but I reported to the management office on December 18 having been exposed to a person who tested positive the day before and my exposure was never reported to the Montebello community. To make my neighbors aware of my situation, I reported my case to our community via our resident Facebook page, reported that I was quarantining for two weeks and then reported my PCR test negative results. Privacy? What am I hiding? My only goal was to protect others in our community.

Residents are doing their part to mitigate the spread of the virus at Montebello by mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing, but an institutional program is also necessary. The January 14, 2021 publication tells us that "the virus has been and is in ev-

ery building." We know that the virus travels and lingers in the air, so cleaning hallways and the stairwells is very important. However, I have been told by a Montebello HOA representative that the Montebello HOA does not clean the hallways for virus, but wipes the elevator button panels. I was also told that sprayer machines that could help disinfect the air in our internal spaces are used for the elevators and occasionally other confined spaces such as the gatehouse or the interior of the SAC vehicles.

Everybody uses the hallways. I have not used the elevators since March, use the stairwells instead, and have run into other people who also use the stairwells, so I believe that spraying the hallways and stairwells is critical. Knowing that the air in hallways and stairwells is cleansed periodically for virus is something that would give me, and I am sure other residents, greater peace of mind — especially since we know that the air in the hallways, by design, flows into the units.

Also, reduction of services should be specific as to the services being reduced and should include start and end dates of such reductions. This is important, because the reduction of services can impact virus propagation, which means that residents need to be especially vigilant when services are reduced.

The time for action is now. We need quick action on improving reporting on the spread of the virus in our community and improved measures by our HOA to mitigate the spread of the deadly disease it causes.

Cover photo of turkey vultures in the woodlands by Linda Brownlee

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

The Month Park Park Poice

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voices on the 37

A new perspective on our finances

By Matthew Marlay

Every year at budget time, Montebello residents engage in a healthy debate about the amount of condo fees and how we are spending our money. (Of course, by "a healthy debate," I mean "complaining.") Don't get me wrong – I enjoy this pastime as much as the next resident, but I recently gained a new perspective on the whole thing.

My brother and his wife are looking at condos in the Bay Area. They asked me to review the financial disclosures of one of the associations they were interested in, and what I read left me flabbergasted. First, the association's reserves were \$0. They literally had no money set aside for any future expenses! And since the complex had been built in 1990, many of its components were reaching the end of their 30-year useful lives and will therefore require replacement within the next few years. How will these replacements be funded? Via special assessments, of course. In fact, owners are now facing special assessments of \$1800/year for the foreseeable future just to begin funding the reserves, on top of the regular \$400 monthly condo fee. This is also on top of a recent \$1600 per unit special assessment that the association had to assess to settle liens filed by contractors who had not been paid for previous work.

The financial disclosures also indicated that last year the association had to transfer about \$60,000 from the reserve replacement fund to the operating fund to pay for ongoing operating expenses. Since that \$60K will have to be repaid (the long-term maintenance need won't go away), that's yet more money that will have to come from the owners via a special assessment. And the budget for the previous year noted an allowance for doubtful accounts in an amount that is comparable to ours — even though that complex is 1/4 the size of Montebello and has lower condo fees.

The copy of the assessment letter that was included in the packet raised some additional red flags. The association had to let go all on-site employees to balance the previous year's budget, which will of course result in less security and preventive maintenance. It also indicated that the association had been "plagued with unforeseen repairs." A couple of unforeseen expenses would not be overly concerning – things go wrong that you don't anticipate. But it seems to me that a continued string of these unforeseen expenses points to a problem with their forecasting -- they seem to be doing a bad job of predicting what issues might crop up, which makes planning for the future difficult.

Needless to say, I strongly advised my brother and sister-in-law not to put in an offer on this condo and to look for a place with a financial cushion and a better budgeting process. In other words, like we are fortunate to have at Montebello! Although none of us likes paying condo fees, I would personally rather pay a higher, but regular, condo fee than constantly worry about getting hit with special assessments. And with our rigorous reserve studies, we have an excellent sense of what kinds of expenses we can expect to face in the upcoming years, and we budget for those items in advance. Thanks to the Finance and Budget Committee for its great work!

Surviving the UK variant virus

By John Powers

We are told that the UK variant is 70% more contagious, but no more deadly and is susceptible to vaccines. The latter is good news, but who wants to take the chance.

There is an easy way to minimize our risk until we actually turn the corner on this pandemic. I have started wearing a double KN95 mask when in the elevator, the commissary, and any other location in which I unavoidably have close contact with people.

There is a good selection of decent masks on https://www.ama-zon.com/s?k=powecom+kn95+-

face+masks&crid=3Ktive+masks&crid=3K-0JGSNG4D9ZI&sprefix=powecom+%-2Caps%2C166&ref=nb_ sb_ss_ts-da-p_1_8. My choice is the Powecom KN95 masks, but there are others listed with excellent ratings.

If you want to get through this, avoid those comfortable face coverings that make breathing easy and do little. The goal here is to avoid inhaling the virus aerosols and thin coverings are not good at that. An uncovered nose is even worse.



On the other hand, a double Powecom mask makes breathing more difficult. If I walk fast with a double mask, I am soon huffing and puffing. In addition, the Powecom masks have very tight ear straps that are a bit unpleasant, but

this is what makes the mask tight to the face and prevents any air seeping in on the sides or around the nose.

This discomfort is the price I pay for an extremely low probability of becoming infected. I am happy to pay that price.

Mary Long lived at Montebello a brief time (five years), but had an exceptionally large impact on the friendships she formed and her helpfulness to the community.

Born at the (new) Walter Reed Hospital in 1949, she moved with her military family, finally ending up in Camp Hill, Pa., when her father retired in 1961. Mary went on the obtain her undergraduate and graduate degrees in library science. In the fall of 1970 she began teaching at a junior high school in Williamsport, Pa.

Wanting to live someplace more "worldly," in 1993 she moved to Washington, DC and joined with the Architect of the Capital. She worked there for over 10 years, and then desired another change of pace, becoming a legal secretary with the law firm of Debevoise and Plimpton, where she worked for over 30 years, ultimately returning to library science when she became the head of the law library.

Mary will be greatly remembered for her endless generosity, love of helping others, and her genuine love of life. Her love of her goddaughter, Allison,

in memoriam

Mary Long 1949 - 2021



was so evident and overwhelming, to which Allison already feels a large void in her heart.

Mary enjoyed her friendships and activities, whether it be afternoon outside visits with her Montebello friends, bowling, playing dominoes, and Friday night dinner gathering. Mary was also involved in volunteering activities at Montebello, being one of the building reps for building 2, working at Carpenter's Shelter in Alexandria, and as a reading mentor with elementary school children in Fairfax County.

Most of all, Mary will be missed by her two sisters, who have so many loving memories! Mary was the absolute best big sister (sometimes bossy, but in a loving, mothering way). We hope to have a celebration of her life when the pandemic has subsided, and everyone can gather to remember Mary Long. – *Nancy Deibler, sister*

To honor Mary's memory, please donate to her favorite charities: Alice's Kids https://aliceskids.org/ Salvation Army https://give.salvationarmyusa.org/ give/164006/#!/donation/checkout

I'm crushed to my core by Mary's sudden death. Memories about Mary are starting to flood my mind. One sweet one is that she loved goldfish and other aquarium fish. As a lover of dogs and cats, I never knew anything about fish. However, Mary knew a lot and loved them as I love furry creatures. – *Deborah Rowell*

I knew Mary Long as a friendly, helpful neighbor. She was almost always in a good mood, even if the general times were not over the past, difficult year. She will be missed by me. – *Randall Cook*

I have known Mary for a long time. Before Montebello, we lived at Place One over 30 years ago. When she moved in here, we became very good friends. I will miss her terribly. – Yo Frommer

Mary was a very brave individual. We

talked often, as members of a Friday night dinner group, and I had no idea that she was in such a bad way. I feel terribly sad now thinking of it, but maybe that's the way she wanted it to be. Who knows what the right way is? – *Richard Titus*

I was so sad and shocked to hear the news of Mary's death. She was a dear soul. – *Diane Fitzgerald*

Mary was such a bright light in our community, always so upbeat, cheerful, and positive. I'm praying for her family and other friends. – *Anita Marchion*

This is devastating. Her bright spirit was always such a joy. We will celebrate Mary's life together when we can all be safe together again. – *Rebecca McNeely*

This breaks my heart. It's made all the worse because we couldn't be there for

her. This is such a cruel illness. – *Heather Click*

I am stunned. We have to treasure each other, especially through these scary times. – *Kathy Davies*

This is just such sad news and honestly, hard to believe that we won't see Mary again. I'm devastated for us and her family. – *Ellen Orlando*

I am heartsick as I had the pleasure of meeting Mary last year when she joined our bowling league. She was a wonderful, happy person. Sorry my friendship was so brief. – Janice Stucki

This is so incredibly sad and almost impossible to believe. It really brings it home that we cannot let our guard down and that we must stay close in ways that we can. – *Bruce and June Nagler*

personal history

Blackout

By Erwin Jacobs

In 1977, I was working in Poughkeepsie, NY, a small city on the Hudson River 80 miles north of New York City. My wife, Joan, was a big fan of the stage shows in the city, which was two hours away by train or car. I was not initially enthused about going to

them, but usually enjoyed the performances.

In July, Joan told me that she had made reservations for a double header. We would have an early lunch, drive to Manhattan and see a show, Anna Christine, at the Imperial Theater on West 46th Street. It starred Liv Ullmann. After the show and a snack, we would see Robert Preston in Sly Fox, which was playing at the Broadhurst Theater on West 44th Street.

I drove into the city on the 13th Avenue and found a parking lot on the corner of 8th Avenue and 44th Street. It had parking on the ground level and also a three-level story lift to place cars. My car was to go up the lift.

Just after intermission at the second performance, the lights flickered for a few seconds. This recurred after a minute or two and finally there was complete darkness. It was 9:30 p.m. We were in the orchestra and were able to leave through an exit that had emergency lights. We went over to get our car, but saw that there were no lights anyplace. The parking lot was nearby and people with cars at ground level drove off, but a few remained. Our car was on the lift and could not be moved.

Everyone thought the power outage was end shortly. Fortunately, it was a clear, warm night. We all stood around talking and looking for places to sit. My wife had to use the restroom and the nearby telephone booth had already been used several times. Then I noticed some light about halfway down the block. We went there and found a bar lit by candles. They were kind enough to let her use a candle to find the way to the ladies room. While I was waiting

light coming from the New Jersey side. He did not think it was safe to walk down there, but my wife would never let that stop her, so we walked to the station with no issue. There happened to be a bus leaving for New Paltz, NY, which was 12 miles from our house. I called our house and spoke to our son, who would drive to New Paltz to meet



for her, Robert Preston came in and ordered a drink. The bartender was apologetic for having run out of ice, but he took the drink out to his chauffeured limousine and drove off.

There were the sounds of some distant gunshots and police cars. The group at the parking lot congregated near each other and were guarded by the lot attendant. He was about 25 years old and chased off some potential looters with a baseball bat.

At dawn, a police car drove slowly and my wife stopped it. She asked about getting to the Port Authority Bus Station at 8th Avenue and 40th Street. The officer said it was running with the bus. The bus was comfortable and air-conditioned. I promptly fell asleep and was happy to see my son at the station and get a ride home. My wife went to the parking lot a few days later to retrieve the car.

The cause of the blackout, which covered all of New York City, except for a part of Queens, was a series of lightning strikes on transmission lines north of the city. This caused an overload followed by mechanical and human error. It lasted for 25 hours.

group kvetch

Seeking members for new MCUOA group

By Jim Galligan

Now that the construction of the Community Center has begun in earnest, it's time to organize the Montebello Construction Support Group.

The MCSG will consist of volunteer observers to gather each workday in front of and around the construction site(s) and opine about the work, discuss how it should be done differently, and offer suggestions to the workers. The MCSG is open to anyone with little to no practical construction experience, but with a conviction that they could do it better.

Observers will be formed into groups and assigned times to stand around and kvetch. Based on past experience, pairs are the minimum observer group. It's no good standing out there talking to yourself if no one can hear your cogent recommendations. Three is the optimum group size. It fosters enough diversity and variations in impractical suggestions until one might actually sound plausible. If that happens, the group can finish its shift and grab a beer or two, satisfied that they have achieved something of absolutely no value. Groups larger than three tend to get unwieldy. There's always one who thinks he or she knows more than the others and starts dominating the suggestions. No one likes a boor.

Each group's goal is to come up with the most plausible-sounding but ultimately impractical suggestion for the contractor(s). A secretary will record the best suggestion(s) of the day as agreed on by all of that day's observers. At the end of construction these suggestions will be compiled into a guide for other condo CSGs that can be sold to help defray the cost of the CC.

To do this correctly will require a minimum of three groups to cover the construction workday. Each group will serve two-hour shifts with one hour off for lunch. Accommodations may be made for missed shifts on nasty winter days, but once the warm weather returns and the crocuses sprout, everyone will be expected to stand his or her watch. Chairs are permitted.

Some have said that there may be an opportunity to hand out prizes at the end of the construction, perhaps at a fund-raising banquet for the BOD. Suggestions for categories are welcome. Here are some possibilities:

Most Annoying Busybody (as voted by the foremen and workers).

Best Standing Around While Others Work Posture (Open to foremen and workers) Best Suggestion That, if Followed, Would Bust the Reserve Fund the Soonest

Best Sounding Suggestion After Three Martinis

Most Plausible, But Still Incredibly Wrong, Idea

If you're not sure you want to join another group, ask yourself: what else are you going to do in 2021 until you're vaccinated?



Winter blooms by Penny Jones

picture perfect

A close-up with young artists

Eight-year-old Nyla and Noah Thedioha earned First Prize and Honorable Mention (respectively) in the Montebelle Grounds Committee 2020 Photo Contest in the under 16 category. They have been staying with their grandparents, Mike and Linda Brownlee, during the pandemic. Linda took the top prize in the adult category. To see all contest winners, go to https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNhie29KNyAbiKwG7m33B1KY6TKIt0AsllecrWaPi1m6Y5Uar2e-F0rI-swh7mgfMQ?key=Z1ZYeEFFektYb19JYWM0a3h1QU1saGpGZWU2a2dn-MK



Voice: Please tell about your winning photographs. What drew you to the bird and the butterfly?

Nyla: We went on a walk in Montebello with my grandmother and my brother. We had our cameras. Then we went past the tree and saw a hawk. We all liked taking photos at the time so we started taking pictures.

Voice: What does the photograph express?

Nyla: Excitement.

Noah: I took the picture because it looked nice.

Voice: What camera did you use?

Noah Thedioha and his winning photograph The Montebello Voice



Nyla Thedioha and her topprize winning photograph

Nyla: I used my grandma's Nikon.

Voice: Did your grandmother influence your interest in photography?

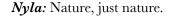
Noah: I just like pictures.

Nyla: When I saw my grandma's pictures, I started to like them and I wanted to be like her.

Voice: What do you like to photograph?

Noah: My artwork because it is like the only thing around me.





Voice: How do you feel about winning top prizes in the Montebello contest?

Noah: I did not know that I was going to win.

Nyla: Happy, but I do not know what to do about it.

Voice: What inspires you? What other hobbies do you have?

Nyla: I don't know. *Noah:* Drawing.

Voice: You've been staying with your grand-parents at Montebello during the pandemic. What is it like to be a kid at Montebello?

Both: Fine.

Voice: What advice do you have for other people who want to take up photography?

Nyla: They should do their best.

Noah agrees.



picture perfect

Linda Brownlee's decisive moments

When the Montebello Facebook group was reactivated last March, several residents began bringing beauty to our confined lives. Most of the posted photographs featured scenes from our woodlands and outside our windows: stunning sunsets, delicate flowers, baby animals, changing foliage, fungal feasts, and festivals of birds. On the days when the news were going from bad to worse, we could count on our virtual community to share something that had nothing to do with politics or disease or social discord. Linda Brownlee's photographs capture a sense of wonderment about the natural beauty around us-if we just slow down to really look. -MK



Linda's baby fox took the top prize in the has brought more berries and Montebello photo contest habitats for Carolina Wrens,

Voice: Please tell about the baby fox, i.e., where and when you took the photo. Was it really looking at you?

Linda Brownlee: Standing at the slight hill at the end of building 2, two kit foxes were playing in the late afternoon sun at the upper exit of their tunnel. One kit was flipping something up in the air and catching it again. This kit just sat down and watched me calmly as I leaned against a tree. It was an "I and Thou" moment.

Voice: The quality of your photos is proof that you use "real" cameras. What you use.

Linda Brownlee: Nikon 3400 DS, previously unused in the closet, with a new Tamron 18-400mm lens, a Christmas gift from my husband, Michael in 2019.

Voice: Have you always been a photographer as an avocation? When and how did you start?

Linda: No, not at all. Feel like I started when I got the Tamron lens.

Voice: You've photographed a lot of nature around Montebello. What other subjects do you like?

Linda: My grandchildren, of course, are a favorite subject. The National Parks are great to take pictures.

Voice: It's been close to a year since we've been largely confined to our homes. You've chronicled changes in seasons. What observations have you made about our surroundings?

Linda: The changes to the landscaping in Montebello has brought more berries and habitats for Carolina Wrens, and other sparrows in the

thickets. Now I know where different birds live in the woods so I can find them. Wish we had blue birds. I see a blue bird box outside the fence adjacent to Village Green, but have not spotted a blue bird yet. Maybe we need blue bird boxes on the trail.

Voice: I've seen you stake out your subjects, such as golden finches. How much time do you spend waiting for something to happen?

Linda: I usually have about an hour before school in the morning on these cold days. The golden hour in the summer evening, is a great time for us to see hummingbirds and butterflies. Really wish for hummingbird feeders in the butterfly gardens. From April to September, a hummingbird feeder, would thrill people taking in the garden.

Voice: Your three grandchildren (can't forget the tween) have shared your home for the past months. What has it been like grand-parenting during the pandemic in a small home? How did you adjust to distance learning? What were some joys and challenges?

Linda: They make me laugh everyday. They ask questions usually starting with, "Do you think this is weird?" Distance learning and covid precautions restricts us from leaving home during the day and homework constricts some evenings. Plus, we have to chose G or PG movies and go to bed early.

Voice: Do you help your grand-twins with their photography? What do you teach them?

Linda: Haven't really taught them much. We need to go outside and feel the restorative powers of nature after a day of distance learning. They have great eyesight and quickly see the birds, fox, and occasional deer. Noah needs to run after school or swat a tennis racket. For fun, we play with Photohop Express to change photos by adding fire or outrageous color smears.



puppy love



















Photos by Dian McDonald

zoomin'



Tech Club



Photography contest awards

The Speaker Series Presents:

Mary Peters

President of Friendly Travel, Inc.

What do we expect from travel in 2021?

The industry is currently in flux. Peters suggests that we will need to be flexible and a little creative.

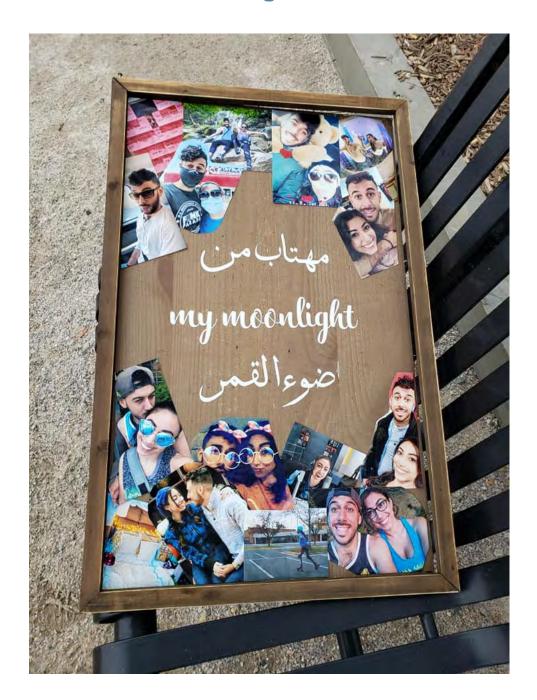
She will share memories of her own travels and recommendations that she has offered to her customers over the years.



Wednesday, January 20th
7:30 in the evening
Format: ZOOM
Zoom information will be forwarded
one day in advance

Sponsored by the Activities Committee

final glance



Lost and found by Rachael Bright

The Alexandria waterfront was always a special place for him. He fell in love with her there, that night of their first date. The moon had been full and brilliant and it made the river glitter like diamonds strewn across blue velvet. Her eyes glittered too, the way she looked at him. He thought she was the embodiment of the moonlight itself. She was radiant still, even in this moment of their parting. They had met here, their spot, on what would surely be their last moments together. One last moonlit walk. One last kiss. One last touch. He pushed her hair back behind her ear and whispered, "You will always be my moonlight."