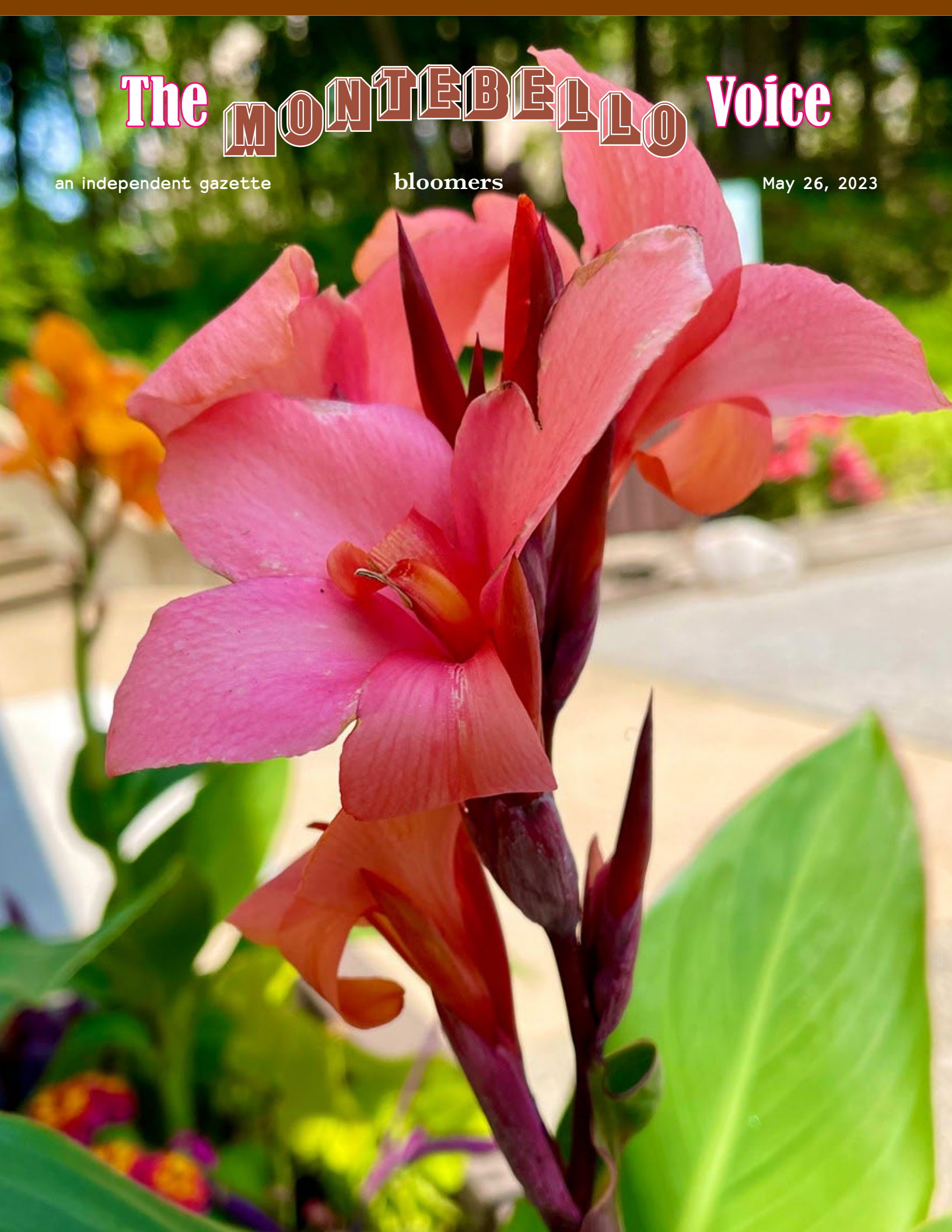


# The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

bloomers

May 26, 2023





# Polymer Clay Play

## Make it! Bake it! Take it!



Polymer Clay is a synthetic clay that can be cured in a home toaster oven. This time, we will make an easy lotus table centerpiece with a place for a tea light. Perfect for those summer evenings! We will also explore small animals with wings, feathers or fur!

Of course, you can also explore and make what you desire!

**So Join us — no experience needed.  
Just bring yourself and a friend!**

See you in June

June 6, 2023

CC Underground 2pm -5pm



AiM Polymer Clay Group



*The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you: musings, travels, announcements, photos, book reviews, commentary, memoirs, essays, analysis, poems, suggestions, club news, recipes, and free ads*  
*A publication for the residents, by the residents*

Cover photo by Dian McDonald

## The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette  
Alexandria, Virginia

*This publication accepts no funding or oversight from advertisers, residents, or the Montebello Condominium Unit Owners Association. All opinions are encouraged and reflect the diversity of views in the community. All articles and photographs come from Montebello residents. To receive or contribute to this email-only gazette, contact [montebellovoice@cox.net](mailto:montebellovoice@cox.net) or visit on the web at [www.montebellovoice.com](http://www.montebellovoice.com).*

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## Music For Your Life's Special Events

My DJ services started with a small private event 4 years ago, and today, I'm regularly playing for a wide variety of special events in the DMV / Northern Virginia area ranging from private event themed music nights to large local community gatherings. I work hard to make every event special for my clients with curated playlists crafted in consultation with and aligned to the tastes of the host for the event.

- Special / Life Events
- Retirement Celebrations
- Private Parties
- Reunions
- Corporate Events
- Weddings / Civil Unions

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Scott's Music Place



# The shoes are dropping

By Chester Taylor

The recent amount of dishonesty, ethics violations, lying, and crimes committed by politicians and their followers is staggering. Now the wheels of justice are rolling, and the courts are issuing judgments. Many of the cases below deal with fraud and defamation. Lies do have consequences. Not counting all the misdemeanors and felonies committed by the January 6<sup>th</sup> rioters, the Supreme Court justices receiving lavish gifts, or members of the Trump family not turning over documents to NY Attorney General, one needs a score card to track the more significant court cases. 📅

Date	Who	What	Results
6/21	Fox News	Sued for sexual harassment by NYC Commission on Human Rights	Fox paid \$1 million
7/22	Steve Bannon	2 counts Contempt of Congress	Guilty: 4 months of jail – on appeal.
9/22	Trump Organization & executives	Being sued in civil case by NY’s AG for \$250 million for fraud. Already fined \$110,000 for failure to turn over documents to court on time. <i>*previously found guilty in NY criminal court 12/22 for similar charges.</i>	Trial pending – besides having to pay back millions, could be barred from operating businesses in NY, including Trump Tower in Manhattan and the golf course in the Hudson Valley.
10/22	Alex Jones	Defamation case: claimed the Sandy Hook massacre was fake	Families awarded \$50 million in the Texas case and \$985 million in the Connecticut case
11/22	Oath Keepers founder and 34 others	Seditious conspiracy and other charges	Guilty: founder Stewart Rhodes facing up to 25 years in prison; others 20 to 85 years
12/22	Trump Organization	Running a decade-long criminal tax fraud scheme in NY	Guilty of 17 felonies, fined \$1.6 million
2/23	Remington	AR-15 assault rifle used in Sandy Hook massacre	Families awarded \$73 million
3/23	Donald Trump	Hush-money payment made to the adult film star Stormy Daniels; 34 felony counts	Indicted, pending trial in October
4/23	Ron DeSantis	First Amendment lawsuit filed by Disney over controversial “don’t say gay” bill	Pending trial, Disney has canceled \$1 billion corporate campus in central Florida that would have housed 2,000 employees
4/23	Fox News	Sued by Dominion for defamation	Fox settled with dominion for \$787.5 million
4/23	Donald Trump	E. Jean Carroll’s defamation and battery case against Trump	Trump found liable for battery and defamation; Carroll awarded \$5 million
5/23	Rudy Giuliani	Being sued by, Noelle Dunphy, former aide, for sexual assault, harassment, wage theft and other misconduct	Alleges she was forced to perform sex acts on Guiliani and work in the nude. Alleges Guilani and Trump were selling pardons for \$2 million each.
5/23	Trump fake electors and their attorneys	Being sued by Wisconsin Democratic electors and a voter	Seeking \$2.4 million and banning Republicans from ever serving as electors
5/23	Hunter Biden	Facing tax crimes and lying about his drug use when he bought a handgun	The investigative team probing tax fraud has been removed by IRS at the request of DOJ
5/23	Fox News and News Max	Being sued by SmartMatic for defamation. Trial date not set.	SmartMatic asking \$2.7 billion. Subpoenaed Donald Trump’s former campaign operation.
TBD	Donald Trump	Georgia trial for voting interference.	Pending. Eight of Georgia’s fake electors have been granted immunity to testify.
TBD	Donald Trump	DOJ trial for obstruction of justice and insurrection	Pending



## A unique summer job with few benefits

By Bob Shea

In early 2023, there were over 4,000 applicants for four positions. Twelve were selected for in-person interviews, and four were hired: all women, all single, ages 26 to 32.

The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust was seeking to re-open its site in Port Lockroy on the north-west shore of Wienke Island, part of the Palmer Archipelago in the western Antarctica Peninsula. Port Lockroy has a natural harbor with a rich history for an island just slightly larger than two soccer fields.

It was a whaling station from 1911 to 1931. Rusting anchor chains and piles of bleached whale bones are a remind-



er of that early history. During World War II, the British military established a small base there. It continued as a UK research station until January 15, 1962 when it was closed and remained vacant until 2006 when it was acquired by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust. It was again unstaffed from 2020 to 2022 due to the COVID epidemic.

Located at 64 degrees 49 minutes South and 63 degrees 30 minutes West,

it is a strange place for summer employment. Its summer is generally from early November to mid-February.

The small staff does limited research on gentoo penguins with over 15,000 of them inhabiting the island. One half the island is off limits to humans.

One of the roles of the staff is to operate the southernmost post office in the world, processing over 60,000 pieces of mail sent by tourists who visit Port Lockroy each summer. Most arrive on small cruise ships, having sailed across the infamous Drake Passage from the former Argentine penal colony of Ushuaia at the southern tip of South America. The staff sells stamps for letters and postcards that will be postmarked “Port Lockroy, Antarctica.”

Almost 14,000 tourists come ashore to mail letters, to visit the small museum, and to buy the only souvenirs on the mostly vacant continent. The sale of souvenirs provides funds for the maintenance of the facility and staff salaries. Letters are sent out via infrequent Heritage Trust resupply ships. A new version of snail mail. Additionally, they stamp passports, authenticating the visitor’s presence in Antarctica.

I was one of those tourists in January 2011. Our small cruise ship anchored offshore, and we boarded rubber Zodiacs for the trip to the shoreline. The tiny museum is well maintained and depicts the austere life of those who lived there when the station was active before tourists. Polo shirts and sweatshirts saying Port Lockroy are a must buy as well as the special stamp in one’s passport. It was a cloudless, sunny day with the temperature around 32 degrees – summertime on the island. The 130 tourists on the M/V Corinthian II were divided into groups with about an hour ashore for each group. Otherwise, the island would have been overrun with people, and the small staff overwhelmed.

Only three staff members were available to assist tourists as the staff was



shuttled, one at a time, to the cruise ship to take showers. The year I was there, the staff consisted of three women and one man. Showers on visiting ships is an important part of the staff’s lives as there is no running water or flush toilets on the island. What a summer job!

Once shirts had been purchased, letters mailed, and passports stamped, we returned to the comfort of the ship and further Antarctic exploration. The four staff members waved goodbye, wondering when their next shower would be. The gentoo penguins ignored us from their half of the island, apparently unconcerned about showers and running water.

As an aside, I have often wondered how a staff of four people managed to get along, sustain themselves, and stay smiling in that isolation. Where do you go on an island that small to get away from your coworkers? Personality conflicts? The only isolated place probably was in a hot shower on an anchored cruise ship. What a summer job!

I value my stamped passport, validating that I had at last visited the seventh continent. 🐧



# Grounds Committee presents future projects

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Following a detailed, 25-minute long discussion with General Manager Eric Finke about the updated master insurance renewal policy with Risk Strategies, Grounds Committee shared its five-year plan for upcoming projects.

Although future projects come with hefty price tags, “we must maintain what we have done,” Virginia Hodgkinson, committee chair, told the Board of Directors, “it’s much cheaper than neglect.” She said the largest project in 2026 will be the redesign and landscaping of the picnic hill. Also, the small playground behind buildings 3 and 4 will be transformed into a social area with game tables and benches.

Sixteen residents attended the meeting in person. During owners’ forum, they asked about frequent problems with missing Amazon deliveries, increasing handicapped parking spaces by the community center, grand opening of the dog park, and the *raison d’être* of the notorious Harriet Duval Stairs to Nowhere behind building 1.


To see all documents related to the work session, go to <https://drive.google.com/file/d/195UM3RIjw9yX15Y-7hLDGdEVFxMLyDCeP/view>. 📁

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## 2023 Grounds Projects

- To preserve and restore the woodlands**
  - Continue plantings in the “pocket forest,” designed to accelerate regeneration of woodland understory layers.
  - Analyze the updated tree inventory (by residents) to detect patterns in tree health.
- To enhance visual appeal of the developed areas**
  - Relandscape the Metro gate area and the west entrance of the Community Center to add seasonal interest.
  - Landscape Transition Area 3 & 4 (Phase 1—the contiguous section behind the buildings).
- To improve recreational and social values of the property**
  - Enhance pedestrian safety and convenience by installing sidewalks around the pool and next to the roadway between Building 1 and 2.
- To raise resident awareness and appreciation of Montebello’s outdoor environment**
  - Articles in the Times, brochures, speakers and webinars, MontebelloGrounds.com
  - Encourage resident participation in grounds-related events, e.g., nature photo contests, Arbor Day fundraising.

## 2024: To enhance visual appeal of developed area




2023	\$ 126,000	Transition Area 3
2024	\$ 133,403	Transition Area 4
2024	\$33,075	Landscaping along LMED & SMED

## Focus for 2024:

### To preserve and restore the woodlands

**In Operating Budget:**

- Tree pruning and removal
- Managing invasive plants
- Professional consultation




**In Reserve Budget\*:**

\$ 44,100	Woodlands Program (benches, signage, plantings)
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**Proposed for 2024-2027**

- Woodlands plantings, especially understory as in the new “pocket forest,” including Arbor Day fundraising

\* All Amounts taken from 2022 Reserve Study, Table 2, Cost to Repair/Replace (future worth)



## 2024: To enhance visual appeal of developed area, continued

- Redesign the Three Circles (2024)
- Develop plan to replace trees in front of towers (2024+)



**Proposed for 2024-2027**

- Add species to the Butterfly Gardens and transplant overcrowded plants (2024-2025)
- Building 5 revegetation, replacing invasive species ground cover with appropriate native species (2024-2026)

## 2024: To improve recreational and social value of the grounds

2023-4	Walkways, benches added as part of Transition Areas 3 and 4
2024	\$27,563 Community Walkway Installation

**Proposed for 2024-2028**

- Continue to add benches and other accessible seating arrangements (2024-2026)
- Picnic Hill renovation (2026)
- Consider outdoor exercise station (parcourse), and other amenities





# LIFTING THE CURTAIN

Offering a glimpse of the artist at work  
from inspiration...  
through implementation...  
to finished art.

ANNA SCHALK



Photos by Dian McDonald



## La Papessa

By Joe de Angelis

“We have elected a female pope!” exclaimed Cardinal Alessandro Bichi angrily upon learning that Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphili had just been elected pope. Cardinal Bichi, the papal nuncio to France, knew full well the relationship between the extremely indecisive Cardinal Pamphili and his sister-in-law Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili.

Beginning with the election of Cardinal Pamphili as pope, who took the name Innocent X, and for 11 years thereafter, Olimpia Maidalchini wielded unprecedented power in the Vatican, Rome, and the Papal States. She ultimately become known as La Papessa (The Popess). Unlike the legendary Pope Joan (855–857), Olimpia Maidalchini was a real person who lived during the 16th century. She was born in 1591 in Viterbo, the eldest of three children. Her mother was an aristocrat, the granddaughter of Sebastiano Gualterio, Bishop of Viterbo, and Papal Nuncio to France. Her family was not an extremely wealthy and her father, in an effort to retain the family wealth for his only son, decided that his two daughters should enter a convent because the dowry was much less than for a marriage. Olimpia, however, was opposed to such a life and quickly elicited a marriage proposal from Paolo Nini, the only remaining member of one of the richest families in Viterbo. Olimpia was only married for four years when her husband died, but during those four years she suffered the loss of two children.

At the age of 21, Olimpia was a childless widow, but because of her husband’s status and wealth, she was also an heiress of considerable means. Through her uncle, Paolo Gualtieri, she was introduced to one Pamphilio

Pamphili, who was 28 years her senior. The Pamphili family was an old and declining but noble family, well connected to the Church and the Vatican. Pamphilio was enthralled by her youth, as well as her dowry, and they were married in the year 1612. Her wealth, and presumably, being the great-grand-



*Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili*

daughter of the Bishop of Viterbo, held her in good stead and she immediately became an important member of the family. She established numerous social relationships and cultivated a strong and intimate rapport with her brother-in-law Giovanni Battista Pamphili, who was beginning a brilliant career in the Roman Curia.

In 1621 Giovanni Battista Pamphili was appointed nuncio to Naples, and invited his brother and sister-in-law to go with him. In a strategic move, Olimpia convinced her husband that they should join Giovanni Battista in Naples and while there, their son Camillo Francesco Maria Pamphili was born. But more importantly, Olimpia’s cultivation of her friendship with Giovanni Battista went into high gear, eventually obtaining unbounded ascendancy over

him, to the point that Giovanni Battista dared not make any major decisions without consulting Olimpia first.

In 1629, due to Olimpia’s scheming and guidance, Giovanni Battista was made a Cardinal. Olimpia then purchased a dwelling adjacent to the family palazzo, which tripled its size, and was more in standing with her brother-in-law’s newly acquired position of Cardinal.

Shortly after her husband’s death in 1639, Olimpia and her brother-in-law, Giovanni Battista, very obviously joined forces for their mutual benefit. Olimpia used her money, position, and connections to advance Giovanni Battista’s career at the Vatican, while Giovanni Battista, in turn, used his position at the Vatican to advance the career of his nephew, Camillo. Then, in 1644, through Olimpia’s continued scheming and presumable bribery, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphili was elected Pope, taking the name Innocent X. It was then that Olimpia’s hold on

power began, and she became the most powerful woman in Rome, ruling the city like a queen, with many referring to her as La segreto Papessa (The Secret Female Pope).

Even as a Papal Nuncio and later as a Cardinal, Giovanni Battista was known to be indecisive. Being the Supreme Pontiff tended to exacerbate his indecisiveness to the extent that it overshadowed his papacy. Donna Olimpia Maidalchini took full advantage of her brother-in-law’s weakness. It was not long before she gained unprecedented access to the Office of the Supreme Pontiff and became his *de facto* chief advisor. Pope Innocent X, although the absolute spiritual and temporal ruler of the Papal States, did absolutely nothing without first consulting with Olimpia. Seventeen years younger than her brother-in-law, Donna Olimpia’s influ-



### *Pope Innocent X*

ence over the Supreme Pontiff seemed to have no bounds.

Upon Giovanni Battista's ascendance to the throne of St. Peter on 15 September 1644, Olimpia immediately moved into the Apostolic Palace, ignoring the angry protest of the Curia's powerful Cardinals. She set up her office in the Vatican and proceeded to function as the city's first lady. At the insistence of Cardinal Panciroli, the Vatican Secretary of State, however, who argued that even the appearance of impropriety was unacceptable, Olimpia therefore, could not remain in the Apostolic Palace. Olimpia quietly acquiesced and moved from Apostolic Palace to the Pamphili family's Palace on the Piazza Navona "for the sake of appearance." Shortly thereafter, perhaps to appease Olimpia and avoid her wrath, Pope Innocent X appointed her Minister of the Streets of Rome, and Minister of Finance of the Vatican. As Minister of Finance, Olimpia saw an opportunity to increase her personal wealth by introducing a salt tax, the proceeds of which she used exclusively for herself. Pope Innocent X also made Olimpia's son, Camillo, a cardinal on 14 November 1644.

On 7 October 1645, as Monarch of

the Papal States, Pope Innocent X bestowed the title of Princess of San Martino on Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, effectively turning the small enclave into her personal principality. The Pope also gave Olimpia a host of sinecures, that is positions requiring little or no work, but providing status and financial benefit.

Being denied the opulence of the Apostolic Palace, Olympia decided to transform the Palazzo Pamphili into a dwelling worthy of a Pope's family. She convinced Innocent that since he was Pope, he should have a much grander residence. Even though she enlarged the size of the palazzo when Giovanni Battista became a cardinal in

1629, Olimpia now wanted to double its size again to reflect the increased prestige of the papal family. To this end, additional real estate adjacent to the Palazzo Pamphili, and facing the Piazza Navona, was again purchased. Olimpia also put her own money into the renovation as evidenced by the long frescoed gallery that Donna Olimpia paid 3,000 scudi (approximately \$50,000 today) of her own money to have done.

Construction and renovation began on the newly expanded Palazzo in 1646. Upon completion, the façade of the new palazzo was 99 feet high with a total frontage of 199 feet. The front of the Palazzo facing the Piazza Navona was enhanced with 18 windows and four doorways, each with a balcony above. The private apartment of Donna Olimpia consisted of seven rooms across the front of the palazzo. Her bedroom had a door that connected to an adjacent bedroom built especially for the Pope. There was also a secret spiral staircase that led to the Pope's bedroom, thus allowing the Pope and Olimpia to visit one another unobserved and in secret.

As mistress of the Palazzo Pamphili and Innocent's sister-in-law, Olimpia

quickly assumed the traditional responsibilities of being the first lady of Rome and the Pope's official hostess: she was now well on her way to being the gatekeeper to the Supreme Pontiff. Petitioners and courtiers from all over Catholic Europe who came to Rome seeking a favor from the Pope were immediately directed to the Palazzo Pamphili and Donna Olimpia.

Donna Olimpia demanded her due from each and every supplicant seeking her favor. Ambassadors, ecclesiastics, artists, merchants, politicians, and anyone who wanted an audience with the Pope saw the wisdom in presenting her money and extravagant gifts to gain her favor. Treasure chests have been known to pass into her Palazzo that was as elegant and magnificent as that of her brother-in-law's, the Pope. Olimpia also loved to play cards with her petitioners, taking great pleasure in taking them for large sums of money at the table, rather than accepting outright bribes. Many petitioners considered themselves quite fortunate if they lost a small fortune at Donna Olimpia's gambling table.

In 1566, as a counter measure in the fight against the growth of Protestantism in England under Queen Elizabeth I, Pope Pius V established the Holy Alliance, the first papal espionage service. The mission of the organization was to collect information on anyone and everyone who might transgress or violate papal directives or Church dogma. Comprised of mostly Jesuits, members of the Holy Alliance were completely loyal to the Pontiff. As a temporal leader, the Pope was often embroiled in international politics and intrigues. During the England and Ireland Civil Wars (1642-49) Pope Innocent X strongly supported an independent Catholic-ruled Ireland. To this end, he called upon The Holy Alliance.

In spite of the fact that Olimpia was prohibited from having private conversations with her brother-in-law, she became one of the most powerful and influential people within the papacy.



She circumvented this restriction by using her son, Cardinal Camillo Pamphili, as a conduit to communicate with the Pope. She also recommended that Cardinal Panciroli be made Secretary of State and head of the Holy Alliance. Olimpia, through Cardinal Panciroli, could then control the Holy Alliance. She secretly attended all of the Alliance's meetings between the Pope and the secretary, thereby exerting great influence over its operations. The Pope always listened to his sister-in-law. Without going into details as to why, Olimpia created a counterespionage unit within the Holy Alliance called the Black Order. The charter of the Black Order was to identify and "execute enemy agents on the spot." Political and religious assnigation was an often used tool in the pontifical tool bag and whenever a victim of the Black Order was found, they always had a piece of black cloth with a red cross on it stuck in their mouth. The Black Order is said to still exist to this day. Pope Innocent X even had a pontifical seal struck that portrayed a toga-clad female with a sword in one hand and a cross in the other. There was no doubt as to who controlled the papal espionage apparatus. Olimpia is also alleged to have poisoned sitting cardinals in order to open up additional vacancies that could then be sold to the highest bidder.

Because of her open and blatant relationship with the pope, Donna Olimpia was often the target of malicious gossip, allegations and satires. The average Roman citizen hated Olimpia and gave her the nickname Pimpaccia (woman full of sins). At that time, Papal Rome had an active practice of attacking the most well-known public figures of the city by ridiculing them. Their weapon of choice was the "pasquinade," which is a form of satire, usually an anonymous brief lampoon, in verse or prose. The term, first recorded in the mid-17th century, is allegedly derivative from Pasquino, the name of a papal tailor whose shop was in the Piazza Navona. Pasquino was also a local rabble rouser who loved to spread rumors and papal gossip.

These stinging insults were hung around the necks of statues, of which there were primarily six, collectively known as the Talking Statues of Rome. In that manner, Romans could criticize without fear of persecution, the Pope, the government and any other public figure, such as Donna Olimpia, through written messages, poems and verses. These writings were then attached to the statues anonymously at night. One of Pasquino's verses attacking Olimpia follows:

*He who wishes a favor from the sovereign,  
Bitter and long the road to the Vatican.  
But the shrewd person  
Runs to Donna Olimpia with full hands,  
And there who wants it obtains it,  
And the street is wider and shorter.*

In 1654, Pope Innocent X fell fatally ill. Olimpia, never missing an opportunity to increase her wealth, convinced the ailing pontiff to relocate the Vatican's gold to his bedchambers for safekeeping and out of reach of those with nefarious intentions. But it was Olimpia who had the nefarious intentions. As the Pope lay dying in his bed, Olimpia secretly removed several crates of gold coins from the papal palace. Olimpia was fully cognizant of the fact that upon the death of Innocent X she and her family would be totally unprotected and at risk of losing everything.

When the Pope finally died on 7 January 1655, Olimpia was approached by several cardinals to pay for his burial, but she refused, stating, "I am only a poor widow." If the Popes sister-in-law did not care about the deceased Pope, why should the Cardinals? The cardinals, more interested in electing a new Pope rather than burying the old one, simply dumped his

body in a closet and went about electing a new Pope. The Pope's lifeless body lay unattended for several days until his former butler had pity on him and laid Pope Innocent X to rest. Olimpia left Rome and never returned.

After Pope Innocent X's death, Olimpia, left Rome for her fiefdom of San Martino, where she lived until she died on 26 September 1657 at the age of 66. Donna Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili is buried in the church of the former Abby of San Martino al Cimino, next to her Palazzo.

But Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili was more than met the eye, much, much more. It was almost as though she had a dual personality. On the one hand, she was greedy and power hungry, while on the other she was a generous benefactor to the city's underprivileged, as evidenced by her work in San Martino. She was also a lover of beauty and was instrumental in the renovation and beautification of the Palazzo Pamphili and the Piazza Navona. As for the rumors and innuendos of her being the Pope's mistress, that is another question, especially since there is no absolute proof.

The village of San Martino al Cimino sits on the slopes of the Cimino Mountains approximately 15 miles north of Rome. The small village, which contains the abandoned remains of a monastic complex, was rebuilt



San Martino al Cimino

by Olimpia at great personal expense. Princess Olimpia invested much of her time and enormous wealth in her fiefdom, employing such renowned architects and artists as Francesco Borromini, Marcantonio De Rossi, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini. She transformed her fiefdom into an avant-garde village that presaged modern-day city planning. Ever mindful of the trauma she experienced at the prospect of being cloistered in a convent, Olimpia intended the village to be a refuge for dowry-less young girls and an alternative to the cloistered life. As greedy, conniving and power hungry as she was, Olimpia was magnanimous to the destitute, and was especially known for her kindness to oppressed women, giving generously to nuns, and she was especially partial to, and protector of prostitutes. She planned and modernized the village of San Martino, building some 250 houses in



*Piazza Navona*

rows of 25 each, as dwellings for those unfortunate women.

Olimpia also built a Palazzo next to the church, incorporating parts of the monastery and its adjacent buildings. A unique feature of her Palazzo bedroom was the fact that the ceiling could be lowered and raised by a system of pulleys, making the room smaller in the winter, thus easier to heat, and cooler in the summer by raising it.

The church of Sant'Agnese in Agone, fronting the Piazza Navona is one of Rome's jewels of Baroque architecture. At Olimpia's insistence, the church was commissioned by Pope Innocent X in 1652. It was initially intended to be a family chapel directly next door to the to their residence, the Palazzo Doria Pamphili, and there was even an opening made in the drum of the dome so

the family could participate in the religious services from their palace. The name of the church is rather misleading in that it does refer to the agony of St. Agnes, who was martyred there, but rather it is the ancient name of the Piazza Navona, meaning "the site of the competition."

Olimpia opined that the Pope's family palazzo should not front on a squalid piazza that is host to the city's open air market every week. Olimpia convinced

her brother-in-law to ban the market from the Piazza Navona and have it moved elsewhere. She also convinced Innocent that a fountain in the center of the piazza, in close proximity to the family palazzo, would project, and greatly amplify the prestige of the Pamphili family, and the papacy.

In 1647, as a result of Olimpia's coaxing, Innocent X initiated a major project to upgrade and beautify the Piazza Navona. Although history credits Pope Innocent X with the renovation and beautification of Piazza Navona, it was Donna Olimpia who, not only encouraged the pontiff, but also worked with him as co-sponsor of the project, and spent a large portion of her personal fortune in the process. Having been convinced to build a fountain in the piazza, Innocent immediately had water

diverted to the piazza for that purpose. At the same time he announced a contest for the design and construction of a fountain. Bernini, however, was excluded from entering the contest.

Olimpia was also instrumental in having Bernini's magnificent Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi (Fountain of the Four Rivers) built in the center of the Piazza Navona. Prince Niccolò Ludovisi, a friend of Bernini, persuaded him to prepare a model of a fountain. Bernini eagerly complied and made a silver model of a fountain. Ludovisi then colluded with Donna Olimpia for it to be displayed in the Palazzo Pamphili. Being well aware of the pope's dissatisfaction with the entries submitted for the new fountain, she agreed to display Bernini's model in a room in the palace where she knew her brother-in-law was sure to see it on his next visit.

Not long afterwards, the Pope visited Olimpia and when his eyes fell upon Bernini's model. He loudly exclaimed, "This design must be by Bernini!" According to Bernini's son, Domenico, "The Pope called for Bernini and apologized for not having him work for him before and ordered him to make the fountain according to his design." Work on Bernini's fountain began in 1651. Over the pontificate of Innocent X, the Piazza Navona morphed into a Baroque showcase of architecture and art. Although Olimpia kept the silver model, without her intervention, support, and cunning, Bernini's fountain may never have come into existence.

Beginning in 1652 and up until 1866, the Piazza Navona was flooded every Saturday and Sunday in August in an elaborate celebration of the Pamphili family. Originally the Piazza Navona



was the Stadium of Domitian, built by Emperor Titus Flavius Domitianus in 80 AD. The name, Navona, means “big ship,” and refers to the flooding of the ancient Stadium of Domitian to accommodate mock naval battles. The papal family Palazzo overlooked the Piazza Navona, and Olimpia decided to turn it into a unique aquatic backdrop for aristocratic carriage rides. In 1652 she undertook a project to turn the Piazza Navona into a lagoon. Her idea was to recreate the classical entertainment of staging naval battles using carriages. Her idea was easy to implement. All that was required was to shut off the rains of the fountains causing the overflowing water to fill up the half meter deep, convex pavement of the piazza. It did not take long before the coaches were decorated as boats and traditional gondolas. Children and adults alike began running into the piazza to enjoy the cool water, coaches, and the music. Olimpia’s idea turned out to be so popular that it immediately became a city tradition and Romans and foreign visitors alike came to participate in the event.

Her good works notwithstanding, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church did everything in its power to eliminate the

history of Donna Olimpia Pamphili’s scandalous control and power over the Supreme Pontiff, the Holy Sea, and the Papal States. However, history would not allow that to happen.

In 1666, the anti-Catholic publicist Gregorio Leti wrote the following in his *Vita di Donna Olimpia Mairdalchini*:

“During the last year of the Pope’s life, Olimpia Mairdalchini scarcely ever left his side, completely controlling access to the Pope and to the money she could make and power she could wield through him. In the last weeks of his life, it was said, she would lock him in his room once a week while she removed money and other valuables from the Papal Palace to her own palace. Even with his death she did not flee the inevitable retribution, believing that she could produce a friendly result in the conclave through the exercise of influence and money. The dead Pope she left to his own fate, not even providing him a proper coffin for his lying-in-state.”

Then in 1880, the Encyclopedia Britannica alluded to Olimpia being the mistress of her brother-in-law, Pope Innocent X:

“Throughout his reign the influence exercised over him by Mairdalchini, his deceased brother’s wife, was very great, and such as to give rise to gross scandal, for which, however, there appears to have been no adequate ground.... The avarice of his female counsellor gave to his reign a tone of oppression and sordid greed which probably it would not otherwise have shown, for personally he was not without noble and reforming impulses.”

Additionally, Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), a German historian, after much study and research, concluded that Olimpia Mairdalchini was not Pope Innocent X’s lover.

Even today, books are still being written about the woman who was the La Segreto Papessa. Additionally, many books, although not specifically about Olimpia, mention her exploits and control over the Vatican. Like it or not, Donna Olimpia Mairdalchini Pamphili, for 11 years, was the power behind the throne of St. Peter. 📖

*Paul Zeisset shares impressions from his trip to the Easter Island*



*The Montebello Voice  
uncut, uncensored,  
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Photos by Dian McDonald  
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