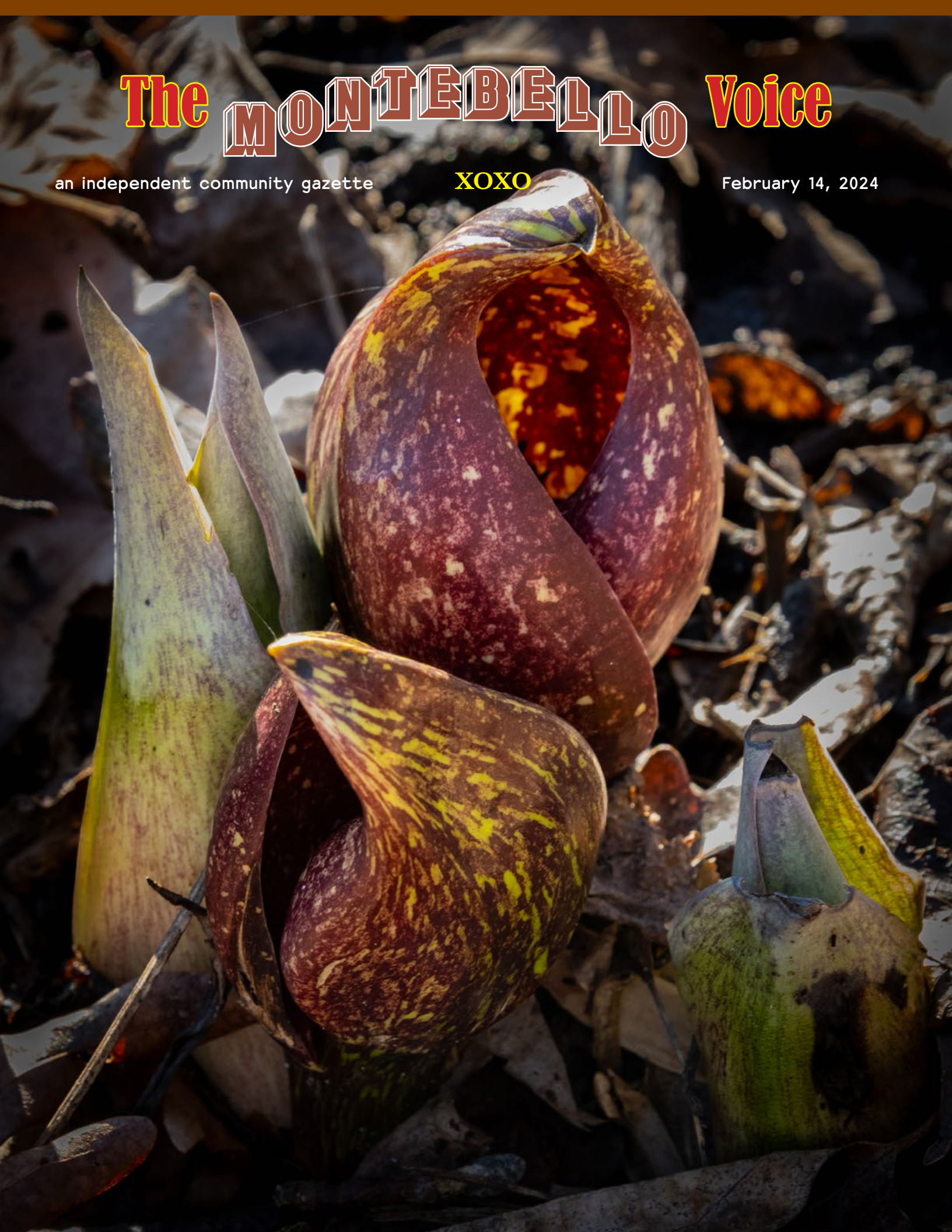


The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent community gazette

XOXO

February 14, 2024





voices on the 35 Marathon bridge

The Montebello Marathon Bridge group is finishing its 2023-2024 season. We started play in May 2023 with 12 teams participating. All players were required to be vaccinated and masks were optional. Awards will be distributed in April 2024.

A new season for 2024-2025 will begin in June. All interested bridge players are welcome and encouraged to play. Two member teams compete monthly at games held in the players' home. The \$10 per person annual fee provides cash prizes awarded to the top teams at the end of the season.

For more information, please contact John Hagaman at 703-329-9426, cell at 703-307-5062 or email to johnhagaman@cox.net. Enrollment deadline is April 1. – *John Hagaman*



Billiards Club Highlander Tournament

*Photo by Angela
Anderson*

Film Society screen- ing of Catch-22 with Caryl Curry

*Photo by Dian
McDonald*

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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 or visit on the web at www.montebellovoice.com.

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Cover photo of skunk cabbage in the woodlands by Don Savage

Management actively implementing security measures

By *Mikhailina Karina*

After the armed carjacking in a building 2 garage last month, management is consulting with experts and putting in place a variety of security measures. A town hall with Fairfax County police will take place on February 27 at 6 p.m. in the community lounge.

At the February 13 Board of Directors meeting, General Manager Eric Finke listed all the pending and current measures to strengthen security around the property.

One observable change is stepped up police patrols, GM Finke said. “There’s a fair amount of crime in the area. Compared to our neighbors, we are far below.”

Board President Jon Kandel echoed a similar statement from his meetings with county police, who were surprised about the crime. “They stressed we’re the safest property in the area,” he said.

Within the next month, Flock license plate readers will be installed at the front gate to “capture the license plates of vehicles and store them in a secure database accessible by local and state

police agencies,” GM Finke wrote in a memo in the [board packet](#). The system has been used throughout the county at shopping centers and high-traffic roads to identify vehicles that were stolen or used in a crime.

An ID scanner for all visitors at the front gate will store information in a secure database, which would also improve efficiency and tracking.

A new security car, 2019 Ford Taurus, will allow for more patrolling around the property. Additional staffing during busy times at the front gate is also under consideration.

Other measures include enhancing the mile-long perimeter fence with motion sensors, increasing No Trespassing signage, creating a method to text security to report safety or suspicious activities concerns, and potentially installing a speed bump on the resident side of the front gate to prevent tailgating.

About a dozen residents responded to the call to join a security *ad hoc* committee, President Kandel said. Two were chosen for their expertise in perimeter – specifically front gate and fence – security. He also said the county police office that specializes in reviewing prop-

erties for security will issue Montebello its report in the coming months.

Based on his discussion with police, President Kandel said the carjacking was likely a random joy ride, a dare, or gang initiation by young teens who were observed checking other cars for unlocked doors.

In addition to the town hall with FCPD, a personal safety class will be available to the residents on March 5.

In other business, the board voted 7-2 to approve the new playground that is slated to be installed this spring.

President Kandel updated the board on the question of making recordings of board sessions available to the residents. Per association attorney’s advice, such “unscrubbed” recordings could be open to litigation. The association will continue relying on official minutes.

Following technical difficulties with Zoom during the last hybrid town hall, board candidates forum on February 18 will be Zoom only. The current site license of 100 will be set up as a webinar to accommodate 1,000 attendees.

The proposal to retile the indoor pool has been tabled until consulting with Paul Beckmann of [Beckmann Architects](#). 🏠



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Hang on. It's 2024

By Bob Shea

In the best of times, I would rather take a sharp #2 pencil in my right eye than quote Steve Bannon, the one-time advisor to The Donald. However, he once said on a podcast, prior to January 6th, “Strap in, it’s going to be wild.”

Unfortunately, I think he could have also been talking about all of 2024. My crystal ball is slightly foggy, but I think, for any number of reasons, 2024 is going to be wild or much worse.

So, buckle up! I am putting on my prognosticator hat. First, many happenings that go beyond politics.

This year, Paris hosts the 2024 Olympics. I recall watching ABC’s Jim McKay live broadcasting the terror of the 1972 Olympics in Munich. Prepared for banter about the Olympic games and gold medal count, McKay suddenly found himself alone in a broadcast booth for hours describing the murder, kidnapping, and ill-advised rescue of the Israeli wrestling team while ABC, totally unprepared for a terror attack, struggled to find a way to cover an event unprecedented in sports coverage.

1972 was, by today’s standards, a relatively calm year. No one had suspected that the Olympics would be the venue for terrorists. Fast forward to 2024, the world is “on fire,” and the Olympic crowds in Paris could be a fertile ground for any number of groups with grudges to again hold the sports world hostage. Paris has in the recent past been the site of horrific attacks by the disgruntled. Can the French gendarmes and military provide a safe environment? Probably not. Stay tuned.

Will the wildfires, floods, extreme temperatures, drought, and hurricanes of recent years repeat their destructive rampages? Probably. Mother Nature has a hand to play.

Ukraine and Gaza are givens. One does not have to be a political scientist to know that neither will be resolved in any

way that meets the approval of the civilized world. Matches are being thrown into powder kegs by actors who know exactly what they are doing on both sides of the issue for multiple reasons.

On the economic front, there is currently 90,000,000 square feet (that is with 6 zeros) of vacant commercial office space in New York City alone. With employees working from home and corporations tightening their financial belts, whole commercial buildings are vacant with few if any plans for either



filling them or repurposing them. What is the national economic impact of vacant skyscrapers, mortgages unpaid, and investors left with a vast wasteland of unneeded real estate in dozens of large cities from coast to coast? Not a happy thought for banks, 401Ks, and retirement funds.

How much will consumer prices rise when shiploads of containers have to go around southern Africa to avoid the Red Sea and Suez Canal? Adding 10-14 days to the shipment of much of what Europe and the U.S. East Coast need and consume will certainly cost buyers at the cash register. At another choke point, the Panama Canal is reducing the number of ships transiting the canal due to lower water levels in Lake Gatun that provides the water that is flushed into the Atlantic or Pacific with each ship’s passage. Commercial shipping costs are not someone else’s problem. It is our problem. Impact on inflation?

Compounding this is the continuing unrest over books in schools, parental

rights, activist school boards, and university-level curricula. What sane municipality bans Webster’s dictionary from a school library because the word “sex” is defined in it? When math books are rejected for being too “woke?” Has the country’s collective good sense, subverted by a few, been put in the extremist trash can? Do we educate, indoctrinate, or just give up?

Then there are elections. A significant percentage of the U.S. population enthusiastically supports elections as long as *their* candidate/party wins. What happened to the old-fashioned approach that said, “well, we lost, what can we do better next time?” Whether an athletic contest or an election, there are winners and losers. What a concept!

How many usually rational citizens still feel that Joe Biden is an illegitimately elected president? They seem to thrive on alternative facts and live in a parallel universe. Election denialism has become the bedrock philosophy of far too many people. With the fall’s election approaching, multiple court decisions pending, the drum beat of “them versus us” getting louder, where will it all end with a disgraced, twice-impeached, unhinged candidate holding the microphone?

Probably violence. Between now and November, there will be at least one lone wolf or cult-related political assassination in our country. What cannot be resolved at the ballot box will be left to the crazies, the true believers in a red hat, with an AR-15 in hand. God help us!

As I said, my crystal ball is foggy at best. These are painful words to write. I hope I am wrong.

Maybe the USA can somehow find an even keel, and get back to the “good old days.” Hopefully, by December 31, 2024, you can collectively point a finger at me and shout, “You were wrong!”

In the meantime, buckle up, say a prayer, and be ready for one hell of a year. 🍷

Susan Dexter

Q: How do you define what Montebello is and what it aspires to be? Please describe your views on its vision and sense of community.

A: Montebello has about 1,600 residents, according to Fairfax County. Its buildings are 40-42 years old, and its approximately 1,000 units are about 75% owner-occupied. It is well maintained with an approx. \$10M budget and no history of special assessments. Unit market values range from \$250,000 to over \$1M, with 77% valued under \$500,000 (Fairfax County data, 2022). Individual unit conditions range from original kitchen and bath elements to double units with luxury renovations. Its population is older than the area average. The campus has extensive common areas where residents can see each other and participate in a wide range of group activities, which support a strong sense of community.

Montebello has been positioned as a luxury condominium since it was built. Recent large investments in common areas such as the Community Center, which I support, show continuing luxury aspirations. It should be noted, however, that the market value of individually owned units varies considerably, as does the wealth of Montebello owners. I think an appropriate vision takes into consideration the needs of all Montebello owners.

Q: What is your position on a smoking ban in all units?

A: Whether we decide to ban smoking in all units or not, the decision should be made by the owners at Montebello. The final decision should not be a policy decision made by the board of directors but rather a change to our by-laws which requires a binding vote from owners.



Q: In light of the recent armed carjacking, what measures should Board and management implement to ensure Montebello's security?

A: I would step up regular patrols and inspection of perimeter fencing, mitigate perimeter weaknesses that make fence climbing easier, research cost-effective technology enhancements, and continue to consult with security professionals.

There are also important steps for residents to take, such as keeping important phone numbers on speed dial,

reporting suspicious activity, and staying aware of guest passes and other access devices that have been issued to them, promptly reporting lost ones so that they can be deactivated. Management could help with periodic reminders to properly manage access devices.

Q: What are your financial priorities for the association? How will you keep condo fees in check?

A: Montebello is a great place to live. I want to keep it that way by properly maintaining our beautiful campus – affordably. I will use my professional expertise as a Certified Public Accountant for over 30 years, and my experience on Montebello's Finance and Budget Committee, to add additional oversight on Montebello financial matters.

I will seek to obtain more community input before approving spending for high-cost discretionary projects. Some expenses are absolutely necessary – they pay for things that we need to have. Others are discretionary – they pay for things that would be nice to have but should be scrutinized carefully to ensure that owners really want to pay for them. Increased scrutiny of spending does not automatically lead to a diminished quality of amenities. Any well-run enterprise owes such scrutiny, and transparency, to its stakeholders. Montebello's by-laws (Sec. 5.6, see BuildingLink) require owner votes for significant additions, alterations, or improvements – I would seek to improve compliance with this requirement. Whether or not a proposed expenditure rises to the level requiring a formal vote, I will actively listen to owner and resident concerns and bring fresh ideas to developing solutions.

Surveys should not just ask whether owners would support a single, packaged proposal, but instead should offer options with associated price tags.

Overall, I will pay attention to the details to help ensure Montebello's Board does not spend our money unnecessarily.

Q: In what community activities – events, clubs, committees do you take part?

A: I have been a member of the Finance & Budget committee for 5 years, where I have become very familiar with Montebello's financial condition. I regularly attend Board meetings and work sessions.

As a musician and music lover, I look forward to the music events at Montebello. I enjoy talking to people at social events such as holiday parties and Cup of Joe. I swim and am a regular at Saturday morning water aerobics. I enjoy the evening Pilates class. I love to walk in the woods and have submitted prize winning pictures to the annual Photo contest.

Q: For those (Ruth Heineman and Susan Dexter) who have not been on the board: What direct leadership experience have you had on Montebello's committees and what have you learned from this experience?

A: I participate most actively in the Finance and Budget Committee. I have actively spoken out in committee meetings for increased scrutiny of spending. I have offered to the committee my professional opinions and have listed prudent practices to improve financial oversight. I am willing to raise tough issues and I take the time to hear and consider all points of view.

My experience on Boards of other organizations has taught the value of courtesy and respect, active listening, and seeking win-win solutions. The most effective governing bodies have members with diverse backgrounds and points of view.

Q: What would you like to accomplish as a board member?

A: There are several things I would like to accomplish as a Board member:

1. More owner input on 'nice to have' project spending.
2. More financial oversight on spending.
3. Adherence to By-Law Section 5.6, which requires a majority vote by the owners when any one or more major additions, alterations or improvements to our campus add up to over 1% of the total annual assessment during any period of twelve consecutive months.

Q: What specific steps would you take to improve transparency of information and decisions at Montebello?

A: Montebello has had a problem with cost overruns for years. Overruns themselves are a problem that sometimes, but not always, can be avoided. However, Montebello's financial reporting makes it difficult for Board members and owners to see the true extent of overruns and other risks, particularly if they are not financial professionals. I would like to add a section in our financial statements that tracks project-to-date costs on repair-and-replace projects that cross fiscal years and update them in other ways to improve awareness of spending – such as a comparison to our budget (per the Reserve Study) and an explanation of the corresponding variances when significant.

A quarterly town hall meeting with our General Manager would also add transparency to our decision-making at Montebello. The town hall should include a quarterly look-back at what has been accomplished in our community and a quarterly look-forward at what we want to do. The meeting needs to be scheduled in the evening or on a weekend to enable participation by residents who work during the day.

Transparency and owner input are two of the most significant areas where Montebello needs to improve. Elect me to the Board and I will make them top priorities. 📌

Ruth Heineman

Q: How do you define what Montebello is and what it aspires to be? Please describe your views on its vision and sense of community.

A: I see Montebello as an exclusive, luxurious small town (as a matter of fact, Montebello is about the size of the small town in eastern Kentucky where my husband was born and grew up), and it aspires to be the best, in terms of amenities (what other gated community has a restaurant onsite?) and attitudes (friendly and caring).

Q: What is your position on a smoking ban in all units?

A: Even as a former smoker, I cannot say until such time as management and legal counsel brief the board about the legality and such at other communities.

Q: In light of the recent armed carjacking, what measures should board and management implement to ensure Montebello's security?

A: It is my understanding that management is working with the police to identify weaknesses. I am not a security profession so cannot offer an opinion as such.

Q: What are your financial priorities for the association? How will you keep condo fees in check?

A: I will work with the other Board members to maintain the buildings and grounds at the current high standard, and to ensure that fees remain reasonable and relative to the needs of the community and infrastructure.



Q: In what community activities – events, clubs, committees – do you take part?

A: I am Chair of both the Finance and Budget Committee and the Activities Committee and take part in as many events as I am able. I do show movies from my collection in the Lounge from time to time, and I run a free bingo game monthly. I am the librarian for the Music Club and I am a leader for Water Aerobics.

Q: For those (Ruth Heineman and Susan Dexter) who have not been on the board: What direct leadership experience have you had on Montebello's committees and what have you learned from this experience?

A: I am currently chair of the Finance and Budget Committee (since March 2023) and Chair of the Activities Committee (since summer of 2020). I have learned over the years how the community operates and its relationship with management.

Q: What would you like to accomplish as a board member?

A: As a member of the Board, I would not be making an individual contribution but work with the other Board members to reach consensus on all issues, taking into account fiscal responsibilities

Q: What specific steps would you take to improve transparency of information and decisions at Montebello?

A: All Board and committee meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend. The Board packet contains all of the information discussed at the Board meeting, with the exception of legal and personnel issues. 📖

Lauren Pierce

Q: How do you define what Montebello is and what it aspires to be? Please describe your views on its vision and sense of community.

A: Historical documents reference Montebello being developed as a “Town,” based in “Friendship.” I see the current vision and sense of community for today’s Montebello as exactly that and so much more. We are a group of individuals, working together to thrive in a 35-acre gated property settled on the coveted “Beautiful Mountain” of Fairfax County. The five luxury residential buildings of our condo (incl., one single-story structure and four towers) are meant to comfortably house the entirety of our wonderfully diverse population who wish to call Montebello “home.”

We are – and ought to continue to be a community who is – committed to being in association with one another by fostering a sense of belonging through shared values and aspirations. Ours is a community in which its owners and residents volunteer with meetings, committees, meetings, activities, and events for the sustainment and betterment of an inclusive, safe, and well-maintained homestead.

The heart of Montebello must consistently beat with the rhythm emanating from the positive pulse of dedication set forth by every owner, resident, employee, employer and visitor as he/she does the following:

- ❖ offers respect to each other;
- ❖ exemplifies integrity;
- ❖ and collaborates with each other, in a willingness to hold all members of our community to the highest level of quality of actions and management within our friendly home-town on a beautiful mountain, “Montebello.”

Q: What is your position on a smoking ban in all units?

A: I take a neutral position on a smoking ban in all condominium units because it involves facilitating a balanced and respectful discussion that considers the varied perspectives within our community. We must strive to reach a consensus, or compromise solution, which promotes the well-being of all residents, given our buildings’ infrastructures.



Since I am a current member of our Montebello Board, who might have to act on this issue based on input from our community, I maintain an open-mind and await the official next stages concerning this topic.

Q: In light of the recent armed carjacking, what measures should Board and management implement to ensure Montebello’s security?

A: I have a career in “Information Security and Privacy,” whereby I presently produce a professional newsletter fo-

cused on safety and security measures. Hence, the topic of “Security/Safety” is one of my strong passions.

Unbeknownst to anyone other than the two Montebello employees with whom I’ve spoken, I actually had a conversation about boosting safety and security practices at Montebello just three days prior to the recent internal car-jacking incident.

That being stated, I believe in a wholistic approach to improving safety at Montebello, which involves a combination of physical security measures; resident, owner, and employee engagement; as well as collaboration with local Law Enforcement. Professionally, I would immediately recommend – at the very least – the following:

- ❖ promoting community awareness;
- ❖ performing a security/safety risk assessment;
- ❖ developing/implementing emergency response plans;
- ❖ providing safety/security awareness training;
- ❖ and urgently strengthening whatever our weakest access control measures are within Montebello.

The aforementioned are all broad security/safety-related topics I have purposefully left broad, because, once again, this is a subject about which, as a current Montebello Board Member, I must remain compassionate and open-minded, in order to effectively receive the following:

- ❖ the value-added information shared by our residents and owners;
- ❖ the experiences from our external community;
- ❖ any insights from industry professionals;

- ❖ and the “knowns” of our condominium’s physical design.

Thus, I will be able to work with other members of our Montebello Board and employees to swiftly implement appropriate responses to deter any future criminal actions within Montebello.

I’d like to note I like the way, one person at a February 2024 meeting stated, “Montebello needs to be the least attractive target.” I definitely agree.

Just as an aside from this topic, if you look at the current Election Easel Boards, you should note there is some “Personal Security Data” now missing from the “Election Bio-Statements.” Guess who suggested that?

Q: What are your financial priorities for the association? How will you keep condo fees in check?

A: Prioritizing initiatives in an effort to keep condominium HOA (Homeowners Association) fees low, while maintaining the quality of amenities and services, requires careful budgeting, efficient management practices, and strategic decision-making. Since I am a current Montebello Board Member, I know that to be effective with this, I must work cohesively with the Montebello Manager, as well as with the Treasurer, to understand and approve a budget that accurately incorporates allocations to cover future expenses and expend funds for current good quality projects successfully without any do-overs.

Our condominium association can effectively balance our desire to keep HOA fees low with the goal of maintaining a high standard of living for residents and preserving property values over time.

I will encourage owner engagement during the Board Meetings, where owners can provide input to current and upcoming expenditures, to help us focus on cost saving initiatives, while maintaining transparency and accountability.

Q: In what community activities – events, clubs, committees – do you take part?

A: I participate in various Activities Committee-sponsored events, including, but not limited to, the following: Cup of Joe and Dances, Music Club presentations, Grounds Committee Arbor Day donation drive, and Pet Club activities and events, etc. I also share in the Arts in Montebello events by visiting the Community Center and marveling at the entries submitted by our artistic and talented residents.

Q: For the current board member (Lauren Pierce) who has not had continuous service: What are your accomplishments during your prior service? What have you learned while away from the board?

A: During my prior service as a Montebello Board Member, I voted on a new streamlined balanced budget that removed some unnecessary line items and moved funding into more appropriate buckets. I voted for the commencement of the new Fitness Center after hearing our community’s input. I lead a Focus Group that resulted in the lower level of the Community Center being designed for multi-use (dances, exercise, digital play by youth, etc.). I was an advocate for having an open game room area with seating areas for snacking and glass walls to bring in natural light. I advocated for the Women’s Shower area to have more privacy when the doors opened to the pool area. I lead a “Walk Around the Campus,” that resulted in helping to bring focus on safety issues as well as changes that were needed to divert any unwanted or standing water from Building 5. I advocated for cost saving measures such as motion sensor lighting, in places such as the Hobby Rooms, and other areas where people often left lights on for extended periods of time before someone else came in to

turn them off. Advocated and voted for advanced technological capabilities for the campus such as Wi-Fi, new network system, as well as Verizon retrofitting FIOS on our campus. This created price competition as well as additional amenities for our community.

During the period of time in between my Board terms, I was able to see the workings of Montebello in a new, more educated light. I grew to truly appreciate the efforts of Montebello’s volunteers. I learned from experience what it takes to co-lead a significant effort for Montebello’s benefit (as the Pet Club Lead), creating a new amenity from the concept/design phase through the Board phase of approval and Management implementation. Thus, I now have a thorough understanding of the importance of effective collaboration and communication with committee members, community members, survey input, Management, the Board of Directors, as well as with Counsel, to bring about successful outcomes. Furthermore, I spent my time “off” of the Board striving to listen thoughtfully and actively to the input and opinions of others who have a vested interest in the place we call “home” and how it is shaped for the time to come. I thereby honed my interpersonal and “intra-Montebello-Workings” skills. Ultimately, I learned to appreciate and love – even more than ever – living at Montebello, and how important effective management and leadership are to its current and future status as a luxury condominium community.

Q: What would you like to accomplish as a board member?

A: I would like to accomplish the following in continuing to be a Montebello Board Member:

- ❖ work cohesively with the other Board Members, as well as with Management, to prioritize reg-

ular maintenance and upkeep of common areas, facilities, and infrastructure, making sure to enhance property value and resident satisfaction;

- ❖ ensure communication and transparency between the Board, Management, owners, residents, and employees by providing timely and effective notices through digital platforms, paper format and/or community meetings; and
- ❖ see the implementation of security measures and safety protocols to protect residents.

Q: What specific steps would you take to improve transparency of information and decisions at Montebello?

A: Improving transparency of information for decision-making in a condominium management setting is crucial for fostering trust, accountability, and effective governance. The following are some steps, which require a wholistic approach, that I believe could be impactful for improvement:

- ❖ verbally encourage owners and residents with whom I speak to review distributed Board Packets and attend Board Meetings, virtually or in-person, to hear and give voice on agenda items.
- ❖ author an article in *The Times of Montebello* that reminds everyone about our decision-making process, including how decisions are made, who is involved, and the rationale behind decisions.
- ❖ require Management to maintain reliable technology to complement effective usage of our virtual platforms for online attendees.
- ❖ require Management to increase the capacity for the number of virtual attendees allowed to join our meetings and events; even if it is short bursts timeframes for the increased capacity.
- ❖ encourage residents to enter complaints in writing via the Building Link or on a Complaint form and request Management to send a response to every entry.
- ❖ hold Management, Board Members and owners responsible to be courteous and receptive of communication one to another and timely when addressing complaints/concerns.
- ❖ hold Management and Board Members responsible to show kindness in speech/response to residents who attend meetings and share concerns.
- ❖ require that matters of safety/security pertaining to our campus and residents be shared to our residents on a separate sheet of paper and in electronic format with all information, unless legally precluded, at the soonest, possibly in stages (immediate and follow-up). 🏠

Bruce R. Shaw

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views. I see Montebello as a premier community, and “community” best describes us. It is an ongoing pleasure to be part of such a vibrant environment.

Regarding the smoking issue, I do not think it is reasonable to tell folks what they can or should do in their own homes. As difficult as it may be, we must find an engineering solution to smoke (and other odors) leaving individual units.

The recent carjacking incident was indeed alarming and concerning. Management has responded quickly. I believe the steps current-

ly underway for better physical security on our site are appropriate. These in-



clude improved fence monitoring and expanded front gate surveillance.

We must keep a financial balance between, on the one hand, spending to meet ongoing operational and maintenance needs and, on the other hand, keeping fees in check. There is always room for improvement, but I believe Management, the Board, F&B, and our engineering staff have done quite well in assuring this is happening.

I am not one for radical change. The Community Center renovation is complete and most grounds projects are finished or planned. We can now move comfortably ahead and enjoy the fruits of the labors of management and our volunteers. 🙏

An excellent teacher and a memorable lesson

By Rolf Dietrich

Imagine most of us had a teacher or two who were memorable. One of mine was Mr. Brewer, my high school government teacher. Most of his peers lectured their students who dutifully took notes, memorized the talking points, and regurgitated them on tests. Mr. Brewer had a different technique.

One morning, Mr. Brewer started his class by writing on the board the statement, “The best form of government is a dictatorship.”

That got our attention.

He elaborated verbally and also wrote on the board:

“One person decides what is best for everyone. Then it gets done.”

“There is no wasting time with messy discussion or debate.”

“A dictatorship is extremely efficient.”

A few students were bold enough to express doubts about his assertions.

After some discussion, Mr. Brewer was willing to concede that perhaps also having an elected body and a few advisory organizations was OK, but only to give the appearance of representation and consideration of other ideas. He conceded that appearances

can be important, but he reiterated that to remain efficient, the ruler must have full control, including selecting (directly or indirectly) all significant advisors and a majority of the elected body. Perhaps surveys could be conducted, but they would have to be biased in a way to make the ruler’s decisions appear to be what the citizens wanted. That way the agenda can be implemented efficiently and exactly as the ruler intends, without messy debate or true consideration of the impact on different segments of the populace.

Mr. Brewer noted that an added benefit would be that through control of the press and other outlets of information, a powerful ruler could reward supporters, suppress information that reflected poorly on the ruler’s decisions, and ensure that many citizens believed that everything was going perfectly. Only people who supported the ruler’s views would be called to speak to the representative body or write articles for the controlled press. That would prevent the need for messy debate and give the appearance that everyone agreed with what was being done. By always conceding to the agenda of the powerful, it would appear that everyone was getting along.

Many more students entered the discussion, willing to push back on his statements. They pointed out that while such a situation was efficient at doing the things that the ruler wanted, it not very good at ensuring the best interests of the people who are not in the inner circle of the powerful. Other opinions, ideas, and concerns should be honestly considered. While debate and compromise are messy and inefficient, that is the approach that is best for the people.

By the end of the class, Mr. Brewer was smiling. We realized he did not really believe in the premises he initially presented; he had put them forward to get us thinking. By engaging us in a real discussion, he had driven home his point:

Although it is more efficient, rule by one person or an inner circle of persons who always support that one person does not serve the populace well.

Mr. Brewer was a great teacher. We should all consider the lesson he taught that day. 📖



The Montebello Voice



Artist Rachael Bright teaches a sip-and-paint class in the underground

Ironing their brown shirts

By Chester Taylor

As Trump surges ahead in the polls, his MAGA thugs are already ironing their brown shirts. Made up of paramilitary groups, White supremacists, and radicalized Christian nationalists, they serve Trump much like the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) of Germany served Hitler in the 1920s and 1930s. Commonly called Brownshirts because they wore brown uniform-like shirts, they provided protection for Nazi rallies and disrupted the meetings of opposing parties. They were antisemitic, anti-gay, and anti-democratic.

On the night of November 9, 1938, in response to the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a 17-year-old German-born Polish Jew, the Brownshirts shattered the glass storefronts of about 7,500 Jewish stores and businesses in Germany and Austria.

It was called *Kristallnacht* or the Night of Broken Glass. Jewish homes were ransacked, and synagogues and schools were damaged or destroyed. At least 100 Jews were beaten to death. More than 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp. That same year, Hitler replaced the SA with the SS, *Schutzstaffel*, who took exclusive control over running the concentration camps and executed six million Jews.

Can't happen in America? It started happening right here in Virginia, July 8, 2017, when the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in Charlottesville. The following month, Unite the Right, held a rally there, too, where hundreds of White supremacists wore Nazi insignias and chanted racist slogans. One of their followers, James Alex Fields, drove his car through a crowd of counter-protesters,

injuring 35 people and killing Heather Danielle Heyer, age 32. Fields' motives: neo-Nazism, White supremacy, and fascism. Trump said, "You also had some very fine people on both sides."

Trump's racist, xenophobic rhetoric emboldened the White nationalist and far-right extremist groups and individuals; and hate crimes/mass shootings continued. On August 2, 2019, in El Paso, Texas, where I once lived, 21-year-old Patrick Wood Crusius, using an AR-15 style assault rifle, shot 23 peo-



Charlottesville, Virginia, 2017

ple to death, and injured 22 others at a Walmart. The victims were nearly all Latinos or Blacks. Crusius characterized himself as a White supremacist and left a manifesto online with White nationalist and anti-immigration themes. When asked did Donald Trump have anything to do with this, Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (D) who represented El Paso, stated, "When you fan the flames of hate in the country, when we have leaders who make scapegoats and targets of people, you are going to fuel violence."

At noon on January 6, 2021 (J6), former president Trump spoke to his MAGA Brownshirts at a rally near the White House, "We will never give up, he said. "We will never concede." Minutes later, his supporters stormed the Capitol and disrupted the certification

of the 2020 presidential election. They assaulted and injured 140 Capitol police officers. One protester was killed that day and later six police officers died from medical conditions connected to the attack. The citizens of this country watched these events unfold on TV. We heard recordings of Trump's phone calls and watched the Congressional January 6th Committee outline how President Trump plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat. He claimed he had committed no crimes, that this was a "fake insurrection."

Then again on May 14, 2022, in Buffalo, New York, an 18-year-old Payton Gendron, in a racist rampage, shot and killed 10 Black people and injured three others at a Tops Friendly Markets grocery store. Using an AR-15 style assault rifle and high-capacity (30 rounds) magazines, he fired 60 high-velocity rounds and yelled racial slurs during the attack. Federal prosecutors said the killings were intentional, required substantial

planning and premeditation, and were racially motivated. Prosecutors added that he selected the Tops Friendly Market "in order to maximize the number of Black victims." Gendron wrote, "the White race is superior in the brain to all other... Yes I am racist because I believe in differences of capabilities between races... YES!! I wish all JEWS to HELL!"

Inflamed by right-wing influencers to include Republican Congresswomen Lauren Boebert (R-CO) and Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich, entered an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado, just before midnight November 19, 2022. He immediately opened fire with an AR-15 type assault rifle, killing five people and injuring 25 others. Former lawyer for Donald Trump, Jenna Ellis,

stated that the five people killed were, “now reaping the consequences of... eternal damnation,” because there was no evidence the victims were Christian. This is the same Jenna Ellis who pleaded guilty October 24, 2023, to a felony charge over efforts to overturn Donald Trump’s 2020 election loss in Georgia.

Trump believes as president he has complete impunity and stated that if elected for a second term, he would weaponize the Department of Justice and FBI to exact revenge on Democrats, prosecutors, and other political enemies, including President Biden and his family. Trump has stated, “If I happen to be president, and I see somebody who is doing well and beating me very badly, I’ll say, ‘go down and indict them.’”

In DC federal court this year, Trump and his lawyers argued that unless a president has been convicted in the Senate in a formal impeachment vote, he cannot be criminally prosecuted. One judge asked, “You’re saying a president could sell pardons, could sell military secrets, could order SEAL

Team 6 to assassinate a political rival with impunity?” Another judge added, “I think it’s paradoxical to say that [Trump’s] constitutional duty to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed’ allows him to violate criminal law.” Not surprising, before the 2020 election, Trump’s henchman, Roger Stone, was caught on tape plotting with a moonlighting New York City police officer who worked for Stone to assassinate two Democratic congressmen: Eric Swalwell (D-CA) and Jerry Nadler (D-NY).

Trump is now laying out his plans to destroy democracy in America. While claiming to promote election integrity, he has made election denial a central part of his campaign. He has been working for months to create Office of Election Integrity to be an execution tool for the far-right’s agenda, and to launder Trump’s baseless conspiracies about electoral fraud. He said he will pardon the J6 rioters convicted of federal offenses. This would include pardons for Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio and Oath Keepers founder

Stewart Rhodes. They, along with the 480 others, are ironing their brown shirts.

In Nazi Germany, in 1939, Fuhrer Adolf Hitler inspired the Brownshirts with the following words:

“I will get rid of the communist vermin.”

“I will take care of the enemy within.”

“Jews and migrants are poisoning Aryan blood.”

“One people, one realm, one leader.”

In the United States of America, in 2023, former President Donald Trump inspired MAGA supporters with these words:

“I will get rid of the communist vermin.”

“I will take care of the threat from within.”

“Migrants are poisoning the blood of our country.”

“One people, one family, one glorious nation.”

Is history repeating itself? 📖



The war on Ukraine

I recently had a conversation with a Kyiv resident.

“Putin sends us reminders every few days – he bombs Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine. We hope that America is listening to these reminders and continues to support Ukraine financially and militarily.

“We understand that support is being discussed in America. We are concerned that Ukraine may not have an effective spokesperson in these discussions. Russia is good in communicating its point of view without much concern about the truth.

“As we approach the two-year anniversary of Russian invasion, Ukraine is bracing itself for more Russian aggression and more bombs. Our military is doing its job. We are counting on American support.” – Andrew Masiuk 📖

Lackluster and uninviting service at the Montebello Grille

By Carmen Davila

January 10, 2024: Initial email from Carmen Davila to Kierra Reynolds, asst. general manager

I went to the Grille with a guest on Monday, January 8th at approximately 6:15 p.m. to have a pleasant dinner. My guest and I sat at the bar. From the outset, Uğur [Gokova, Grille co-owner, *ed.*] displayed a nonchalant indifference bordering on apathy.

He asked if we were going to carry out or eat in and we said we'd eat at the bar. After we responded, he stepped away and attended to other customers for about 10 minutes before returning with menus.

Even a simple inquiry about the soup of the day elicited a dismissive flick of his finger, an unspoken "wait a minute" devoid of any actual acknowledgment. This lukewarm response felt quite familiar, mirroring my previous encounters with Uğur's lackluster service. In fact, I made the very comment the last time I visited the Grille that service had gone down significantly.

After taking his time, Uğur finally brought two menus, placed them on the counter, hastily stated that the soup of the day was chicken noodle soup, and disappeared again. My guest commented that "he", meaning Uğur must have been having a bad day to which I responded, "No. That's his usual demeanor."

Uğur finally got around to taking our dinner order and he asked what we wanted to drink. I asked for a glass of water and my guest asked for a glass of wine. After he placed our order with the kitchen, I noticed that the inside of my glass was dirty, so I politely informed him and asked for a replacement. He did not respond to my request and kept on working. He eventually returned with another glass of water which he brought without an apology or a word of acknowledgment. I thanked him for

the water but at that point I was getting extremely annoyed.

Shortly thereafter Uğur returned with a breadbasket. He didn't bring bread plates, so I asked for bread plates. I wasn't sure if he heard me because, again, he did not acknowledge that he had heard my request and he continued to assist others at the bar and in the restaurant. We waited for about 10 more minutes and as he was passing by and walking behind me, I asked him again for the bread plates to which he responded in the most rude and hostile tone, "That's why I'm here!" and he flung the two bread plates down on the bar counter where my guest and I were sitting. I said, "Whoa, is there a problem here?" Uğur responded by saying that he heard me say that the service was poor during my last visit and he "wanted to show me what bad service was." (His words verbatim.) I repeated to him that the service was indeed poor and that it had gotten progressively worse and that his performance that evening only proved my point. I told him that he was rude and unprofessional, that if he wanted to continue to have customers he needed to treat them much better. Honestly, the only reason I patronize the Montebello Grille is because it's convenient. Otherwise, I would have stopped long ago because of Uğur's poor attitude. Any other business owner, upon hearing that their service needed improvement would have tried to find out what could be done to improve. Not Uğur! Instead, he took it personally and ended up being petty and behaving even worse than usual.

My guest and I were shocked at this type of unprofessionalism from someone in the hospitality business. We stood up to put our coats on and my guest asked Uğur for the check to settle the wine bill. When Uğur realized what we were doing, he asked, "What about the food that you ordered?" I told him we were not going to eat there.

His immediate response was to indignantly refuse to accept payment for the wine. Then he said to me "You are BANNED!" At that point, we walked out of the restaurant.

The entire experience was a testament to Uğur's inability to grasp the value of customer service. His dismissive attitude and neglectful service seemed to imply that basic courtesy didn't apply to him, especially since he has the benefit of a captive audience here at Montebello. He erroneously believes, and he stated as much yesterday evening, that he provides good customer service.

Over the years, I have heard numerous complaints from other residents about Uğur's attitude and indifference with restaurant patrons, but nothing has been done about it. Perhaps no one has brought it to management's attention, but the treatment that I received was so egregious that I could not let it slide. I deserve an apology from Uğur because he had no right to disrespect me and my guest in that fashion. Since this has been a recurring problem, I would highly recommend identifying a replacement vendor who is more suitable to be in a service business at Montebello.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

(Since there was no response to the above email, I sent another one on January 15.)

January 15, 2024: Email from Carmen Davila to Eric Finke cc all board members and asst. GM Kierra Reynolds

Mr. Finke,

I am writing to follow up to a letter which was sent on Wednesday, January 10th regarding a very disturbing incident which occurred during my visit to the Montebello Grille for dinner. The proprietor, Uğur, was absolutely rude and lacked any sense of profession-

alism or customer service. I've heard numerous times from people who also had similar experiences, but the behavior has continued without any consequences.

I've attached the letter containing the details for everyone's easy reference.

Kierra acknowledged receipt of my email but I have yet to hear from anyone else in management and hope that this message will prompt action on your part to rectify the situation.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

January 16, 2024: From: Eric Finke

Cc: Kierra, Jon, Robert, Steve, Heather, Lauren, Rolf, Foster, Doug, Bruce

Good afternoon Ms. Davila,

There is no need to include the entire Montebello Board when emailing me. While I heard about your incident from Kierra, this is the first time that you have reached out to me directly. I am sorry that you had to experience this type of service from the bar and Uğur. We unfortunately as landlords have no control over the behavior of the Grille staff or its proprietors. As I sympathize with your perspective, what I can offer if you would like is to share your concerns with both Uğur and José so that hopefully the incident is not repeated, but only with your permission. If you prefer to remain anonymous, I can assure you that a member of the Board and I will schedule a meeting with them regardless to relay anonymous concerns from both yourself and other residents regarding Uğur's professionalism when waiting on customers. Thank you for your understanding and please let me know your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Eric Finke, CMCA, AMS, PCAM
General Manager

January 27, 2024: From Carmen Davila to Eric Finke

Thank you for acknowledging my letter, which I received just before leaving for an overseas trip, causing the delay in my response. Here are my thoughts.

I initially contacted management on January 10th, as per your acknowledgment of Kierra's notification to you. She had already informed me that she had forwarded my email to you. However, as five days passed without any communication from you, I felt it necessary to copy all management to ensure a prompt response.

While you are relatively new to Montebello, the persistent behavior and poor attitude displayed by Uğur have been ongoing for years. Although you assert that, as landlords, you lack direct control over the Grille staff's behavior, I believe as General Manager, you possess managerial influence and the Board, as representatives of all condo owners, certainly can do something about it. Owners deserve respect from all contractors such as the proprietors of the Grille, whose services are ultimately funded by our condo fees. Although all contracts have an "out" clause, canceling the agreement seems an unlikely solution here at Montebello for one reason or another. Nevertheless, it is crucial to address rude and disrespectful behavior from Uğur.

Egregious actions should have consequences, yet it seems Uğur's actions will continue without repercussions. Moreover, you did not address his attempt to "ban" me from the restaurant, an amenity for which I pay. He must be informed that he cannot "ban" me, and my decision not to patronize the Grille is my own because I will no longer support a business that treats me like crap.

I am not the only one who has raised concerns, and while I appreciate your offer of sympathy, what I seek from management is ACTION, not sympathy.

You do not need my permission, and anonymity is unnecessary on my behalf. This is an issue that warrants immediate attention from management. I concur with the suggestion for a meeting involving Uğur and José to ensure they are informed of the recent complaints, bearing in mind that I have never encountered any issues with José previously. I would appreciate the opportunity to be present at that meeting so that everyone is on the same page.

Drawing from personal experiences, I am aware of Uğur's inappropriate communication with a prospective buyer who, when she and her Realtor went to the Grille to sit down and sign her contract, Uğur greeted them with "Can't you see we are closed?" On behalf of residents who may want to enjoy the restaurant here at Montebello, I urge you to firmly inform him to alter his attitude drastically and positively or consider hiring servers who can interact with customers in an appropriate manner.

Although I appreciate the opportunity for residents to directly engage with managers during the Meet the Manager sessions, my work schedule and commute to DC make it challenging for me and others who work to attend. To facilitate communication, I suggest implementing a secured suggestion box to collect feedback, both positive and negative, from owners and residents on a range of issues, not limited to the current one. This initiative could offer valuable insights for improvement if management is inclined to pursue such enhancements.

Please let me know the date and time of the meeting with Uğur and José. Thank you.

Still waiting for a response from the management. 📧

Montebello got talents



Marianna Du Bosq, Juliet Du Bosq, and Romina Hennig performing Alma Llanera Venezuelan folk dance



Michael Gibson on acoustic guitar, Norma Shifflett singing, Juliet Du Bosq tap dancing, and Dr. Erwin Jacobs telling jokes



Susan Dexter on clarinet and Jane White on piano, Adrian Du Bosq break-dancing

Photos by Leslie Rodriguez and Dian McDonald