

# THE CONDUIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE PALISADES COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

## “IT WAS LIKE A MYSTERY NOVEL ...” MARK MAVES AND THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM

BY SUSAN A. MESSINA

**I**t feels safe to assume that most readers of *The Conduit* have visited the National Building Museum, or at least have driven past the striking, block-long building between 4th and 5th and F and G Streets NW. Maybe you have stopped in on a jury duty break to visit one of the best gift shops in the city. Whatever your connection to this local treasure, now you have a new one. Our neighbor and 30-year Palisades resident Mark Maves is the architect we have to thank for leading the incredible team that transformed the Pension Building into its current incarnation as a fascinating museum about the built environment.

A native of the San Francisco Bay area, Mark grew up in a household with Frank Lloyd Wright books scattered around the house. Despite a momentary turn to thoughts of becoming a National Park Service ranger, his intent to become an architect was solidified when his ninth-grade English teacher offered to trade a whole semester of written homework for a single assignment, to build a model of the Shakespeare Theater. Maves went on to earn his undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture at the University of California, Berkeley.

Mark then relocated to DC in 1973, for what he thought would be a two-year stint at the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Fate had other plans. A photography class where

he met someone ultimately led him to join DC-based Keyes Condon Florance Architects. This well-established firm was known for thoughtful mid-century modern design and for turning a WWI and WWII torpedo factory into the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

Through his decades of work at the firm, Maves had a significant impact on our cityscape and beyond. He started the firm's expansion into academic buildings, including GMU's Elliott School of International Affairs, Catholic's Columbus School of Law, GMU's School of Business & Management and Public Affairs and UMD's Computer Science Instructional Center. Farther afield he was involved in designing buildings at Vanderbilt, Baylor and Clemson State Universities. He added National Historic Register projects to the firm's portfolio, starting with Kansas City's Union Station and eventually the National Building Museum. “It's intriguing to restore a significant historic building while giving it new life by integrating a fresh use,” he reflects.

For those who have lived here long enough to see the transformation of the



MARK MAVES AT THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM, 2026  
PHOTO BY BOB BURNETT

Navy Yard, it will be interesting to know that it started with Mark Maves's firm. He had been doing master planning with the National Institutes of Health and the Goddard Space Flight Center when he was asked to take a look at the western end of the Navy Yard. This was underused federal property, pretty much abandoned since the WWI- and WWII-era buildings used for assembling ship parts had long been silent. Galvanized by the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976, Maves and his firm explored possibilities of doing a joint development project there. Theirs ended up being one of the first in the country to combine federal and private dollars. It led to the creation of the Navy Yard neighborhood, which now boasts waterfront parks with walking trails, numerous restaurants, the Nats Stadium



and approximately 12,000 residents. "It's important that we use this example to stimulate further growth of new neighborhoods in the little remaining underused land in the District. We don't have the advantage of other cities that have acres of former industrial sites," Mark asserts.

Of all his work, though, the National Building Museum is his favorite project. The museum was created in 1980 by an Act of Congress. As you can read on the National Building Museum website ([nbm.org/about](http://nbm.org/about)), the Pension Building had been commissioned by Congress in 1881 and built between 1882 and 1887 for three distinct purposes: to house the headquarters of the US Pension Bureau, to provide a suitably grand space for Washington's social and political functions, and to commemorate the service of those who fought on the side of the Union during the Civil War. According to the GSA website ([gsa.gov](http://gsa.gov)), Congress directed General Montgomery C. Meigs (1816–1892), quartermaster of the US Army and an 1836 graduate of West Point, to develop a fireproof building for the Pension Bureau.

*(Side quest: Google Montgomery C. Meigs and you will discover an extraordinary man. In his capacity as designer and architect, he supervised the construction of the Capitol Dome, oversaw the design and monument construction at Arlington National Cemetery, and even touched our neighborhood by designing the Washington Aqueduct that runs under what is now MacArthur Boulevard!)*

If you have seen the Building Museum from the outside, you might have noticed the 1,200-foot-long terra cotta frieze wrapping the building. It commemorates the Union infantry, cavalry, artillery, naval, quartermaster and medical units that fought in the Civil War. Inside, you will have seen the eight colossal Corinthian columns, among the tallest in the world. (They look like marble, but in fact are expertly painted plaster, meticulously restored on site during the renovation!) There is a long and interesting history to how the building was used by the government, but perhaps most notably, the Great Hall hosted inaugural balls for Presidents Grover Cleveland (in 1885, before the building was even complete), Benjamin Harrison (1889), William McKinley (1897 and 1901), Theodore Roosevelt (1905), William Howard Taft (1909) and many others since then.

By 1950, however, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) had taken over the building now considered obsolete and threatened with demolition. Thanks to an exhibition by the AIA (the same organization which would eventually entice Maves to DC), public opinion began to shift toward preserving the building, and in 1969 it was listed in the

National Register of Historic Places.

It took a great vision—and a great many people—to convert the derelict old structure to its magnificent new use. Maves, with the title of principal, was in charge of the whole project, from the start in 1981 to completion in early 1986. He notes, "I was really pleased with the quality of the team to do the job. We had a full array of lighting consultants, engineers and preservation advisors. Columbia University's Preservation Lab conducted studies to find the original interior colors." All the systems in the 100-year-old building needed to be pulled out and redone, and a modern HVAC system had to be installed. The project was hastened when President Ronald Reagan, much like President Cleveland a century earlier, wanted to use the Great Hall for his second inaugural ball in 1985 before the renovation was finished.

Asked to share his favorite behind-the-scenes memories, Maves says that



PHOTO AT TOP: NBM ENTRANCE SHOWING CORINTHIAN COLUMNS  
PHOTOS AT RIGHT: RESTORATIONS AT THE MUSEUM  
PHOTOS BY MARK MAVES



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RESTORATION OF MOLDING AT THE MUSEUM DURING AND AFTER; ANATOMY OF A BRIDGE AT THE MUSEUM; CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN AN EVENT AT THE MUSEUM

he enjoyed the museum's construction phase. "There were a remarkable number of craftspeople in there and I could watch them forming and carving and painting, marbleizing and redoing the skylights. It was like a piece out of the 1800s. Virtually all the work was done on site, including the sculpting of all of the replacement of the molding and the statues high up in the niches." He laughs at one recollection: "There was one room on the second floor that had a nice domed ceiling with a pattern painted on it. But it was in grim shape. The preservation lab tried a number of different things on the edges and in the end found that Pink Pearl erasers worked best. They just erased the ceiling!"

Thinking back on the whole project, Maves muses, "When we got the job, it was like a mystery novel. It was complex. I was curious about the building and its history. It was a challenge to insert a museum into this grand space. And in the end, there was huge satisfaction in a job well done."

He adds, "Now that time has gone on, I'm pleased that it's a place for public discourse about environmental planning issues. It's become a special and active place for children to play and learn. It's become a place to illustrate and explore issues that face the building environment, including climate responsibility, which the museum has not shied away from. It's also a grand

place for an event; there is no other space of that size in DC."

The Palisades is fortunate to have among its many fascinating residents someone who has had such a big impact upon our city, in this case a physical effect. These days Maves can be found relaxing with his wife (a practicing lawyer), talking about how proud he is of his son (an aerospace designer/assistant lacrosse coach) and daughter (a nonprofit marketing director), and volunteering as a member of the ANC Transportation Committee. He also enjoys photography, both doing it and collecting it, and exploring the world of wine.

If you haven't yet visited the Building Museum, or haven't been back in a while, what are you waiting for?! It's open Thursday–Monday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is only closed on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Exhibition tickets are \$10 for adults and \$7 for youth/seniors. There is no charge to enter the Great Hall or visit the gift shop. There are also free docent-led tours of the historic space, which

highlight its architectural features and construction history. Learn more at [nbm.org/](http://nbm.org/).

*For more photos of Maves and the museum, visit local photographer Bob Burnett's website, [www.bobburnett.me/conduitmaves](http://www.bobburnett.me/conduitmaves).*



## REVOLUTION, REACTION, REFORM: HISTORY DAY AT MACARTHUR HIGH SCHOOL

BY ANGIE SPADAFORA

When MacArthur High School (MHS) hosted its 2026 National History Day competition, students weren't just presenting projects: They were helping to define the identity of one of the city's newest schools. Opened in 2023, MacArthur has quickly become an active participant in National History Day, a nationwide academic program that engages students in original historical research. Guided by social studies teacher Andrew Grover, the school's growing involvement reflects both a commitment to rigorous academics and an effort to build culture from the ground up.

Mr. Grover has been involved with History Day for nearly two decades, working at the DC History Center before he arrived at MHS. To him, the program is more than just a competition: It is a foundation for community. "Anytime you're trying to form a new community," he said, "[the] many different opportunities that you have to just allow students to shine ... really helps shape what the community embraces." At a new school, those opportunities matter even more. "Those little moments ... come full circle in terms of creating some pride ... and at this point now, some traditions."

That sense of tradition is already taking hold. Now in just its third year of hosting History Day, MHS is beginning to establish itself in a competitive academic space while giving students meaningful opportunities to stand out.

### MORE THAN A PROJECT

At its core, National History Day challenges students to go far beyond the typical classroom assignment. Each year more than half a million students nationwide create documentaries, exhibits, performances, research papers or websites tied to a shared theme.



ALL PHOTOS FROM MACARTHUR HIGH SCHOOL'S 2026 NATIONAL HISTORY DAY COMPETITION PROVIDED BY ANGIE SPADAFORA, AVAILABLE AT [WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/DVMMBDAJG3U/](https://www.instagram.com/p/DVMMBDAJG3U/)

For Mr. Grover, a former History Day student himself, the experience is uniquely valuable. "I couldn't think of any other project that I ever did in high school that prepared me more for college than History Day," he stressed. Unlike standard assignments, it allows students to engage in deeper research, working with databases and primary sources. "You get exposed to ... higher levels of doing intricate research," he explained—skills that extend well beyond the classroom. "You're going to carry this with you ... even after the project is over."

The flexibility of the project format also allows students to connect their work to future goals. "If you're really intentional," he said, "it's also giving you something that you can take with you ... for whatever your future plans might be." From documentaries for aspiring filmmakers to exhibits for future designers, History Day doubles as both an academic challenge and a portfolio builder.

### STORIES THAT MATTER

At MacArthur, the projects reflect a wide range of interests and perspectives. While some advanced to higher levels of competition—particularly in the website and exhibit categories—others stood out for the stories they told.

"My favorite projects are always any that bring out a new narrative," Mr. Grover confided. "Anything that ... showcases narratives that don't often get told ... [is] always really exciting."

One standout example this year explored dandyism, examining the intersections of fashion, race and gender. Even projects that didn't advance to the next stage left an impression. "Some of my favorite ones didn't even make it to DC," he admitted. "It was just really cool to hear them."

### A THEME THAT RESONATES

This year's theme, *Revolution, Reaction, Reform*, proved especially engaging for students.

“Revolution just feels really accessible and ... exciting,” Mr. Grover said. While many students initially associated the term with major wars, they quickly discovered its broader meaning. “Any revolution is something where there is just a pretty strong change,” he explained. Students explored revolutions in social movements, inventions and cultural shifts—expanding their understanding of history itself.

### FROM CLASSROOM TO COMPETITION

MacArthur’s History Day journey extends beyond the school. Students who succeed advance to the citywide contest organized by the DC History Center, held this year at Howard University. Top projects then move on to the national competition at the University of Maryland.

For a school that opened just three years ago, that pathway—from classroom presentations to a national stage—represents something significant.

### BUILDING SOMETHING BIGGER

Looking ahead, Mr. Grover hopes to expand participation across Washington, DC.

“I would love for anyone who doesn’t know what History Day is to join in the fun,” he said. “Yes, it’s work, but the payoff is there.” Students often remember their projects long after they’re completed, and the program offers both skill-building and scholarship opportunities.

His message is direct: “If you’re not doing History Day, what are you even doing? ... Do it. Try it.”

At MacArthur High School, that message is already taking hold—turning a new school into a growing hub for historical inquiry, one project at a time.



## FROM THE PCA PRESIDENT

### HELLO, PALISADES!

When I first drafted this letter, it started off that spring was in the air. But a little time has passed and now summer is in the air and celebration is in our hearts as we look forward to an exciting 250th celebration on the 4th of July.

Before we get there though, I'd like to celebrate a success story of community service, passion and commitment, all within the very pages you are reading right now. Nine years ago, in the fall of 2017, Maya Latynski picked up the torch from Buffie Brownstein and Hans Moennig and took over as editor of *The Conduit*. Over these past years, Maya has evolved the look and feel of our treasured newsletter and curated a space for insightful and interesting content from our local legends, artists, historians, naturalists, among many others. Her patience and ability to adapt and press on despite those who ignore deadlines or give a little *too* much has



MAYA LATYNSKI ON THE COVER OF THE 2017 FALL ISSUE OF *THE CONDUIT*

been the backbone of our quarterly update on life in the Palisades. Maya, you are an inspiring example of how one person really can make a difference. Without your steadfast passion, this tradition may have been lost to our neighborhood as it has in many other communities. On behalf of the PCA, and all of Palisades, thank you for literally putting the pen to the paper with your

commitment to our community. The PCA wishes you well on your new adventures and trusts that you will keep us in your contacts and send lots of pictures and tales! Maybe even one or two for *The Conduit*!

Jessica Davis

**PS. The 4th of July is ON and is going to be the BEST EVER!!! July 3rd: The Hoedown 5:00-7:00pm with the local sounds of the Barn Owls! The parade starts at 11:00am on the 4th with the music of the VI Kings celebrating 250 years of Americana under the tent at the picnic! Let's make this year sparkle, Palisades!**

## PCA-ORGANIZED OFFERINGS

### ST. PADDY'S DAY STREET PARTY

On March 22, the PCA hosted its annual St. Paddy's Street Party. Neighbors enjoyed live music from the amazing **Irish band 40 Thieves**, as well as beverages and **Rocklands BBQ**. Lots of fun was had by all!

A big thank you to **Palisades Dental Health, Jennie McDonnell with Sotheby's International Realty** and **Carolyn Schafer with Long & Foster** for sponsoring this event!

—Casey Denoyer



### EGGSTRAVAGANZA

The PCA's Eggstravaganza brought the community together on Saturday, April 4, at the Palisades Recreation Center for a morning of festive fun! Families enjoyed a potluck breakfast and took part in an exciting egg hunt. The celebration also featured a giant slide and a variety of lawn games. Congratulations to the lawn game winners: Claire and Fitz Bovich (3-Legged Race); Bruno Olea, Fitz Bovich, Cal Kegan, Lucy Thompson and Charlotte Mendoza (Sack Race); and Mark and Cooper Antonowitz (Egg Toss).

THANK YOU to our sponsors, **Nora Burke (McNearney Associates)**, the **Sabel Family**, **Palisades Dental Health**, **Live Action Fitness**, **Little Beast** and **Starbucks**.

—Casey Denoyer



### MAYORAL CANDIDATE FORUM

On April 21, the PCA, along with the **Foxhall Community Citizens Association** and the **Spring Valley Neighborhood Association**, hosted a mayoral candidate forum at the **George Washington University Mt. Vernon campus**.

In a filled-to-overflowing room attendees got to hear candidates **Janeese Lewis-George**, **Kenyan McDuffie** and **Gary Goodweather** answer questions that had been submitted by neighborhood residents. Topics covered included healthcare, federal government relations, transportation, education, economic and tax policy, and quality of life.

The mayoral candidates were followed by candidates for Attorney General **JP Szymkowicz** and **Manuel Rivera**—both of whom live in the Palisades!

After the forum, the PCA organized its own version of the “spin room” at the **Conduit Road Public House** on MacArthur Boulevard, where three of the candidates and numerous campaign staffers worked a room full of Palisades influencers.

—Nick Keenan



### TEXTILE RECYCLING SUCCESS

Our April 25 community textile recycling event was a strong reminder of what can happen when convenience meets purpose. Residents showed up in steady numbers to dispose responsibly of unwanted clothing, linens and other textiles—keeping these items out of landfills and giving them a second life through reuse and recycling.

The PCA partnered with the Palisades Library to offer a convenient location for dropping off. From morning through the final drop-off, volunteers helped streamline the process, making it quick and accessible for everyone. The event not only supported environmental sustainability but also highlighted a growing community commitment to reducing waste in practical, tangible ways.

Events like this matter. Textiles are one of the fastest-growing waste streams, yet many items can be repurposed, recycled or redistributed when collected properly. By offering a simple, local solution, our community made it easier for residents to do the right thing. Together we collected 3,762 lbs. This was 1,400+ lbs more than last year. Let me repeat ... that is just shy of 2 TONS of textiles kept out of the landfill to be reused or repurposed.

Thank you to everyone who donated and volunteered. Based on the turnout and enthusiasm, it's clear this is a program worth continuing—and expanding.

Stay tuned for future recycling opportunities and ways to get involved.

—Suzanne Morrell



### FARMERS MARKET THANK YOU

On May 3, the PCA recognized the ongoing contribution by Farmers Market vendors to the fabric of the Palisades community. The merchants received gift cards for coffee at **Lupo Verde** and were toasted with champagne in appreciation of the quality of their products and customer service. The vendors make the Farmers Market a community asset and, like the Post Office, show up in snow, rain and heat, and, in our case, the perils of a construction zone. Special thanks to **Mac Market** for providing champagne.

—Ken Buckley.



## CELEBRATING CONNECTION

BY LINDSEY TRUITT

When you live in an old house it is impossible to ignore your connection to the past. We bought the Amberger farmhouse thirty-three years ago and as far as we can tell, we are the third family to live here in close to 200 years. There were other farms and houses in the Palisades in the 1800s, but ours is one of the few old houses left. People were definitely born in this house, and people also have died here. Many times whenever the house is quiet and I happen to be sitting in the living room, I have sensed a gentle spirit on the staircase. It isn't upsetting, and I hope that I am deemed a good guardian of the place.

The small farm that surrounded the house grew special lettuces that were trucked into "the city." Our property extended across Arizona (we are the fourth house from the intersection on Sherier) to the stream that used to run through the next block and between MacArthur and near what is now the Trolley Trail. The house was actually lifted up and reoriented when the neighborhood was being developed, and now it faces Sherier Place. We have found the old stone foundation near a back corner, so we know it wasn't moved far. While digging a pond, I unearthed a horseshoe that certainly belonged to an animal who lived here. While digging, I've

also found old glass bottles and beautiful marbles, evidence of both work and play.

We are fortunate also to have several old trees that grew up with the house. Like the house, their history brings richness to the neighborhood. Out front a huge Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) is in decline but it remains central to much animal and insect life. There are two very mature Atlantic white cedars (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) on the north side and a gigantic Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) out back. Aside from their inherent elegance, these trees are home to hundreds of species—I have observed and counted them. Insects in all life stages, lichen, birds, various mammals, snakes and mosses all make our property buzz with life.

Every fall for as long as I can remember, a Ruby-crowned kinglet arrives from the north to spend its winter in our Eastern red cedar. The kinglet, with its expression of slightly sad astonishment, is an insect eater and other than making an occasional visit to our suet, it lets the hidden grubs in our tree sustain it. These tiny birds are in constant twitchy motion as they search for the larvae that are tucked away as the next generation of moths, and the males only show their hidden ruby crowns when alarmed. It is not surprising that a small insect eater would seek out a



large tree that hasn't been sprayed to kill insects, but what is interesting is that this bird always seems familiar with me: If I encounter it on a low branch while taking out the trash or he is close by while I refill the suet, he just stops and looks at me and seems to want to hop onto my hand. But the lifespan of a kinglet is only maybe five years so, in fact, there have been many friendly solo kinglets over the years. It seems that they head our way from the far north with an inherited map to a good winter tree, which includes the presence of a nonthreatening human. I usually feel that a connection to the natural world is a link to experiencing the greatest **now** moment, but next to a very old tree with the same seasonal visitors every year, this *moment* grows to include the lifespan of the tree and possibly generations of creatures. Appreciating an old tree is a portal to experiencing both time and the wild interconnectedness of all living things.

This old house with its wavy glass windows and quiet ghosts, our trees that bring life both current and ancestral, and our very soil, undisturbed and rich, together have a value that exceeds that of each separately. I celebrate this with the birds who visit as they seem to appreciate this more than most.

### ATTRACTING AND FEEDING BIRDS

Even if your garden doesn't happen to be on the secret list of "must visit" places for the winter bird visitors, you should still try to provide food for the birds that breed here. Most terrestrial North American birds, 96 percent, raise their young on high-protein insects, mostly caterpillars or moths. By avoiding pesticide use in your garden, you are helping the birds feed their babies—mosquito spray kills all insects. For help with safe and natural mosquito abatement, contact me at [Truitt.lindsey@gmail.com](mailto:Truitt.lindsey@gmail.com). Our nonprofit, Our Wildlife Habitat, is a free service that will help you to prevent mosquitos from breeding in your yard without hurting the beneficial insects.

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## 2026 4TH OF JULY T-SHIRT DESIGN WINNER!

Congratulations to this year's 4th of July t-shirt design winner, **Thomas Kramer** of MacArthur Blvd!



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# ARTISTS OF THE PALISADES

at the Palisades Post Office, brought to you by the PCA

**KATHLEEN BYRNES** April–May 2026

**T**wo things motivate my art. When I see the reflection of light and the distilling of shapes in life, I am compelled to work out the composition. My mind immediately goes into drawing mode. The second is a reaction to the story nature is creating. The mood could be nostalgic or it could be a powerful sunset. Here is where my passion for color is applied. I hope that my canvases evoke an emotion for the viewer as they do for me.

Working mostly outdoors offers all the challenges of composition, color and technique. Years of study have gone into honing my technique. My mark-making is immediate but concise, creating a loose feel but purposeful execution. After years of painting, my work is getting more edited and walks the line between realism and abstraction.

I paint shore landscapes and flower portraits and, when possible, cityscapes.

I live in Washington, DC, which gives me access to bodies of water and bucolic settings and it's only a short drive to grassy shore scenes, in both the Chesapeake and South Jersey.

I show my work in South Jersey, Bethesda and at my studio here in DC. My recent show was in Bethesda at Studio B, fall of 2025.

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## PALISADELOT\* IS US!

BY JOE NEALE



As an undergraduate in the '60s and as a faculty member at Georgetown University later in life, I commuted through the Palisades twice a day. I never knew this place had a name, it was just a road, MacArthur Boulevard. On occasion an Italian restaurant, an ancient schoolhouse, a little box of a Safeway and a movie theater caught my attention, but nothing special, it was just a means to get from one place to another, a road between two points as it is today for the many commuters with whom we *Palisadians\** share our Main Street.

I am of a generation that elected John Kennedy, a generation that dreamed in the promise of Camelot. While that dream disappeared as I sat in a biology class at Georgetown in November of 1963, the idea of such a community survived. But I noticed nothing in my daily treks along MacArthur to suggest that there existed within the narrow streets to my left and right a community with a spirit to match Lerner and Loewe's magical musical.

And then ... one day, there I was in that *Palisadelot\** state of mind ... It may have grabbed me on the morning we brought our younger son to the assembly on the blacktop for the first day of Kindergarten at Key School. As is a common experience

on the first day of Kindergarten, here was one child who was less than enchanted with the prospect of entering this formidable edifice. No problem, the *Palisadelot\** state of mind came to the rescue. Another newbie quietly came over and, with a smile, took the reticent one's hand and accompanied him through the portal to a lifetime of education.

I had stumbled across the twice-daily community meeting: joyful greetings, meaningful hugs, lascivious gossip, shouted goodbyes, shared laughter and sometimes sorrow. Does the sound of several hundred children responding to the school's principal with a resounding "Gooooood Moooor Ning Mis Ter Lan Der Hue" strike a chord in your heart?

While many now consider the Palisades Hub to be the Round Table of *Palisadelot\**, for others, it has been Key School. For my wife and me, this is where we bonded with the community over planning for the yearly events, the Halloween spooky house, the Christmas tree sale, the PTA auction, science project day, the Halloween dress parade and interschool basketball games in the gym. The caring spirits of Ms. Linden and Ms. Palm remain in our hearts. Did I mention Key summer art camp with Ms. Palm and Mr. Colton's athletic camp? Camp graduates becoming CITs (Counselors in Training) for their very first summer jobs?

Many individuals brought their unique talents to making Key a center



of the community's life. Abby H., chair of the Friends of the Palisades Library and the *Palisadian\** of all things books, would organize book sales during Key's Spring Festival. I "first" met Abby there when I volunteered to assist, and as we chatted between sales, I learned that she had studied Biology at Georgetown during her freshman year. It only took a moment for us to conclude that I had been her instructor! Only in *Palisadelot\**.

Maria G. used her gracious smile and calm manner to direct the annual construction of the Key Halloween festival spooky house. Coach Arthur and an assortment of parents developed Key basketball talents. Endless contributions by PTA chairs, committees and volunteers continue to fill out this Round Table to make Key the thriving vibrant community that it is. As the Kindergarteners grew up



\* A NEW WORD YOU MAY HENCEFORTH USE WITH ATTRIBUTION.

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: MR. DAVID LANDERYOU, KEY SCHOOL; MS. JANIS LINDEN, KEY SCHOOL; KEY SCHOOL SOCCER MEERKATS PHOTO BY JOE NEALE



PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT: FORMER POLICE CHIEF ROBERT CONTEE, SPENCE SPENCER, JESSICA DAVIS AND OFFICER TONY MCELWEE, 4TH OF JULY PICNIC 2023; BOLIVIAN DANCERS IN 4TH OF JULY PARADE

and moved on to different schools and different lives, the Key glue keeps them together into adulthood and we continue to grow lifelong friendships across Key families.

Music is woven into the fabric of our village. Ann R., as the volunteer director, inspires Key students to sing in an after-school choir. Family voices, the good and the not-so-good, get in the spirit in monthly karaoke-style sing-alongs in our cathedral on Cathedral. On any given Sunday there will be live music as we ponder the produce at the farmers' market. While we no longer have the Starland Café, our local musicians keep

the beat going at its descendant, the Conduit Road Public House. And did I mention the Hub's regular schedule of events? We celebrate loss with music: On the day that our beloved Safeway went tits up, we held a party on the pavement and danced through the store in a conga line to the music of a Dixieland band playing "When the Saints Go Marching In." Music flows through life in *Palisadelot\** like hemoglobin, constantly keeping us refreshed.

Covid transiently shut down our Key Round Table but elevated our culture to a new level: driveway firepits of all shapes, styles and dimensions

materialized as we gathered in the common cause of sharing our lives at six (?) feet of separation (well ... we did cheat a tiny bit ...) and going to bed with the communal aroma of burning wood in our hair and socks. That tradition eventually morphed into weekly Thursday evening wine and cheese with the same neighbors, as the spirit of the covid times became part of our culture (*Palisadism\**). While the adults sat around covid firepits, the boys in the 'hood firmed up their Key School bonds and made like Huck Finn as they set up camp to try their hand at fishing on the river and doing other things that need

## SOME MORE PALISADEANA\*

- WEIRD LISTSERV OFFERINGS
- BACK-PORCH MEALS ON SUMMER NIGHTS
- "SURELY, THAT WAS NOT MY SON ON YOUR DOORBELL CAM VIDEO."
- RUNNING WITH A BABY IN A JOGGING STROLLER ON THE TOWPATH ON A BRIGHT SATURDAY MORNING
- WHEN LEAVING FLETCHERS IN A CANOE, REMEMBER ALWAYS TO PADDLE UPSTREAM
- JACKIE AND MISS BARBARA WHO KNOW ALL OUR CHILDREN'S NAMES AT THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST SAFEWAY
- HAVING THE HIGHEST DENSITY OF DENTISTS OF ANY COMMUNITY ON EARTH!
- "THEY ARE NOT TEAR-DOWNS, THEY ARE BUILD-UPS."
- RUNNING RED LIGHTS ALL THE WAY TO GEORGETOWN OR SIBLEY TO DELIVER AN EMERGING BUNDLE OF JOY
- BEING GREETED DAILY BY THE 6 A.M. FLIGHT FROM NATIONAL (WHAT IS A REAGAN ANYWAY?) TO CHICAGO



not be mentioned here.

We lost the Merlin of *Palisadelot\** a couple of years ago when our beloved Spence Spencer passed. Spence would tell us that his work had something to do with the justice systems in places like Afghanistan or Iraq, but I liked to believe that he was really a Man on a Very Secret Mission. He was our guiding light in all things Palisades, from our famous parade (dancing Bolivians, Bolivians and more Bolivians) to the farmers' market he helped to invent, along with Chris B., and that little kiosk now beside the Fitzgerald. The image of Spence waving from his convertible as he drove up 49th Street remains emblazoned in my memory.

What would *Palisadelot\** be without a fixer. While Parker's Exxon has changed over the years, one constant, Benny the Wizard, remains as one of the beating hearts of our Main Street. Trunk lock

failed on your 30-year-old BMW? No problem! Benny fixes such things from memory in his sleep. And you thought that Click and Clack (The Tappet Brothers) knew cars?!

Speaking of beating hearts, we do miss Barbara B. We lost more than a little bit of Main Street when Black Coffee said goodbye. But we still have MPD Officer Tony McElwee, our long-serving community police officer! You may have witnessed him officiating the pie-eating contest that is the prequel to our famous parade, and otherwise he can often be seen patrolling the 'hood in his unmarked blue sedan ... in case you should be tempted to slide through that stop sign in a rush to do something terribly important. At present, what holds all of this together is the glue of *The Conduit*, Maya L., the PCA, Jessica D. and the superglue, Anne O., the go-to manager for all things *Palisadian\**.

The word "Sherier" sums it all up. If MacArthur is the spine of our Palisades, Sherier is its artery. If over all those years of merely commuting through the Palisades

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JESSICA DAVIS AND JOE NEALE; DOUG D'S HOUSE ON SHERIER; LENDING LIBRARY BOX; BENNY THE WIZARD AND JAY AT THE PARKER'S EXXON ON MACARTHUR BLVD

I had bothered to turn down just one block and experienced a Sherier Place Halloween, I would have got it! But you can also understand *Palisadelot\** on any other day by taking a slow bike ride along Sherier, craning your head left and right, to let the cultural diversity of the homes and porches and gardens inspire you with the wonder that time has created here. Where else in DC would you find an orange house surrounded by pieces of exotic art, grape arbors AND banana trees? You are at Doug D's. How about a pink fairy tale residence with seasonal inflatables galore? Or a bust of Edgar Allen Poe peering out from a lush garden?

So while we are not actually living in Camelot, we are the denizens of a delightful village where each year new children learn to say "Good Morning Mister Lander(h)ue [sp.]," where our children thrive, where we grow with neighbors through our career years, and where many of us plan to stay as we age and to care for each other as we do.

*Joe Neale and soulmate Marcy Oppenheimer are 26-year residents of the Palisades. For more than six decades, Joe studied and taught at Georgetown University, where his great-grandfather had been valedictorian of the Class of 1861. When he is not busy writing for The Conduit, Joe does science and has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles on neurobiology and neurochemistry, including four in Science magazine. To see the collection go to: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Neale+jh&sort=pubdate>*



## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? FROM OLD CONDUIT ROAD TO OLD MONTGOMERY COUNTY

BY MAYA LATYNSKI

There once was a passionate environmentalist, chair of the PCA's environmental committee and a star writer on environmental issues for *The Conduit*, a leader of Weed Warriors and planter of pollinator gardens, including the one that sprang up behind the rec center. And then he just disappeared!

Yes, I'm talking about Jeremy Stanton. But I tracked him down! Jeremy and his wife, Rose, and daughter, Elizabeth, "decided in the first summer of covid that [they were] feeling cooped up in the city and started to think seriously about leaving it behind." Mother and daughter could let their blossoming horsemanship grow. Both were taking lessons in Urbana, and on one drive out the whole family spontaneously said, "Let's just move to a farm!" As luck would have it, they heard from a friend about someone who was looking to sell a house with ten acres of land and beautiful views. So they bought it!

The transition has been seamless. Here they are, five years later, living on Fairbrooke Farm in Montgomery County, surrounded by flora and fauna, happy as clams.

One sunny day, I drove out there—a space I usually speed past on route 270. It's an ex-urban area with a rich mix of people, ways of life, buildings and businesses. There are farmers, commuters. Tree farms. A Hindu temple next door in a historic house. The Stantons' farm sits just inside the Montgomery Country Agricultural Reserve, the first one in the country and



still one of only a handful. Just under the surface of new development is this "hidden treasure," as Jeremy calls it, a place with an aura of timelessness.

The Stantons own five horses, two of whom are retired and allowed just to hang out. Rose has started her own horsey business ([www.connectwitheightwire.com](http://www.connectwitheightwire.com)), offering well-being and team-building retreats based on a connection to nature and horses. Jeremy commutes a few times a month to his old job in digital strategy at Georgetown University and tele-commutes the rest of the time.

"Small farms are essential to the functioning of society. If you want clean healthy food and care about the environment, you'll want to support our small farms. They do essential work at the intersection of those concerns." So the Stantons do their share, keeping chickens and growing much of their own food. Everything from turnips, peas and strawberries in the spring, to potatoes, corn, garlic, onions, tomatoes and peppers in the summer, to sweet potatoes, winter squash, amaranth and lima beans in the fall.

Jeremy has also focused on planting trees, choosing carefully to make them fit into the environment. Living here has given him a complex understanding of all the issues connected to farming. "If you care about the environment, you understand that it needs some stewardship; humans have to engage." He adds, "There is no such thing as pristine wilderness—humans have always managed the land. For example, a lot of the conservation easements out here must be left alone by law, on the belief this is best for nature. But within a few years they get completely overrun with invasives like Callery pear and multiflora rose, which wreck the ecosystem and benefit no one."

Griffith and Riggs Roads are named after long-residing families. Jeremy has befriended locals, especially some of the multi-generational farmers, who seem



ABOVE: JEREMY AND HIS DAUGHTER, ELIZABETH; PHOTO BELOW: TRACTOR ON THE FARM

to appreciate his agricultural efforts and are more than willing to give advice. These farmers have to be innovative with what they grow and how they sell it. One runs vegetable gardens in local backyards, providing a share of the produce to the homeowners in exchange for use of the land, turning lawn into a bounty of nutritious food; another is growing dryland rice near Silver Spring. There is also a Land Link (<https://www.mocolandlink.org/>) program for young people who want to farm but cannot afford to buy land.

The area's connections to the old times include a Quaker community, traces of the Underground Railroad and some of the offerings at the Sandy Spring Museum. And there is the good old boys' network. You can always meet some of them at Saturday lunchtime at the Sunshine Gas Station Grill at the intersection of Georgia and New Hampshire Avenues; everyone is welcome. One of them puts on a big breakfast for all the local farmers shortly before Thanksgiving to raise money for the local hospital. Another local event, twice-yearly, is when a farmer drives his combines out to the fields, blocking traffic in both directions outside his farm. A much different kind of neighborhood traffic issue!

## NOVEL STORIES AND HISTORY OF THE PALISADES & BEYOND: SPOOKS ON THE POTOMAC

BY NICHOLAS CARSON

“Spook” is an informal term for a ghost/specter, a slang term for a spy or an intelligence agent, or a verb meaning to frighten or startle. It originates from the Dutch word for ghost.

Living beside the Potomac River since 1971, first in Glen Echo, then Cabin John and eventually the Palisades, I occasionally heard myths and rumors about Maryland/DC residents commuting across the river to work on the Virginia side. Some accounts involved paddling from different islands, others from spots somewhere along the shore. At one point I thought these referred to Minnie’s Island, which has had several owners since it was claimed by John Trammel in 1904. A later resident, Sherman Kent, was a Yale professor and an esteemed CIA analyst.

At some point I heard somewhere that these commuters probably launched from Sycamore Island. Then a friend of mine whose father worked for the CIA shared with me a declassified article that had been published in a CIA headquarters newsletter. This resonated. The George Bush Center for Intelligence was built in the late 1950s and opened in 1961, in Langley, Virginia, directly across the river from Sycamore Island.

In the early 1960s, before the Beltway was constructed, crossing the Potomac was already becoming a time-consuming nightmare. James Bond drove an Aston Martin, but at the CIA a small group of officers discovered another way to commute to work ... by canoe. This eventually became known as the CIA Canoe Pool.

The Pool’s likely founder was John Seabury Thomson, who worked at the Agency and was known on the river as



a competent whitewater kayaker. Robert Sinclair joined soon after. Sinclair’s article about the group appears in the newsletter *Studies in Intelligence*. The newsletter sports the subtitle “A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.” Sinclair’s piece appeared in volume 28, Spring 1984, and was declassified more than 30 years

TOP PHOTO: 1972 CANOE POOL CROSSING THE FROZEN RIVER DURING WINTER  
BOTTOM PHOTO: 1972 CANOE POOL ON THE FERRY; PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NICHOLAS CARSON

later, on September 10, 2014. His name was redacted.

Written in Sinclair’s beautifully poetic, nature-filled prose, the account takes us back to a way of life that still exists and runs right through our neighborhood. Over the years, the river always changed for the members of the Canoe Pool, as they experienced the four seasons up close. “We have become connoisseurs of sunrises,” he writes, and “the chance to observe a little corner of wilderness day in, day out is a rare privilege. Regular contact with the Earth is as important to me as it was to Antaeus.”

Sinclair’s account of his fourteen years of commuting to work by canoe describes biking a little more than three miles from Bethesda to the river, meeting up with a small group of colleagues, traveling in a hand-drawn ferry to Sycamore Island on the Maryland side, claiming their canoe and paddling across to the Virginia side. Arriving in Virginia they would tie the canoe to a tree, hike a short way through the woods up to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, cross the parkway and arrive at the CIA headquarters. The trip typically

took about an hour. At times when the river was high, they encountered slippery mud; occasionally in winter when it had frozen solid, they walked across pulling the canoe so they could jump into it and use their ice axes as paddles if the ice looked suspect.

“Of course, you need special circumstances before canoeing to work



becomes feasible, and I am grateful for the way these circumstances have worked out for me. What has made the canoe pool possible is a pair of unwitting conspiracies—one between nature and the National Park Service, and the other between Allen Dulles and a nineteenth-century Marylander named Matthew Ruppert.”

Matthew Ruppert was one of the founders of the Sycamore Island Club



in 1885. A local restaurant and saloon owner, he personally obtained the land patents for the islands from the State of Maryland before transferring ownership to the club. The island just upstream from Sycamore Island is named after him.

The Canoe Pool had their last paddle on March 23, 1979, after two canoes were lost within five months, the second one after someone cut the chain it was attached with. But the Canoe Pool remains a legend to this day and is still talked about in the halls of the CIA headquarters.

A last quote that we can probably all relate to says it all: “Relieved that the river was still proof against the absurd, I resumed paddling to a world I knew was not.”

If you enjoy a good, true story of daily adventure in nature bookended by the mundanity of life, I highly recommend Sinclair’s full account at: <https://share.google/oZmzmQVLSIX4CjLdV>.

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Did you know that there once was a boat elevator near Fletcher’s Cove?**



## Bob Sinclair – Decorated CIA Senior Analyst

Robert (Bob) Sinclair passed away peacefully on April 2. It is difficult to boil 90 years down to a compelling blurb, but the highlights below give a sense of the man his family and friends knew and loved. Bob was a lifelong learner. He attended Shortridge High School in Indianapolis, IN, and went on to Yale University, where he earned a BA (Magna Cum Laude). He later received additional advanced degrees from both Georgetown University and UCLA.

Bob joined the CIA as an intelligence analyst in 1956 and served in a variety of key positions over his 37-year career—the South Africa and Vietnam desks, writing/delivering the President’s Daily Brief, and serving as Director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence (CIA’s think tank). He received the Career Intelligence Medal when he retired in 1994. He was one of the founding members of the CIA Canoe Pool, commuting to the CIA’s Langley, VA offices by canoe across the Potomac River from Sycamore Island (search “CIA canoe pool” for the declassified CIA article). The Canoe Pool was a terrific conversation starter, but it also provided unexpected moments of reflection and adventure.

IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MAP OF CROSSING AREA; JOHN SINCLAIR’S OBITUARY; 1972 CANOE POOL CROSSING THE POTOMAC RIVER; 1972 CANOE POOL ON THE WAY DOWN TO THE RIVER, JOHN SEABURY THOMSON ON LEFT; 1972 CANOE POOL SKATING AND WALKING TO WORK (NOTE ROPE IN HAND), LYDIA WEBER AT CENTER, ROBERT SINCLAIR ON RIGHT

## WHAT'S THE HUBBUB? WHAT SPRING HAS TO OFFER!

BY MICHAEL SHEREIKIS

**A**fter a challenging winter, spring is finally in full bloom; the sun is out and renewal is in the air! Here, too, at the Palisades Hub, we are feeling that sense of renewal and are excited to share some great news ...

Our array of solar panels has been installed, passed inspection and was activated on Earth Day! We are now harnessing the sun to power our community mission. We couldn't be more thankful for the leadership of outgoing Board Chair Mark Segraves and other Board members, as well as the financial backing of the Palisades Community Church, all of which has made this installation possible. Solar Solutions has been great throughout the process, and we look forward to a greener and more cost-efficient Hub for years to come.

In other big news, after a successful year-end fundraiser, we are delighted to report that The Big Picture at the Hub project is here! Next time you visit the Sanctuary for a Backstage event or a Community Sing, you'll experience a huge, motorized screen over the altar, a ceiling-mounted laser projector and a new audio system. It was a complicated and unique installation, which married new technology with

this nearly 90-year-old building while preserving as much as possible the classic look and feel of the Sanctuary. It looks and sounds great, and we can't wait to start programming movie nights, documentary series and whatever else our community dreams up using this lovely new resource.

On opening night, May 19, a flock of curious visitors witnessed the advanced technology of the new set-up. The sky's the limit! For starters, a sample of short films by local amateur filmmakers, quirky and hilarious, made the evening one not to be missed.

We are also very excited to announce the summer launch of Palisades Village Square, a new kind of satellite senior wellness center that Palisades Village will host in our Hawthorne Room on weekday afternoons. With funding from the Washington Home Foundation, it will be open to all, offering fun social and educational activities of interest especially to older adults. You can look for its weekly calendar on the listserv or request one by email at [info@palisadesvillage.org](mailto:info@palisadesvillage.org).

Programming at the Hub has continued to grow in 2026, with comedy shows, cabarets, jazz concerts, rock shows, school fundraisers and private



celebrations of all sorts, as well as yoga, tai chi, gymnastics, youth tennis, soccer and senior exercise classes. Our popular Hub Cap Centre and Backstage events continue to bring an eclectic array of performers, while our Community Sing and monthly Open Mic events continue to reach new heights.

We're excited for all the changes happening at the Hub and can't wait to see what the community brings to our stages and screens. One thing that will never change is our mission to provide affordable space for people to gather, connect and express themselves. Learn more at [palisadeshub.org](http://palisadeshub.org).

PHOTOS TOP RIGHT: STILLS FROM THE SHORTS SHOWN AT THE BIG PICTURE LAUNCH; PHOTO AT LEFT: THE NEW MOTORIZED SCREEN IN THE SANCTUARY





**EXTRA, EXTRA!  
READ ALL ABOUT IT!**

**PALISADEANS! YOU MUST STOP THE LATEST PLAGUE!**

It's not the **spotted lantern fly!**



It's not the **mosquitos!**



It's not even the **rats!!!**



Palisades has been through a lot! And now, worse yet ... **INSANITY** has struck! Enough!

After nearly nine years of sweaty labor, seemingly sane *Conduit* editor takes steps to abandon not only her coveted position, but also this hospitable wonderland. WHY? OH, WHY? What is the world coming to????!

Rumors abound: She's being kidnapped across an ocean! (We always thought that husband of hers looked slightly louche ...)

She has sold out, taken that job with *The Tatler* royals desk! How could it be more influential than *The Conduit*!!!!!! Will it come with invitations to better parties? A manor house grander than a Sears bungalow???????? Only a madwoman would do this ...

Last-minute update: We have a new editor! Out of left field rushes in a formidable player capable of restoring sanity! Who could it be??? Is it a bird! Is it a plane! No!!! It's our very own **Elissa Petruzzi!** Innovative, charming and undaunted, she saves the day! Just in time for summer reading season and the 4th of July lollapalooza! Yeay, Elissa! Phew ...



# THE CONDUIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE PALISADES COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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