



The Neighborhood Newsletter

Volume 14, Number 1

The Festive Issue, April 2007

PARTY ON!

By Mary Cummings (*Jason Street*)

I used a nine-question neighborhood e-survey to learn about neighbors' party experiences and solicit their celebratory advice. The questions included: About how many parties do you have in an average year? How many parties do you attend? Do you have a favorite party memory? If so, will you share it with us? Have parties changed over the course of your party-going life? If so, what are some of the changes? What makes neighborhood parties special and important? If more parties in the neighborhood would be a good thing, how might we make it happen? Do you have any party hosting suggestions? How about a party attendee suggestion or two? Any other party wisdom you'd like to add?



The number of parties hosted ranged from 3 to 15, with a mean of 10. One family noted, "If you count just having people over for dinner or brunch, then quite a few, maybe 10-15; if you're counting gatherings that are really more party-like, then probably only 1-2." The number of parties attended seemed to depend on involvement in churches, political functions, or organizations. It ranged from 2 to 36, with the outlier stating "about 2 or 3 per month, including political and church related."

I conclude, based on our vast sample of eleven respondents, that many get to "have" parties for their children but are not invited to their children's friends' parties. I don't think there were any grandparents in our sample, and would love to hear about their party lives.

Party memories included: "While heating punch in a cut glass punch bowl, it broke as the first guest arrived." "On New Year's Eve, each of us writes a prediction that will be opened the next New Year's Eve." "One Christmas season, each of us was in a large, multi-generational gathering that lasted over a week; we used a special china marker to write our names on a porcelain platter made for the occasion (bought from a catalogue). The result was fabulous!" "Mainly the spontaneous-type, late summer wine party that goes on for hours, or cocoa on cold days. Oh - and of course the Mystery Dinner parties, where you come in costume and act out roles; I LOVE those!"

The number and age range of children in families appears to be the single most common relevant factor behind party changes noted by our respondents. "No more smoke-filled rooms." "They

now include children and goody bags!" "More frequent, less-formal (seated) dinners in favor of potlucks, or casual food." "Mostly the evolution of family - from adult parties, to parties with infants (4-6 PM!), then families getting together, etc." "There are more kids in attendance." "E-vite makes it almost too easy to grow a party." "I think it's me that has changed - as a kid I went to kids' parties; in college to drinking parties; after college, before marriage, I hosted many gatherings of mostly singles. At this point, I mostly attend kids' parties or family-oriented parties. Also, I've come to like smaller gatherings where I have more of a chance to talk to someone for awhile, as opposed to big parties where you tend to only talk to someone for a couple of minutes."

Everyone agreed that neighborhood parties are special for lots of reasons: "The neighborhood!" "We have some fascinating and warm neighbors, and it is great to be able to socialize for fun as well as around 'tasks'." "Get to know neighbors better. Sample interesting food." "A time to be with people without worrying about the day-to-day hassles." "It is nice to meet new people that live nearby, as well as to have a chance to talk to the people we already know, but rarely stop to chat with." "The neighbors! Frankly, with our busy lives, it is a real treat to get together with people." "Getting to know your neighbors and making bonds with people in a social setting." "Neighborhood parties are safer; you can walk to a party and drink all you like."

We collected several thoughts about making more neighborhood parties happen: "Do it!" "Celebrate an event or theme or someone's 99th birthday or an inconvenient truth or..." "How about regular drop-in gatherings at Menotomy Rocks in good weather? Maybe Sunday night picnics? Another good location that might draw a different crowd is the upper playground at ACC." "I do keep thinking about maybe arranging a block party or neighborhood party to celebrate Arlington's 200th year. We organized one for the year 2000 town-wide block party day and it was fun, but a fair amount of work." "Plan around easily-put-together events (Election Night party, to plan a communal yard sale, to celebrate a mutual friend's birthday, a tea party for no reason)." "At one point there were Friday evening picnics in the park - that was easy and fun; and I love the idea of moving potlucks, where a group of households have appetizers at one place, move to another house for the main course, and a third for dessert and coffee; then three others host the next round.

Complex, but pretty cool.” “Perhaps have a party committee and round-robin (perhaps in pairs) people willing to host a party. I would suggest something no more than once a month, but maybe once every six weeks.”

Among our hosting suggestions were: “Block party or park party – include separate circular in **Newsletter** – ask for volunteers for social events (not **Newsletter** staff).” “Lots of invites with an interesting draw.” “If it’s a big party, hire some teenagers to help out! Otherwise the host never gets a chance to talk to anyone.” “I would have a party with a theme – some can be social issues, some can even be fund raisers.”

There were more valuable suggestions from attendees: “Town Hall or the UU church for a winter event – a square dance? The park for a good weather event – interactive game in which people have to ask each other questions and talk to each other” “Parties are always fun when they have a theme!” “If you bring a hostess gift, put a note on it saying who it’s from. We’ve gotten many anonymous bottles of wine over the years. As a hostess, it’s nice to be able to thank the gift giver, and it might be too chaotic as people arrive to know who brought what.” “Attendees should always bring something to lighten the load on the hosts.”

A few last pieces of wisdom: “I think that Friday nights or Saturday or Sunday afternoons work best, and that you might want to move it around to get a diverse group of people.” “Make it easy, make it collective.”

With all this advice on hand, let’s have another party! We do have a Neighborhood Day committee on the job. Let us know if you’d like to get involved.

THANKS! CHEERS! APPLAUSE!

Thanks to all of you who sent in a contribution in response to our fund-raising note in the last **Newsletter**. Many of you replied, enough to put us in the black for this issue and the next. And that’s good news, we hope for all of us. We are grateful as always for your support, for without it this **Newsletter** couldn’t happen.

If you didn’t get a chance to contribute, it’s certainly not too late. Truth is, it’s never too late. Quite the contrary; we’re constantly hoping that more neighbors will take a small part in our **Neighborhood Newsletter** and in building our neighborhood life together.

To contribute to the **Newsletter**, please make checks payable to the Menotomy Rocks Neighborhood Association and send them to Bill Berkowitz at 12 Pelham Terrace. Your stories, story ideas, and suggestions, are of course most welcome as well. Thanks once again.

LISTEN TO YOUR HOUSE

By Peter Howard (*Woodland Street*)

Were you wondering last December what the scaffold in front of 19 Lincoln Street was for? This is where Katrin Kauffer, Otto Scharmer and their children Hannah & Johan live.

Well I can tell you what the scaffolding was for because I was on it helping Andrew Fischer rebuild the porch roof structure. Katrin heard a creaking sound one day when she was working in her office located in the dormer over the porch. She decided not to use the porch until the beams and joists holding it were checked. This turned out to be an excellent decision. She called Andrew. He and I installed supports under the porch to strengthen the porch floor. Then arranged jacks posts on the porch floor to lift the ceiling joists. When we cranked up the ceiling and uncovered the beam running over the porch pillars we found almost all the joists ends were decayed and disconnected from the beam.

The beam itself was covered with a thick layer of mold and, worse, decayed half way through. The bottom six inches of the corner posts on the dormer were decayed. Most of the dormer studs that should have been sitting on the beam were floating above it. In short, we don’t know what was holding the porch roof and the office dormer up. After much selective replacement and strategic shimming its all back together and looking like new. The moral? Listen to your house.



CHANGING OF THE LIST GUARD

For some time now, Mary Cummings has generously and faithfully maintained the neighborhood Service Referral List, in order to provide readers with recommended home and garden resources. Your positive input to the list, based on your personal experience, is the sole source of the information presently accessible via the link on www.jhitesnews.org.

Mary will soon be turning over the online guardianship of the list to Marianne Curren, and they are working on the transition now. In the meantime, please feel free to e-mail new listings with phone numbers to: mgcxx@verizon.net. Please indicate “service referral” in your message line.

As the present listings are reviewed and updated, your new referrals will be incorporated. The result should be a current, accurate list available for your convenience as we move into the warmer months ahead. With luck, you’ll find some of the help you need to manage those projects – both indoors and out – that have been crying for your attention, or that you have been just itching to tackle.



ONE NEIGHBOR'S STORY

By Josh Lobel (*Jason Street*)

Our neighbor Josh Lobel is running for School Committee this year, and we are glad to share his instructive story of how he came to be involved in both neighborhood and Town. Though the Newsletter does not endorse candidates for office, we do encourage all neighbors to vote in the upcoming elections on Saturday, April 14.

It was almost 30 years ago that I moved into our house on Jason Street

with some friends from college. I was much younger then – we were thrilled to be in a great neighborhood in a vibrant town, but we weren't very connected. That all changed when one of my roommates found that a neighbor had just passed away, leaving her 80-year-old sibling alone. Her sibling was Bertha Yerrinton. Bertha grew up in the house across the street from ours – her father built it around 1904 for \$4,000. She had two older sisters and when she and her twin sister were born her mother unfortunately died in childbirth.

The four Yerrinton girls lived in their house for pretty much their whole lives. None of them married, although they did live in other places periodically. Their grandmother helped raise them. She lived on the third floor of the house, and her routine was to wake up at 6:00 a.m. and take a cold bath each day.

So what does the story of the Yerrinton girls have to do with me? As we were visiting with Bertha to offer condolences, someone said "I wonder if some young person might like to live with Bertha?" Well, my college friend Lorraine jumped at the chance, and we moved her belongings from the third floor of our house across the street to the third floor of Bertha's. Oh, how I wished for an aerial tram or some zip line to help in that move. Lorraine lived with Bertha for several years and we all got to know this remarkable woman.

Bertha introduced us to our neighbors. We met Gwen Hooper and Jean and Margaret Potter, Tana and Rick Onanian and Ann Mathes. She connected us to our town, as she told stories of taking the trolley to Boston (where she worked at one job for 60 years). She told us how she worried about the man who delivered ice and coal – as other fuel sources and electricity arrived she asked him if he was concerned about losing too much business. He replied, "You may not need coal, but people will always need ice!" She explained how her beloved church had burned down, and how the community had come together to rebuild it, not as it was, but as a lovely replacement (the UU Church on Mass. Ave).

You might think that a woman with such a steady life – every day in the same house, 60 years in one job – might not have a very broad world view. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Bertha and Lorraine shared so much. Bertha was so

open, so supportive and interested in our lives. She was amazed at the opportunities we had. If one of us had been a sky diver, I have no doubt she would have given it a try.

It was through people like Bertha that we came to be adults and to love our town. Over time, my roommates moved out, and my wife and then children moved in. My son went to ACC – the child care facility that Gwen ran. Our neighbor Rob Meyer became our pediatrician. And I became involved in our kids' schools. First, that was through things like joining the Science Committee that Sue Sheffler started. Then working on the school fair and plays. Then the school directory and moving the school library catalog onto a computer. I found ways that my skills and interests could contribute.

More recently, I have broadened my involvement to district-wide activities. First the schools' Technology Council. Then attending and distributing notes on almost every school committee meeting. This fall, I participated in the Superintendent's 21st Century Study Group. My children are now in 6th and 9th grades. We talk about our schools every day. I'm running for School Committee to help make our schools the best that they can be. My experience, knowledge of the system, and track record of involvement will let me make a difference on the committee. My desire is to build stronger bridges between our schools and our town, which includes people like the young Josh Lobel of 30 years ago, and the 90-year-old Bertha Yerrinton.

Bertha taught me how to give back to a community. When she died at the age of about 90, she made generous bequests to her church and to Symmes Hospital. I just googled her, and found she left 40 acres of forest to conservation land in Maine. I think Bertha would be pleased with my willingness to serve. I would be very honored to make her proud.

SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

It's been quiet in winter around here, with few souls on the street. But there are always things to see, every time you walk outside. Just look closely enough – if people are scarce, you can still see signs. I've come to learn that every bit of information has meaning, that there are few accidents in living. Signs are included; every sign says something about what it's like to live here.

Take the signs in our neighborhood for example, visible by simply walking around, which of course is also good for you. I don't mean traffic signs or road signs, but rather public written messages, in other forms. Those signs are tip-offs to what goes on (or what has gone on) around here, small clues of neighborhood life. They are samples, not always representative. Yet they are important, since we lack easy access to the inner worlds of our neighbors; most life is lived behind closed doors.

So part of our neighborhood is a Sanctuary, or so says a sign in Hill's Pond in Menotomy Rocks Park, near the Churchill Street entrance. Other park signs name trees, honor neighbors on benches, explain the Picture Post. A few blocks away, we also have a Nut-Free School, according to the door sign ("Noix **INTERDIT**") on the newly-renamed International School on Irving Street. And we are a neighborhood wealthy enough to give to others, with consciousness to match – or why else would there be a Planet Aid drop-off sign for clothing and shoes in back of the A Place to Grow nursery school on Pleasant Street?

There are signs neighbors have posted to send a message about the world beyond. On Jason Street, a yard sign (with flags) updates the number of American deaths in the War in Iraq. On Brantwood Road, a large sign asks us to help Darfur ("Not on Our Watch: SaveDarfur.org"), as if what happens in Darfur and Iraq is entwined with what happens here. Or how about "STOP BUYING START LIVING" stenciled onto the mail relay box at Jason and Irving, the subtext suggesting that we need public exhortations to live correctly, and perhaps we do.

Other signs speak to life in the past. On a street-facing wall of the International School, there remains one of those gold-and-gray placards marking a fallout shelter, harkening back to Cold War days when nuclear attack was an immediate threat. And in the back woods of Menotomy Rocks Park, there are skeletons of old Vita life course signs, once designed to promote fitness by encouraging neighbors to stop and stretch at different exercise stations. Most of those signs are gone now; they were not agile enough to withstand vandalism, but their vestiges linger on.

Then of course you'll find historic signs placed on many neighborhood homes, as our neighborhood contains two different historic districts. Our old neighborhood ancestors – Hornblower, Trowbridge, Brackett, many others – set the historic foundation for our neighborhood of today. Will there ever be a sign on your house memorializing your own name? Not very likely. The Hornblowers were here first; they've got the naming rights, which may last in perpetuity.

What other signs are near houses? Often they are alarm system signs, announcing that your home is protected by your security company of choice. That's a generational shift. When I first moved here in the 70's, the prevailing house signs I remember then were "We welcome good neighbors of all races, colors and faiths," or words to that effect. Times have changed, even if the crime rate has been stable.

We have become more security conscious, and possibly (hard to be sure) less welcoming. Recently I spotted a (tongue-in-cheek?) yard sign proclaiming "Warning – Attack Neighbor," though thankfully not in this neighborhood.

Still, we're not without our sense of humor. On Academy Street, a sign hung on the school playground reads "Park C o

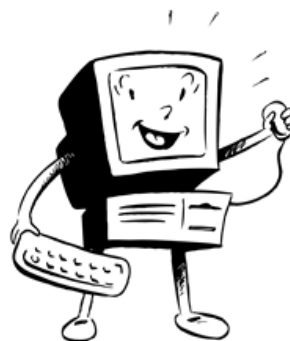
ed after 9:00," the jokester having cleverly blacked out the "l" and "s." Down the road, the yellow-and-black crossing sign on Jason Street just before the park now includes a human with a tiny turtle companion. You'd better slow down, or you might miss him, or her, turtles being co-ed too.

Some neighborhood signs point the way to the Underworld. Take a moment, and take a look at the variety of manhole covers (is that the proper name?) adorning every street. They have names – "Bell Atlantic," "Water" – or at least abbreviations – QWD on Brunswick Road and vicinity, AD in other places – plus stylish decorations. And some of them have numbers, such as AS 53 on the street right outside the Foodmaster parking lot. Can you collect the whole numbered set? And what do these numbers mean? Whatever their meaning, those signs are portals to an alternate universe below. If only those manholes could talk....

Back above ground, signs advertise yard sales, soon to be gracing most phone poles in sight. Also, lost (and sometimes found) dogs or cats. Occasionally, an apartment wanted. It's all so low tech – maybe one day we'll scan for yard sales on our cell phones, but not now. Neighbors still communicate by paper on wood, the reigning example, if we needed another one, being the full-up park bulletin board.

Speaking of that bulletin board, I've learned something else about signs, which is that people not only like to read them, but that they'll create their own, with just a little encouragement. A few years ago, I had a student working with me on a photography project. As part of her project, she took photographs of Menotomy Rocks Park, and posted them on the park board with an invitation to comment on what each photograph meant to them. A Sharpie pen hung nearby. Some of you may remember seeing those photos, called "Reflections," and the variety of creative thoughts that neighbors jotted down. Provide a public pen – Sharpies are recommended – and watch the writers emerge.

I'm sure you've encountered other interesting signs of your own. Don't hesitate to add to this list; let us know. And we haven't begun to talk about symbols, as contrasted with signs – the house flags, the children's chalk drawings, the holiday lights, the strange-looking hieroglyphics sometimes scrawled on the pavement. That's probably another whole article: would you like to write it?



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“NEIGHBORHOOD PROBLEMS?”

By Bill Berkowitz (*Pelham Terrace*)

“I don’t want to seem too complacent, but this is a neighborhood without any problems.”

Is that neighbor’s quote true? Well, not exactly. But a more accurate answer needs a little elaboration.

It’s pretty clear our neighborhood is fortunate in that we don’t experience the major social problems of many communities across the United States – primarily in larger cities, but in some suburbs too. As neighborhoods go, ours is relatively trouble-free. It’s relatively safe. Serious crime is rare. We don’t have drug problems, not out in the open. Most of the time, and with some exceptions, the streets are clean, the houses attractive, the proprieties well maintained. And generally speaking, few of us are poor, which is not to say that economic struggle is absent from our midst.

Yet all that doesn’t mean we don’t have problems, or at least what we perceive as problems, for “problems” are largely in the eye of the beholder. And even though our problems may be minor in the larger scheme of things, they may still be deeply felt. Often it’s the small stuff that keeps us up at night.

But what are those problems? And how are they experienced? To learn more, as readers may know, I have been talking to a number of neighbors and collecting survey data, as part of an ongoing neighborhood study. So based on more than 300 random-sample interviews and questionnaires, here is some of what I’ve learned:

First, if you ask them, a majority of neighbors (71%) do report at least one problem they experience. (The definition of “problem” being up to them.) The mean number of problems reported from all respondents, though, is only 1.17; not all that many.

Second, those problems experienced depend on where you live. If you live on Pleasant Street for example, you might think that traffic would be more of an issue, and you would be right. If you live by the park, you are more likely to note park problems, and so on. The problems we perceive are usually close by; the further away, the less bite they have.

Third, there’s a lot of personal variation in whether something is seen as a problem. For instance, if a leaf blower is operating outside, one neighbor might climb the walls, while the neighbor next door just tunes it out entirely. And some people don’t care what their neighbor’s home looks like; oth-

ers do, sometimes with a passion. Quite naturally, it’s a matter of personal sensitivities and thresholds; variation holds true for most things in life.

And fourth, all manner of different problems are reported – I recorded over 50 of them. Variation, once again. Some are idiosyncratic, being voiced by only one or two people, such as fire risk, overhanging branches, fences, street lamps, geese, termites (!), and people working too hard. Yet certain kinds of problems are indeed reported more commonly than others. What are they?

Topping the list by far is traffic. Traffic was specifically mentioned by 27% of the 300-plus interview and survey respondents; but, more revealingly, it was mentioned at least three times more frequently than any other problem or concern.

And why are we not surprised? For traffic is a multi-dimensional issue – the volume, the noise, the density, the pollution, the aesthetics, the safety, the occasional difficulty of simply crossing the street, the impediment it brings to relations with neighbors, especially on Pleasant Street, where it’s genuinely harder to know those across that busy divide. There are multiple downsides to traffic, and it’s hard to separate them out.

Neighbors report all of these. What may be a bit less expected is that some have come to accept traffic as a melancholy fact of neighborhood life:

“Traffic is a chronic concern. [But] these are major cut-through streets and high traffic volumes are inevitable.”

“Considering how we are all so dependent on our cars, I have no suggestions for a solution.”

“I’d like to see more foot traffic, but that’s the way it goes. It isn’t going to come about unless we run out of oil.”

The next most frequently mentioned problems are closely bunched together, at least in terms of frequency. There are 11 of them: in alphabetical order, they are appearance and upkeep; crime and safety; diversity; dogs; neighbor issues; noise (as distinct from traffic); overdevelopment; parking; ponds (mostly Spy Pond); property values and expenses; and unshoveled sidewalks in winter. Each of these problems and concerns was mentioned by between 3% and 8% of respondents, or between 10 and 25 in raw numbers. Because classifications are imperfect, though, one hesitates to say definitively that the percentages in one category significantly exceed those in another.

Some in this cast of characters are quite familiar – most of us, for example, have heard about chemical runoff into Spy Pond, about sidewalks not shoveled when it snows, about excessive noise (leaf blowers are in fact a favorite target), and about unleashed dogs, although there are at least two sides to that particular story.

More interesting may be the neighbor issues – and it’s not that those issues are cited more frequently than the others, nor is it to downplay the others’ importance; yet when neighbor issues are cited, the comments tend to be longer, more textured, and more fully formed. To do them fuller justice, I’ll hope to write about some of these comments in a separate article coming up soon.

What conclusions might we draw from this overall problem pattern, and from the reported numbers? We’d like to make comparisons with other neighborhoods, but it’s challenging to do that reliably, since we lack comparable data. For traffic in particular, the numbers can’t easily be generalized, simply because our neighborhood is bounded by two major thoroughfares (Mass. Ave. and Route 2), and also includes three major arterial streets: Pleasant, Jason, and Gray. Other neighborhoods, with different physical layouts, would report differently.

But what about the other problems? Here we can draw some tentative conclusions, and one of them is that the reported frequency of problems does seem reasonably small. Again, even the most frequently reported problem (traffic), was mentioned by only 27 % of respondents. No other problem type was reported by more than 8%, while 29% reported no problems at all.

* The data also confirm the relative absence of serious problems, as that term is ordinarily used. Crime and safety issues were mentioned by only 3% (11 people), and then mostly around petty theft, or fear of theft. Affordable housing (but not homelessness) was cited by a few. Drugs, not at all. Poverty, never. Of course, the fact that something is not reported as a problem does not mean it doesn’t exist, or that it isn’t experienced as one. But perhaps we should count our blessings.

* Interesting too is that most problems reported are about “things” rather than “people.” It’s the physical issues (traffic, appearance, noise, overdevelopment, parking, parks, ponds, property values, sidewalks) that come up most often, rather than people or social issues (crime, diversity, neighbors, perhaps dogs). Of all the problem mentions, more than three-quarters of them (about 76%) fall into that first problem class. Even when people issues are mentioned, they are more often in the realm of irritations rather than hot-blooded disputes, as I’ll hope to show later on.

* The relatively small reported frequencies, especially of people problems, may also be noteworthy because we live in close proximity to each other. Some see us as “suburban,” a loaded term, but regardless of label we live in a dense neighborhood, about 8000 people per square mile; and that’s a density greater than of many major U.S. cities – Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, to name just a few. Arlington itself is the 10th most dense community in Massachusetts, denser

than (this may surprise you) both Worcester and Springfield. So maybe we have acclimated ourselves well, and learned to get along with each other.

So one overall conclusion from the data is that we have good reason to be grateful, but no reason to be complacent. As evolving humans, we do have some neighborhood problems to deal with; utopia lies in another zip code. Are these problems solvable? Probably, at least in part. Are we as neighbors capable of solving them? The same answer may apply. And will we solve these problems? That’s less clear. Solution will depend upon the nature of the problem, on its perceived severity, on proper timing, and especially on the skill and the drive of those involved. Not every itch will get scratched, and not every scratch will make us feel better, though some will surely give relief.

What’s much more clear is that neighbors do have ideas for addressing these problems, and about other neighborhood changes they would like to make. There are some extensive data on this matter; but that’s for another article, perhaps in an upcoming issue of the **Neighborhood Newsletter**.



RAMBLING READERS REPORT

By Carmenza Fonstad (*Brantwood Road*)

Last November, our neighborhood women’s Book Group “The Rambling Readers” (RR) read Sandra Steingraber’s *“Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment”* (1997). The author presents a good deal of information on possible environmental carcinogens found everywhere around us. To make it a little less overwhelming, the extensive information is organized along environmental themes like Air, Water, War, Land, and Our Bodies. We highly recommend the book.

In discussing the book, several Rambling Readers expressed concern about possible cancer-causing substances in our neighborhood, including pesticides applied freely by some homeowners in their yards and even by the town in the past. One reader who still lives next to our Menotomy Rocks Park recalled how the wooded areas of the park used to be sprayed with pesticides every year; we wondered if the breast cancer she developed might have been linked to the sprayings. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to prove a causal relationship between environmental toxins

and cancer because it can take years or even decades for cancer to develop after someone has been exposed to a carcinogen.

To make things even more confusing, some people's genes allow them to better detoxify carcinogens in their bodies than others, so they are less likely to develop cancer from the same type of exposure. Also, current government regulations are very inadequate; for example, they take into account only exposure to single substances and fail to consider exposure to multiple substances, which is the situation we experience in real life. Oftentimes these substances act synergistically; that is, their combined effect is larger than the sum of the effects of the individual components.

Every year, hundreds of new chemicals are put in the environment by industry without adequate proof that they are not carcinogenic. Currently, the onus is on the consumer and on the rest of the population, to prove that these substances cause cancer. Steingraber and many others think that the burden should shift to industry to prove that the substances released are truly safe: this is called "The Precautionary Principle." This Principle has wide acceptance in the regulatory process of many other countries; unfortunately, the US lags behind due to lobbying from powerful industries.

So it is up to us to become better informed and thus better capable of protecting our community's health from environmental harm.

Rambling Reader Paula Spencer did some web research and found a site with addresses of drycleaners who use alternative substances to perchloroethylene, a known breast carcinogen: www.greencleaning.com. Other websites worth checking: www.scorecard.org (gives info about toxic chemicals in specific towns);

www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep (gives info about safety/toxicity of the ingredients of more than 12,000 personal care products); Silent Spring Institute has a report on breast cancer with a list of mammary carcinogens and endocrine-disruptive compounds at http://library.silent.spring.org/publications/pdfs/brody_rudel_EHP03.pdf.



OUR NEIGHBORHOOD REACHES OUT: HELP NEEDED! 20 MONTHS AFTER KATRINA - VOLUNTEER WORK TRIP TO SLIDELL, LOUISIANA

John Page (*Jason Street*)

I'm associated with a group called "Bridge to Biloxi," which has sent over 300 volunteers to the Gulf Coast to help rebuild lives and homes devastated by the Katrina floods. On April 29 we are leading a group of volunteers to assist a Creole community with home, yard and garden cleanups and rebuilding. We will be working at Bayou St. Vincent in Slidell, Louisiana, 20 or 25 minutes east of New Orleans. Details of the volunteer week are below.

I would welcome neighbors to join this effort which I expect to be rewarding and lots of fun! Please let me know if this would be of interest.

Dates: Sunday, April 29 – Saturday May 5. (New Orleans Jazz Fest: weekends of April 28 & May 5) (www.nojazzfest.com)

Community Served: Residents of Bayou St. Vincent, also known as 'Bayou Liberty' in Slidell Louisiana, about 20 minutes from downtown New Orleans, a waterside neighborhood of some 300 Creole families, including many elderly homeowners who suffered heavy flooding and damage during Katrina. Very little assistance has been provided to this community to date. Most residents are currently housed in FEMA trailers.

Costs: (*responsibility of each volunteer*) Round Trip via air to New Orleans approx \$250 (if purchased now!). Contribution to food costs approx \$15 per day. (15 x 5 = \$75). Lodging in the community: no charge. Share of rental car for local transportation (total cost of rental car \$230).

Housing and food: Housing options include floor space for sleeping bags in community church and residents' homes. Residents will prepare and serve three meals per day at one location for the volunteer group. Volunteers will contribute to cost of food. (Volunteers may arrange for rooms in local, low cost hotels, if preferred.)

Travel: Plane from Boston to New Orleans or Biloxi, MS, (or, alternatively, drive 1500 miles, 24 hours)

Work to be performed: Clean up of flood debris from homes and neighborhoods; restoration of gardens and neighborhood parks; removal of fallen trees and branches; home repair and carpentry, interior and exterior; house gutting (removal of flood damaged sheetrock, cabinets, etc.); sheetrock installation, taping and plastering; electrical wiring; etc.

Information: Contact John Page at 781-648-4854 or at JohnPage@FriPage.com

Sponsored by Bridge to Biloxi, which has sent over 300 volunteers to the Gulf Coast to help with rebuilding homes and lives of flood victims (www.BridgetoBiloxi.org).

The New Orleans Jazz Fest will undoubtedly add competition for plane tickets as we get closer to the date. Volunteers should buy their own tickets **ASAP**, and plan to arrive in New Orleans by Sunday afternoon/evening on April 29 in time for a intro meeting at 7:00 pm in Slidell. Departure will be after work on Friday, May 4 or, more likely, Saturday, May 5.

The **Neighborhood Newsletter** is produced through generous contributions from neighbors, the assistance of Swifty Printing, and the underwriting support of Judy Weinberg of Venner Road and RE/MAX Leading Edge Real Estate, judylynnweinberg@gmail.com.

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING MARKET, EARLY 2007

By Judy Weinberg (*Venmer Road*)

The *New York Sunday Times* recently had a separate magazine devoted entirely to real estate. There was an article about real estate on television, and it's amazing how it has become a spectator sport. Entire channels are devoted to it (HGTV), and a myriad of shows on a variety of networks: Flip This House, Sell This House, Sell That House (yes, those are two separate shows!), Million Dollar Listing, House Hunters, Property Ladder, Designed to Sell. The list goes on and on.

Why are these shows so popular? I suspect it's for the same reason so many people want to talk about real estate. It affects everyone, whether homeowner, tenant, or landlord. It's why visiting open houses is an entertaining Sunday outing, even when you have no intention of buying. Owning a home is usually the largest investment any of us will make, and people want to stay informed. The media has been reporting such doom and gloom when it comes to real estate; it's fun to watch how other people are faring.

So, how bad was the market last year? I'm pleased to say Arlington held up relatively well. Single-family prices dropped 2% from 2005-2006, but demand was up, as 24% more homes were sold last year than the year before. Condos also dropped 2% in price, though the number of condos sold last year was considerably less than the year before.

As an overall investment, property in Arlington still appears to be a good bet. The average length of time people own their home is seven years. The average sale price in 1999 was \$307,193; the average price in 2006 was \$526,467. That's more than a 70% increase in property value.

The following chart shows all real estate sales in our **Newsletter** neighborhood between October 14, 2006 and March 17, 2007:

Single-Family Homes

48 Arlmont Street	\$ 265,000
19 Brunswick Road	\$ 375,000
36 Brunswick Road	\$ 580,000
21 Gould Road	\$ 672,000
83 Gray Street	\$1,000,000
175 Pleasant Street	\$ 600,000
30 Shawnee Road	\$ 455,000

Condominiums

9 Bartlett Ave., #2	\$ 300,000
56 Churchill Ave., #1	\$ 395,000
169 Gray Street	\$ 358,000
21 Oak Knoll	\$ 749,000
23 Oak Knoll	\$ 508,000
22 Pleasant Street, #1	\$ 553,000
60 Pleasant Street, #204	\$ 212,500
100 Pleasant Street, #14	\$ 214,500
114 Pleasant Street, #302	\$ 210,000
114 Pleasant Street, #401	\$ 240,000
128 Pleasant Street, #108	\$ 325,000
7 Temple Street	\$ 320,000

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD NEIGHBORS

The time has come to broaden the base of our **Neighborhood Newsletter**, by bringing more neighbors into its planning and operations. Would you like to be one of those neighbors? Or could you be? We surely hope so.

We've been talking about this for a while, but now we're ready to move from talk to action. So here's our proposition: We're looking for a small number of you who are willing and able to come together three or four times a year to plan the next **Newsletter**, and to see that plan through. What should be in it, who should write what, and when? Those are the standard **Newsletter** questions and tasks.

It's the right time to share these tasks with you. With more of you involved, we think the Newsletter will have more variety, more originality, and more responsiveness to what's going on. We should all be the better for it. So, readers, we may be talking to you - which means this is a good time to nominate yourself, for that will save us the trouble of those pesky phone calls and e-mails later on.

The workload: quite modest, when the work is shared. The benefits: fun, engagement, knowing more neighbors, helping to make a good neighborhood even better. The simple qualifications: caring for our neighborhood is #1, as is willingness to pitch in for a short time, say for at least a year, until you decide to turn things over to the next person.

Are you ready? Just let us know of your interest - or even your potential interest. No commitments are necessary right now. But we will aim to get together with those interested sometime later in the spring or early summer to take the next steps forward.

Please think about whether this is something you could possibly do, and let us know if you could do it. Just contact Mary at 641-0954 or Marynwill@comcast.net, or Bill at 646-6319, Bill_Berkowitz@uml.edu. Thanks!

CONTACT THE NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER

We always welcome your letters, articles, or suggestions, as well as any donations you might be able to make. To contact Mary Cummings, Editor:

Write to: 135 Jason St.

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To make a contribution to **The Neighborhood Newsletter**: Make checks payable to "Menotomy Rocks Neighborhood Association" and send to Bill Berkowitz at 12 Pelham Terrace. Thank you for your support!