



The Neighborhood Newsletter

Volume 12 Number 3

The Holiday Issue, December 2005

“PUSHING THE ENVELOPE”

This is the time of year when a note like this one lands on our front page, asking for your financial support to keep the **Neighborhood Newsletter** coming to yo door.



As before, we don't like to be any more visible with fund-raising than absolutely necessary; we'd much rather be gathering and writing neighborhood news. So here's the direct but hopefully low-key pitch:

Each **Newsletter** issue costs about \$600 to produce, which translates into about \$1800 per year. That should be a doable target, and we're counting on you to prove us right. So if you haven't contributed in the last 12 months, or if we haven't heard from you in the past – and if you value this neighborhood effort – please consider supporting the **Newsletter**, as always in an amount that's comfortable for you.

Some readers of past fund-raising notes have suggested placing envelopes in the **Newsletter** to make responding easier. Others have recommended Paypal. We appreciate those ideas, and some time we might try one or both; but for now, imagine yourself reaching for an envelope right after you read this article. Okay – got one...? Excellent. You can take it from there.

If you do your part, we'll pledge to do ours. We'll try our best to produce a lively, informative, interesting, and community-building newsletter, one that can speak to any neighborhood topic of interest, that responds to your concerns, and that will always be (very) wide open to your ideas, suggestions, and *especially* your own writing, in any way, shape or form.

Your check in support of the **Neighborhood Newsletter** should be made payable to the Menotomy Rocks Neighborhood Association, then sent to Bill Berkowitz at 12 Pelham Terrace. Many thanks as ever for your assistance; and may everyone's holiday season be gloriously bright!

The Neighborhood Newsletter is produced through generous contributions from neighbors and the underwriting support of Judy Weinberg of Venner Road and Coldwell Banker Real Estate, judyweinberg@comcast.net.

THE ROVING REPORTER

By Jessie Brown (*Jason Street*)



For this issue, we asked people, “**What’s the most outrageous thing you’ve seen in our neighborhood?**”

“A purple garbage truck!” Charlie Keating, age 2, Brantwood Road

“The huge tree branch that fell over and hit our neighbor’s car.” Suni George, Pleasant View Road

“The lady who wears all black and stripey tights and a black hat. She even has a black cat in her yard.” Kathleen Morgan and Eileen Harris, age 9, Churchill Avenue

“The bats I’ve seen flying around there in the day time.” Jimmy Harris, age 13, Churchill Avenue

“That’s easy—the deer that was swimming in our pool! It took off from a standstill, and cleared our six-foot fence. The kids joked that must be how reindeers learn to fly. Then it just went running up Gray Street.” Joan Jantz, Gray Street

“The car that’s completely covered in toys. That must have taken some effort.” Anonymous, lower Jason Street

“Well, while we were eating on our front porch, we saw a pair of hawks over our house, being chased away by a fleet of songbirds!” Scott McKay, Lakeview

“Bill Berkowitz strolling down the street in a cape.” Ben Kuhn, age 12, Jason Street

“The oak that squashed the playground.” Peter Berdovsky, Newport Street

“Probably people would say me, walking around with my parrot on my shoulder.” Ellen Reed, Woodland Street

“The time back in 1991 that a hot air balloon, shaped like a 747, came down in our neighborhood. It was after dinner, so I woke up the kids and we all ran out to see. It landed in the parking lot next to Johnnie’s.” Nancy Tiedeman, Bailey Road

“Nothing. Our neighborhood is too calm.” Louise Ivers, Hillsdale Road

HOW ABOUT A BIG GREEN BOX ON YOUR STREET?

Speaking of energy and the environment (see page 3), here's an small, earth-friendly recycling activity you can take part in on your own street, with thanks to Glenn Koenig of Hopkins Road. Glenn writes us:

"A few years ago, I decided not to throw dead batteries in the trash anymore and instead collected them in a small box. About a year ago or so, I realized that I had no real plan for what to do with them besides take them to a toxic waste collection, so I started poking around on the Internet. I found the site for "The Big Green Box" [www.biggreenbox.com/StoreFront.bok.] and ordered one.



"I put all my dead batteries into the box when it arrived and then kept it for adding more. Soon, it became clear that we weren't going to have enough dead batteries to fill it more than even half way before the deadline to return it. So, I designed and printed a flyer and distributed it to all my neighbors on Hopkins Road and a few others on Addison Street.

"A number of people responded, and I was able to load the box almost to the top. I shipped it back just a while ago. This might be a good project for various neighborhood groups.

"There are two things I learned while doing this, and I thought I should warn you about them. First, to avoid the risk of short circuits, all batteries, even "dead" or leaky ones, must either be placed either in zip top plastic bags (that are supplied with the box), or have their terminals taped with electrical tape so that the terminals don't touch other batteries in the box. Second, you only have one year after starting the collection to return the box, so it pays to plan to complete the collection well before a year is up.

"If you have any questions, please call me and I'll try to answer them."

The basic green box costs \$58, and can be ordered from the web address above. The box accepts batteries from toys, flashlights, clocks, smoke detectors, cell phones, cameras, calculators, laptops, cordless tools, and pretty much anything except really big items such as car batteries.

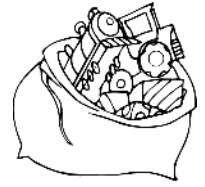
There are more details than can fit into this short article, but Glenn is willing to be a resource person for any questions or for neighbors who might like to start a similar project on their own street. Glenn can be reached at 16 Hopkins Road, at 646-4294, or at gck@dancing-data.com.



Please keep our sidewalks clear and safe this winter.

NEIGHBORS RESPOND TO KATRINA

By Peggy Gardiner (*Menotomy Rocks Drive*)



Over a period of two weeks, two pumpkin and toy sales were held on Menotomy Rocks Drive and Shawnee Road to raise money for those impacted by hurricane Katrina. Both were wonderful events filled with lots of very generous gifts. Pumpkins and gourds were carried in from a garden. Baby toys showed up on the driveway early in the morning. Bikes rolled in before 8:00 a.m. Strollers filled with toys came strolling down the street. Neighbors also brought cookies and food.

Donations were made regardless of what was purchased. Overall, \$370 was raised and donated to the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity. After the sales, the remaining vanful of toys was donated to the Citizen Action Team "Real Time Disaster Relief" [www.citizenactionteam.org], and was due to be delivered to children in Gulfport, Mississippi.

It's nice to know that the people who live in this neighborhood have such kind-hearted spirits. Special thanks to the Cobeans, Conti-Lindems, Goldstein-DeGregorios, Lanigans, Bingham, Foster-Haesslers, Weinstocks, Melcher-Garners, Wheelers, Gardiners, Streits, Griffins, Houghs, Keefes, and all those who gave so generously.

For more details or information on donations to the Citizens Action Team, check out their website listed above, or contact Pamela Ruby Russell at rubbytunes@aol.com



WATCH OUT FOR HOUSE BITING DOGS!

Dear Friends,

Most of you are dog lovers, but I'm afraid I have to report one bad dog. Last night he bit my house—just walked up to it and started ripping out the shingles with his teeth. He ran away when I turned on the porch light.

This seems to me an event worthy of note. Dogs are famous biters, to be sure, but I've never heard of one biting a house. I wonder if he has bitten other houses? It was dark when I saw him, so I couldn't identify him in a lineup, but I did see that he was white, of medium build, and had short hair. I strongly recommend that you keep your house away from him.

Don Mattheisen
Churchill Avenue

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD'S ENERGY FUTURE

By Bill Berkowitz (*Pelham Terrace*)

Gasoline nearly \$3.00 a gallon. Fuel oil around \$2.50. Natural gas prices headed in the same direction. It may not get much better, not in the longer run. What's a neighbor to do?



In our pleasant and attractive neighborhood, that small corner of the world where many of us feel very fortunate to live, we are witnessing one effect of the global economy. Over a barely perceptible network, it filters down to our streets and homes, not waiting for an invitation. For better and/or worse, this is globalization in action.

Global affairs might not rate neighbor attention were it only a matter of prices today. For many of us, high energy costs may be unpleasant, and perhaps worrisome; but for most of us, they do not rise to the level of true hardship. Yet what if those prices surge much higher? Or, instead of surging, what if they simply climb steadily upward, outpacing our incomes? Or what if the energy production or distribution system, for any of a dozen reasons, becomes significantly disrupted? What then?

None of this may happen, of course. We are not energy nor economic experts, and the future eludes even expert prediction. But we'll argue here that it's useful to think in advance about these issues, not just individually, but also collectively, on a neighborhood level. The premise is that we'll all be better off living in a close and caring community under just about any conditions, but especially so if adversity comes our way. Global forces are powerful; yet so are we as individuals, and especially as neighbors. We too have power to plan, to respond, and to shape our own destiny. The question is how.

If there are future energy shocks, our neighborhood in many ways is well positioned. Because, for one reason, our neighborhood is walkable. For most **Newsletter** readers, it's a 10-minute walk or less to the supermarket, the bank, the post office, the library, other places where we shop or do errands. Most of us can walk there; many of us do. In talking with neighbors, walkability in fact is cited as one of our neighborhood's primary attractions.

Walking has other virtues. It's good for the heart, if not also for the soul. And walking allows you to meet up with other neighbors, to greet them, perhaps to chat for a moment or two. These informal and unplanned social contacts, at first glance so incidental and trivial, should not be underestimated; multiplied over many times and many days, their traces accumulate. Then, gradually, they solidify into acquaintanceships and relationships, sometimes into friendships. Those pedestrian encounters are building blocks for

a vibrant and cohesive community.

We are also well positioned because we have a decent public transportation system that generally gets you where you want to go. And we are well positioned because many of us have jobs where we can do at least some of our work from home (and get out to walk during the day). What's more, because our neighborhood is walkable, close to Cambridge and Boston, it should become relatively more attractive both for new buyers and for suburbanites living further from the metropolitan core.

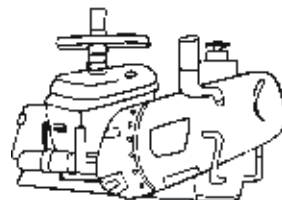
Our physical layout and location may help keep Arlington, and our neighborhood, a very desirable community to live.

Home heating may be more problematic, for walking won't warm you inside the house, not by itself. Nor will home energy conservation, not alone. To add to the equation, our current lifestyles are semi-hard-wired. It's unlikely that we'll be baking bread together in communal ovens, eating together around the fireplace, or gathering together in each other's living rooms to watch DVD's, or play music, or simply talk, nice as any of these might sometimes be.

Yet at the least, a close neighborhood will enable us to watch out for each other, to provide a supportive structure, to alert us on who may need help in a truly difficult situation, and possibly to offer that help. And our neighborhood does include town-owned indoor spaces (the former Parmenter School building, the senior center), occupied for only part of the day, and potentially available in genuine emergencies. Then, oil and gas may not be the only home heating options. How many neighbors heat their homes with wood, or some other energy source?

Further down the line, there are more creative neighborhood responses that could increase our energy independence: cooperative energy buying; neighborhood-based solar conversions (in a "neighborhood solar district"); a neighborhood bulletin board or web site for car pooling and energy sharing arrangements; seminars and block-level workshops; a neighborhood bike shop; an energy fair; a neighborhood shuttle van....

There are many pathways to sustainability, more than can be outlined in this space. The main purpose behind these words is to raise awareness and stimulate dialogue about neighborhood response to events outside. I believe we'll be better off thinking and acting together, sharing information and resources, regardless of the price of fuel. I hope, though, this will not be the last word on the subject, and that other **Newsletter** readers will respond, critique, and add ideas of their own.





A SPECIAL WELCOME

Margaret Potter and Wilbur Kim (Irving Street) welcomed **Isabella Jean Potter Kim** on June 21, 2005. Isabella weighed 8 pounds, 10 ounces and was 21 inches long.

She was welcomed home by her proud big brothers, Alexander, Daniel, and William.



SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK A BIG HIT

By Colin Campbell (*Morton Road*)

On August 7th, the Arlington Center for the Arts hosted *The Taming of the Shrew* at Robbins Farm Park, a performance for which I volunteered. Actors came from the Deerfield, NH-based New England Shakespeare Company. After the show, a party was held at the home of ACA Board Members Al and Doreen Stevens (Jason Street).

According to ACA Communications Director Linda Shoemaker, a large turnout of about 600 enjoyed the production on this beautiful summer night. Shoemaker says that the ACA plans to host another Shakespeare event next summer and encourages patrons to look for updates on the ACA website. She acknowledges the contributions of RCN and the Sunningdale Charitable Trust.

This annual Arlington event, organized by Betsy Baldwin (Jason Street), is looked forward to in both Menotomy Rocks Park and Robbins Farm, and is always well attended. Remember to support the ACA year-round, so that it can continue to host such wonderful, community-building events.

NEWSLETTER NOSTALGIA

by Mary Cummings (*Jason Street*)

The Neighborhood Newsletter, Volume 5, Number 2, *The Park Celebration Issue*, September 1996 was a six page marvel. Joanne Robinson wrote "Historic Districts in Our Neighborhood," which answered several FAQs: how historically significant build-



ings are protected; how many historic districts there are in Arlington; and what does it mean to own a house in an historic district.

Six families were welcomed and Kevin Wang, born July 17, 1996 received a special welcome. Are all those families still in the neighborhood? I know Robin Cassel and Jeffrey Whittemore are still here and their daughter, Anna, now has a brother Asher. Also welcomed were Erin Higgins and Doug Rosner, Lisa and Tom Streite, Robert and Deborah Shapiro, and Michele and Bruce Clifford.

The **Neighborhood Newsletter** e-mail list was first suggested, the Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park were looking for equipment and volunteers for the park's Centennial celebration, Miriam Levine let us publish her poem "In the Provinces" and I wrote an update for the traffic calming efforts.

My favorite part of this issue is the list of book recommendations we compiled with the help of our two new book groups. We were really on a roll in September, 1996.



FINDING THE "COMMUNITY" IN COMMUNITY ACCESS CABLE

By Charlotte Pierce (*Brantwood Road*)

Imagine yourself saying "Lights! Camera! Action!" as a real TV producer! If you have something to say about education, composting, sustainable energy, the arts, open space, gardening, affordable housing, renovation, or any other subject, you can be a TV producer, say those very words, and educate others about issues and topics that are important to you, the neighborhood, and the community. The training is free and the Arlington Studio awaits you at 85 Park Avenue!

TV Around Town

If you think community access cable a series of muddy videos of - well - boring municipal meetings (like I did up until I started producing shows about a year ago), you're in for a pleasant surprise. For example last winter, producer Steve Boudreau and his host and editor Jim Porter produced an outstanding video of our own Menotomy Rocks Park, which ran on the community access channel. Interviewing neighborhood experts Clarissa Rowe, Karsten Hartel, John Pickle, Ed Heck, Patricia Thomas and others, the show celebrates the park's fascinating history, unique geology, its picturesque pond, rich wildlife, and the many events held there throughout the year, from Earth Day to Shakespeare in the Park. To see this quality video online, visit MenotomyJournal.com.

Joining *Menotomy Journal* on cable is the ¡Hola Arlington! educational Spanish series for kids; the *Golden Opportunities* show produced by and for seniors; *Arts ala Carte*, with interviews and performances by local visual artists and musicians; *Documenting Dissent*, a CSPAN-style lecture show; and *Sustainable Arlington*, which focuses on renewable energy topics; plus local varsity sports;

church services; and a host of other specials.

The studio staff and volunteers also run workshops and “cable camps” at the studio, plus the after-school Video Production Club for 14 kids at the Ottoson Middle School, and studio staff and volunteers support the high school video club that is reviving educational programming on community access channel 9. These programs give valuable real-life experience to motivated students.

The Licensing Process

Comcast and the Town are currently negotiating the renewal of the company’s 10-year franchise license to operate in Arlington. After a public hearing on October 19, the Board of Selectmen issued a preliminary denial of Comcast’s first formal proposal for a new license. The company will continue to run the studio until an agreement is reached, and there will be no interruption in cable service.

The law allows the Town to ask for 5% of gross cable TV revenues (not broadband internet), plus access channels and capital improvement funds, all of which must be used for local PEG (public, educational, and government) access. In its first formal response to the RFP for cable license, Comcast drastically low-balled these requests, cut the number of channels, and ignored requests for public access video-on-demand (VOD) that would let us view Town meetings and other programs on our own time.

Must Comcast raise rates in Arlington as it claims, if it has to pay a fair and legal license fee (5%)? This \$17-billion company enjoyed a 64 percent profit increase in first-quarter 2005; it’s difficult to see why consumers should have to suffer. By law, the company, not the Town, has complete control over rates.

Arlington’s ace in the hole is the presence of RCN as a viable competitor, plus Verizon, which is waiting in the wings with its own fiber-optic delivery system; as well as wireless and other future options.

“RCN’s rates did not suddenly increase when that license was signed in 1997, and RCN has stayed competitive,” said Glenn Koenig, of Hopkins Road, and President of Arlington Community Media Inc. (ACMI).

How to Support Our Community Access Cable

One easy way to show your support of community access cable is to sign the petition, available on PDF at ArlingtonStudio.org, WorldLanguageNetwork.org, or ArlingtonCommunityMedia.org; or at the Board of Selectmen’s office at Town Hall. You can sign it at one of those locations, or e-mail or fax the petition (or your own letter) to the BOS Cable Advisory Committee at fax number (781) 316-3029; or just pick up the phone and call the BOS office at 781-316-3020 and ask them to log your call in support of community access cable.

A former snob about community-access TV, Charlotte Pierce has reformed and is now a producer of shows for Arlington Community Access, including the!Hola Arlington! and Sustainable Arlington series. Contact her by e-mail at charlotte@piercepress.com. For budgets, needs assessments, Comcast’s proposal, and more on the background of community access cable, visit arlingtonstudio.com or arlingtoncommunitymedia.com.



NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY NEWS

By Bill Berkowitz (*Pelham Terrace*)

Here’s a brief update on what’s been happening with the neighborhood study that’s been proceeding for the last while.

As some of you know, I have begun a study to learn more about our neighborhood, with two basic goals. The first is to learn more about life in neighborhoods such as ours, for surprisingly little is in fact known about them. The second and more specific goal is to consider how our own neighborhood might possibly be strengthened, to ensure that it’s the best possible place for all of us to live.

To do this, I’ve had the chance to listen at length to a representative sample of neighbors, and more recently to begin sending mailed surveys to a different sample group. I’ve been gratified both by the degree of cooperation received, and by the richness of your responses. I’m very grateful for your support.

There’s certainly been no shortage of thoughts! Neighbors have suggested high-speed gondola cars to whisk us to Alewife, a beer garden, and an outdoor pool, as well as somewhat less elaborate ideas such as Sunday morning bagel get-togethers, yoga classes in the park, and web site expansion. Great changes do start with visionary thinking, but frequent comments are also made on our neighborhood’s positive qualities right now (friendliness, safety, and walkability rank high on the list), as well as its number one bete noire: traffic. Of course, there’s much more to report, and I hope to do this later.

Current plans are for the survey process to continue through the first months of next year. At that point, my commitment will be to tabulate the data, to share the overall results, to arrange discussions with those interested, and to think together with you how we might act upon and benefit from some of the main ideas that may emerge. I hope to have more details about this in the next **Newsletter** issue.

In the meantime, if you receive a survey form in the mail, I hope you’ll take a few moments to respond to it. Your views and opinions are valuable, no matter what they may be; they will make an important and helpful contribution to our neighborhood’s welfare. Everyone’s comments, questions, and suggestions are most welcome as well. Please don’t hesitate to let me know them, either at 646-6319, or at Bill_Berkowitz@uml.edu. And stay tuned for further updates in the future!

OUR NEWSLETTER WISH LIST

Can we get our holiday wish list in early?

Over the past few years, we've spotted a few neighborhood needs that shouldn't be hard for the right person to handle, but that haven't quite been met yet. All it takes is someone to step up to the plate, even for only a short time period, before the job gets passed along to the next person.

Think about it. Might one of the people below be you?

* One opportunity is to manage our Neighborhood Service Referral List, of home repair, home improvement, and other craftspeople. This has been a popular **Newsletter** feature ever since it started; it would be even more useful if someone could take a more proactive role in seeking out and reporting recommendations (and occasional red flags) in a wide variety of service areas.

* Another need is for someone to match neighbors who need household help that's often hard to find - leaf raking, snow shoveling, and child care are the hardy perennials - together with neighborhood young people who are ready, willing, and able-bodied, and who could use the extra spending money and experience. If you've ever wanted to be a matchmaker, intergenerational style, here are folks hoping to be coupled.

* And have we mentioned that the **Newsletter** is always looking for writers on any neighborhood topic, as well as planners to help shape each of our upcoming issues? Those would truly be gifts that keep on giving the whole year through.

Each of these of course comes with a full benefit package: the chance to know new neighbors; the rewards of job creation; the praise you'll get inside and outside these pages. And let's not forget the freedom to set your own hours, be your own boss, and work from the comfort of your own home. If all that doesn't do it, how about the quiet satisfaction of making our neighborhood a better place to live.

So we are waiting for you to fulfill one of our neighborhood wishes and take a small step forward. If you might be able to help in any of these valuable neighborhood roles, just give us a call: Mary at 641-0954, or Bill at 646-6319. Thanks!



NEIGHBORHOOD WEB QUEST

Congratulations to Ted Baldwin who won last issue's web contest by identifying the picture of the "Mystery Neighbor."

For this issue's, we have put up several pictures of the work that went into preparing the 14th annual Spooky Walk at Menotomy Rocks Park as well as some photos of moms at the bus stop.

How many of these neighbors pictured on the web can you identify? Our next winner is the one who identifies the most.

www.jhitesnews.org

SUNFLOWERS ON THE CORNER

How many neighborhoods are there in the United States? Tens of thousands, probably. There's no official count, but many of these neighborhoods have good ideas we could borrow. Here's one of them:

In Portland, Oregon (with dozens of neighborhood groups, and a city Office of Neighborhood Life), neighbors have taken charge of their own street intersections. If you head out to the Sunnyside neighborhood, at the corner of Southeast 33rd and Yamhill - as I did when visiting last summer - you'll find that neighbors have painted a giant sunflower, about 25 feet in diameter, right in the middle of the road.

What does this accomplish? Several things. First, the sunflower is quite beautiful in itself. Second, it definitely slows down traffic! Third, it has stimulated other street corner activities, in this case including outdoor movies, a public poetry station, and a glassed-in "share-it" cabinet, where neighbors place small items that others might enjoy. And fourth, it's come to serve as a neighborhood symbol and landmark - for neighbors now meet at their new gathering place, called Sunnyside Piazza.

This is only one example of a program called Intersection Repair, which has spread all over the community. For details and other ideas, check out www.cityrepair.org/. Imagine the possibilities for us, at some of our more run-of-the-mill street corners.... -BB



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.

E-mail: Jhitesnews@comcast.net

Phone: 781-641-0954

Web Site: www.jhitesnews.org

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!