



# The Neighborhood Newsletter

Volume 16 Number 1

The Helping Hands Issue, March, 2009



## PRECINCT POTENTIAL: CREATING LINKS WITHIN OUR "SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE"

By Deborah Goldsmith (*Devereaux Street*)

The benefits of shared activities for individuals, families, and neighborhoods (as well as political and social networks) are described in several articles in this Newsletter issue. Here's one more example: linking our blocks and our neighborhood to our Precincts, Town Meeting, and the larger needs of Arlington. This could have significant multiplying benefits as well.

In most neighborhoods, casual meetings while snow shoveling, spring planting, and leaf raking can serve to greet new arrivals and share news. More connections develop on my block at our yearly Dance and Block Party and annual Open House, and also by our shared phone and e-mail list. But, when it comes to Town issues, connections to our Precinct and Town Meeting are very indirect; they could be enhanced.

Here's an idea to move us toward that goal: What if we asked a few folks in our Precinct (perhaps our Town Meeting Members) to suggest an Arlington-based Service Project? Blocks or neighborhood groupings in the Precinct would be invited to participate. Each group would commit to working together once or maybe a few times a year, depending on the project. All ages would be included. The efforts could be tracked and recognized.

Some potential benefits:

Each block spreading the word and getting involved would increase its connections. Participants would have a shared work goal, a sense of accomplishment, and the pleasure of seeing their efforts multiplied by several groups acting together.

Working with other groups in our area over time

would increase two-way communications within our Precinct and potentially with our Town Meeting representatives.

A needed community service could be provided, at a time when many services are over-stretched.

Here are two more specific ideas – just as a start:

1. Each block participating would choose a week when it would supplement collections for the Food Pantry. What if 5 or 15 blocks chose 2 or 3 weeks in the year?

2. Each block would survey everyone it could to collect information for a Precinct-level Resource Guide – of informal and town social networks, activities, services – maybe targeted for one age group at a time. One goal would be to help newcomers and the elderly become more fully connected.

Feedback is welcome on any of these ideas. You may reach me at (781) 643-3984.



## UPDATING THE SERVICE REFERRAL LIST

Several recent additions have been made to our always-popular Service Referral List. It's now online at our **Newsletter** web site,

[www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org](http://www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org).

We continue to need your input to keep the list accurate and up to date. If you are aware of changes we should implement, please notify Marianne Curren at [mgcxx@verizon.net](mailto:mgcxx@verizon.net) or at 781-646-4689. Thanks!



## THAT CANS-DO SPIRIT

By Marianne Curren (Hillsdale Road)

If you've traveled Jason Street this winter, you've probably noticed the large container for empty bottles and cans in a front yard. You've probably also wondered about the story behind it, and the story is truly worth knowing.

It begins about 5 years ago, when Jason St. resident Cricket Beauregard-Lewis met an early morning walker, Madge White. Madge, originally from Jamaica and now from Dorchester, worked as a home healthcare aide in the neighborhood during the week. Madge walked for exercise, but Cricket noticed that Madge collected beverage cans at the same time.

They began to chat, and Madge mentioned that she redeemed cans so she could send lunch money to her daughter, who was attending teacher's college back home. Cricket encouraged Madge to store her material at Cricket's for convenience. Their conversations turned into coffee, then into friendship; as Cricket says, she appreciated "the opportunity to get to know someone different."

Over the years the friendship endured. Cricket's daughter has been seriously ill, and Madge became "an anchor" for Cricket, with a positive attitude and a fervent religious belief. Cricket enjoyed matching Madge's support, trying to "do something for someone." She helped Madge out a bit financially and saw that Madge, in turn, tried to help others – for example, buying the first pair of new shoes for a 10-year-old disabled child in the class taught by Madge's now college-educated daughter in the Caribbean. So the cycle continued.

Then in the fall of last year Madge herself was diagnosed with lung cancer, although she had no risk factors. She needed treatment and could no longer perform her health aide duties. Cricket wanted to help further, but just giving money didn't feel right. Cricket looked to find out in what way Madge would be able to accept help. That's when Cricket hit on the idea of the expanded can collection.

By the holidays, Cricket had put the e-mail word out to friends on Woodland Avenue and Bartlett Street

with the help of her friend Ellen, and soon the redeemables numbered 500-600 per week. While this is impressive, the monetary value is only about \$30, but the collection has taken in about 4,000 items to date. Cricket regularly takes her empties to the redemption center housed on The Fernald School grounds. Her daughter, who is still ill herself, works with Cricket on the project, which helps them both deal with their own family challenges.

Her neighbors of all ages have been coming through. Kids donate empties. Along with their cans and bottles, adults have donated their redemption receipts from local markets. A total stranger wrote a check for \$100, and so it goes. As Cricket has noted, it's "incredible how people are generous."

The end of the story is that both Cricket and Madge look forward to the time when Madge can return to her healthcare job. According to Cricket, Madge's attitude toward her illness has been so remarkable that she's speaking to medical professionals about her disease and her perspective, at her own physician's urging. And the friends are planning a spring lemonade party on Cricket's front lawn so Madge can personally share her story and meet those who have helped.

Down the line, when Madge is back at work, Cricket hopes to pass on her giant redeemables carton to some other neighbor who has a worthwhile cause. And that would be a classic example of "paying it forward"; in other words, a fitting next chapter in this tale of local kindness.



## DOINA'S DELIGHTS

By Doina Iliescu (Jason Street)

With no children or dogs to walk, my husband and I don't often travel in the circles that form the roots of so many neighborhood friendships. Even though our paths don't cross every day, I find that I am always delighted to see my neighbors and their children. They are the reason that, while we are both on the go, I am moved to lean over the railing on my back porch, or over the fence that separates our yards, and settle in for a least a few minutes of neighborly inquisition—about the latest renovation project, or how the kids are doing in school, or whether the family is taking a summer vacation. I relish these moments to check in and catch up, and remain connected to my neighborhood.

## “YOU’RE RUNNING FOR WHAT?”

By Cindy Starks (*Monadnock Road*)



The reactions to telling someone you are running for school committee are interesting.

Many people congratulate you and wish you the best of luck, but almost as many wonder if you have finally lost your marbles. They look at you quizzically, cock their heads to the side, and ask “Why?” But to understand my answer to the question, you need to know more about me and a little of my personal history.

I graduated from college (UConn, 1988) with a degree in electrical engineering because I wanted something interesting, challenging, and well paying. I found all of that in the high tech industry and worked for the likes of Data General, Integrated Computer Solutions, Inc., Shiva, Inc., and finally Oracle Corporation. The work was everything I had hoped it would be, but in 1994 I gave birth to my first child and it changed my life in ways I could not have foreseen. In 1997 I gave birth to my second child, and by the time he was 3 I could no longer pretend that I wanted to do anything but be home with my children. I was able to make that change, and so in 2001 I retired from high tech.

I quickly sought ways to fill my time and began volunteering at my oldest child’s elementary school. There was so much to be done, and I found myself intrigued by the field of education. I loved talking to the teachers and found myself coming into the classroom more and more to help whenever possible. As both children grew and attended the same school, my commitment to and interest in education grew. I started thinking that teaching was something that I might be interested in, but I felt that elementary school was not the right venue for me.

When my oldest child entered middle school, I realized that I had found the level of teaching that best suited me. So I enrolled in Lesley University and began attaining my Masters of Education degree and my license to teach middle school math. At the same time, I helped to found the first (and currently only) after-school program for middle school students, having been appalled that while the choices for after school care in Arlington were rich for those in K-5, the options abruptly ended after that.

Over the years my commitment and belief in education have grown into something of a fervor for me. I have come to believe that education is the internal infrastructure of our country and that we owe it to our children to give them the very best education we can afford.

Education is what opens the doors to so many possibilities, and the fuel that will power the next generation. My children have received a great education in the Arlington public schools and I want to ensure that this continues and that it holds true for every student.

It is imperative that our school district continues to move forward in preparing our students for their future. It is why I have become a teacher and why I want to serve on the Arlington School Committee.

Editor’s note: Cindy is running in a three-person contest for School Committee; two candidates will be elected. Town elections are on Saturday, April 4.



## STEVE’S PEEVES

By Steve Johnson (*Jason Street*)

Why do I see so many people sitting idly in parked cars with the engines running? Often, they are in places where signs are posted, asking drivers to please turn off their engines, for obvious reasons. Maybe a cigarette tastes better with exhaust fumes. Maybe they need the power to run the deluxe entertainment system, or the washer and dryer. Yes, washer and dryer—there are super-sized family maxi-vans with laundry machines built in to the cabins. I doubt they are selling very well. Whether or not those engines are running idle to power the almighty air conditioners, we all end up paying for it.



See our website at [www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org](http://www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org)

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## POETRY CORNER: THE FELLS IN WINTER

*An occasional feature of contributions from our multi-talented neighbors. We'd love to publish your own creative writing as well.*

### THANK YOU

By MaryAnna Foskett (*Brantwood Road*)

The Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park held several volunteer work sessions during 2008—most involving activity to control the spread of invasive plants and trees in the Park, in an ongoing effort to preserve the beauty and diversity of the Park's woods and pond areas. Projects included pulling garlic mustard in April and May from the Shawnee gulley area before it seeded; removing buckthorn, multiflora rose, burning bush, oriental bittersweet, and purple loose- strife from the pond area; removing Norway maple saplings from the Devil's Den area and the Shawnee Road entrance; and planting some new trees and shrubs in the cleared areas.

The Friends wish to thank Marge Bean, Justine Block, Eliza Burden, Melissa Carr, Dana Cooperson, Barbara Costa, Ted, Anne, Matthew & Emma DeCoursey, Becky Edmondson, MaryAnna Foskett, Bill & Peggy Gardiner, Richard Goldberg, Erica Heffer, Andy James, Tom Ladenburg, Jean & Al Lokensgard, Biff Maier, Liz Reisberg, Clarissa Rowe, Greg Ruccio, Ted Siegan, Mustafa Varoglu, Dorothy Vieweg and Don Vieweg for their enthusiastic assistance. The volunteers who wielded weed wrenches & loppers during one of the rainiest weekends of a rainy summer are given special commendation! Our thanks, also, to the volunteers who assisted in making a spring Dallin School outing to the Park an opportunity to learn about nature.

### THE FELLS

By Donna K. Wren (*Hillsdale Road*)

Every time I drive by the Fells, I think of my best friend and former Arlingtonian, Lynda, and of the times we took our babies for walks there. are beautiful all the time, but especially at this time of year.

*the Fells in winter  
before the snow  
skeletal trees reach high  
pine umbrellas cannot block the sun  
stone cliffs, great sleeping giants  
wear lacy nets of frozen waterfalls  
even on their sunny sides  
the birds are quiet  
squirrels and chipmunks asleep  
no rustling to startle  
this lone interloper  
pebbles skitter and click a greeting  
as they dart away from my feet  
frozen puddles crack  
echoing off those giants  
who do not wake  
leaves, stiff with frost,  
crunch under each step  
like eating cereal  
it's louder in my head  
crunch crunch crunch crunch  
I am noisy in my solitude.*

**THIS SPACE IS BEING HELD FOR YOUR ARTICLE, POEM, OR ART WORK!**



## NEIGHBORHOOD VEGETABLE GARDENS

By Jerry Cohn (*Jason Street*)

In Arlington's history, East Arlington flatlands were famous for their fields and greenhouses, which supplied vegetables to Boston year round; but the steep and rocky landscape of our own neighborhood was not celebrated for its lettuce, beets, celery, and hothouse cucumbers. Before we were built up, however, we did have our agricultural uses. In 1871, newspapers noted damage to orchards and pumpkin patches that ran west of Pleasant Street, before the tornado of August 28th moved on to decapitate two church steeples. And Hill's Pond in Menotomy Rocks Park is the refined descendant of George Hill's farm pond. His house still stands at 253 Pleasant Street, while buildings from the Morton and Frost farms, now private homes, cluster around the junction of Jason and Spring Streets. Strawberries grew there, in commercial fields, within living memory.

So, I wondered, aside from my own plots - four beds that total about 500 square feet, for peas, lettuce, arugula, tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, squash, peppers, asparagus, herbs, and sometimes onions - what other terrain in our flower-filled neighborhood is devoted to vegetables, and what other neighbors are farmers at heart? I have only found a few, but they are decidedly diverse! Here are brief profiles of four:

Penny Snyder grows squash and tomatoes in her flowerbeds on Jason Street. Every year she can depend on her compost pile to produce seedlings; she says she has transplanted at least ten generations of cherry tomatoes. But she, like several other neighbors, has had to depend on a community garden plot for a dedicated vegetable garden because the suburban subdivision of our rocky pastures has encouraged too many shade trees. And on Osgood Street, Somerville, where she has Plot #1, she even grows hop vines, courtesy of a friend at Sam Adams Brewery.

Shaded out at home, MaryAnna Foskett and Dolores Schueler, of Brantwood and Brunswick Roads respectively, grow their vegetables (and cutting flowers) on two shared plots at Arlington's community gardens on Magnolia Street. Favored crops include toma-

tillos for Mexican cuisine; and they are even experimenting with a grape arbor. At first they planted Concord grapes, but the vines "took over East Arlington," and so they have just switched to a more disciplined variety.

JoAnn Robinson also farms at the Magnolia Street community gardens, with her friend Linda Frost. She too grows tomatoes and tomatillos, and hot peppers and basil as well; Mexican cooking seems to be a motivating factor among our gardeners. Earlier JoAnn tried raising tomatoes on the roof of her Jason Street house, where there was plenty of sunshine, but not enough acreage! She is lucky, however, in having by her front door an ancient apple tree that can be depended on for "apple goo" preserves.

Our most versatile gardener, however, is certainly Joel Rubin. In summer he grows crops, even including corn, on his property on Spring Street at the junction of the old Frost, Morton, and Hill farms. Indoors, he recycles the water from an aquarium (where dwells Honey Fish, a fearsome 10-inch, 16-year-old South American cichlid) into a window box under grow lights; watercress flourishes year round thanks to fish "nutrients." For a while Joel even kept chickens, until the town bylaw against "livestock and poultry" was brought to his attention. His wife, Netta Davis, is one of the sponsors of a warrant article before Town Meeting this year, to reintroduce the chickens to Arlington. We hope you will urge your representatives to vote "Yes"!

Joel has also planted fruit trees - two cherries, two mulberries, and a Russian quince. Strangely, he has no luck with blueberries, whereas only a block away I have two bushes that do well, although I lose most of my fruit to the birds. That's OK! All of the local vegetable gardeners, myself included, seem to value time outdoors for the rewards of nature in action. Joel even thought a groundhog would be an asset - not my reaction after one polished off my pea plants last May. But we agree that having a fresh tomato, warm off the vine, makes any setback from weather, bugs, or blight forgettable. I call my few blueberries straight from the bush my "gardener's reward" - the pot of gold at the end of Noah's rainbow.





## RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC IN JASON HEIGHTS

By Robert McKersie (*Jason Street*)

With the impending arrival of spring and the clearing of ice from the roads – enabling more rapid auto transit through our neighborhood – I am motivated to give a report on efforts over the years to deal with the problem of the volume and speed of traffic in our area of Arlington.

Several factors account for the amount of traffic that we experience in and around Jason Street. In the morning many drivers use what is a non-conforming entrance to Rt. 2 to head west. In the evening, given the jam-up on Pleasant Street, and the inability to use Venner Road due to rush-hour restrictions, many commuters use Jason Street to head north. (It should be acknowledged that if the restrictions on Venner Road were removed, Hillsdale would experience a sizeable increase in traffic volume.)

Jason Street has the distinction of being – according to the Transportation Advisory Committee – the busiest street not designated as an artery. By comparison to Pleasant Street (a state highway) and Highland Avenue (a wider and straight thoroughfare), Jason Street is narrower, with several curves, so it poses significant issues for the safety of our residents, especially children. (An important section of Jason Street, near Menotomy Rocks Park, is also a part of a school bus route.)

Turning to the question of what have been the fruits of many efforts over the past decade to deal with the problem, the bottom line could be summarized as: a few concrete changes, but given the magnitude of the problem, very little progress. To review what has taken place

- With the energy and leadership of the late Peg Spengler, we were successful in getting the attention of the selectmen on two occasions to endorse the imposition of traffic restrictions on Jason Street. However, these plans were never implemented, even on a test basis, due to pressure from streets nearby that would have received the diverted traffic. Following the old adage that one person's solution is another person's problem, the plans were shelved
- However, we were helpful in creating support for the creation of the Transportation Advisory Committee, and several of us spoke at the Town Meeting when this warrant article was approved

- At one stage we resorted to a publicity tactic, and up and down the avenue we displayed signs saying, "Give our kids a brake!" and "No Racin' on Jason." The *Boston Globe* wrote a story about the effort, for whatever that is worth
- On several occasions, residents parked cars in front of their homes, thereby narrowing the open lane to at most one car. I can remember being in the house and hearing the honking horn of a school bus that could not get through the narrow opening
- Credit must go to Anne Murray, who worked hard, along with others, to get crosswalks established at the park entrance and near the Woodland intersection of Jason Street. And from time to time, signage has been placed on the street to alert drivers to these crosswalks.
- The most significant physical change has been the installation of a roundabout island at the bottom of Jason Street, in front of the pumping station, which requires autos heading north on Jason Street to slow down and navigate the circle with caution. Credit for this improvement goes to Mark Miller and Don Marquis.

Another accomplishment – not in the traffic domain, but just as important – occurred several years ago when the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) wanted to put a chain-link fence around the pumping station, prompted by national security mandates. Since many residents had been meeting around traffic issues, it was very easy to mobilize a group for a 7 a.m. meeting with an official from MWRA to convince the agency that neighbors were concerned about creating a "prison-looking" structure in our neighborhood. With the help of Diane Mahon and George Laite, we proposed the concept of a neighborhood watch – thereby achieving the surveillance of the pumping station that satisfied officials of the MWRA.

Looking ahead, the unresolved issue is: what is to be done about the persistent problem of excessive traffic in our neighborhood? Fortunately, no serious accidents have occurred. Nevertheless, anyone living near the "cut-through" is well aware of near misses and dangerous driving patterns on streets that were originally designed as quiet neighborhood thoroughfares.

Several ideas have been discussed. For example, copying what has been done in Belmont and Cambridge; namely installing speed tables that slow traffic considerably. A more radical change would be to designate Jason Street as a one-way street heading northbound. This would certainly solve the winter problem of cars coming down the steep end of Jason Street and ending up in the front yards of the LaPlante and Davis/Rubin homes. Closing off the non-

## PLANNERS WANTED!

We have openings for a few caring neighbors to join our planning group to help with the Neighborhood Newsletter. Might this interest you? Then opportunity awaits! Here are the specifics:

**Your qualifications:** An interest in our neighborhood. Energy and motivation definitely a plus.

**What's involved:** It's simple - thinking about future Newsletter stories, and coming together with others 3-4 times a year to plan the next issue.

**Among the many benefits:** ~ Hanging out with good people; ~ Seeing your ideas get into print; ~ Low commuting expenses; ~ Maintaining and strengthening our neighborhood quality of life. Need we say again: Our Newsletter, and our neighborhood future, depend on you. Interested? Or simply curious? Excellent! Please contact Bill (Bill\_Berkowitz@uml.edu), Mary (Marynwill@comcast.net), or Steve (Steveanddoina@comcast.net). We're looking forward to hearing from you. Thanks!



## POUR IT IN, LAY IT OUT, OF PASS IT AROUND

By Mary Cummings (Jason Street)

Many, many thanks to Steve Johnson and Doina Iliescu (Jason Street) for doing the lion's share of laying out this issue. We could use a few more volunteers who might be willing to take on an issue layout in turns or as a team. We have been using Adobe Pagemaker for several years and that limits us to those who have access to Pagemaker and some experience using it. Though we might eventually change publishing software, keeping to one makes everything easily transportable. If you're at least a little interested and would like to see exactly what the job entails let me know. If desktop publishing doesn't tickle your fancy, how about helping us to deliver the final product to our 1340 household neighborhood? We always appreciate articles and would love to see some letters to the editor again. If you can't edit, write, or distribute, there's always the financial contribution that keeps us going.

Contact me at marynwill@comcast.net if you would like to help keep The Neighborhood Newsletter alive with fresh new blood.



## WE'RE NOW ON FACEBOOK!

By Alyssa Krinsky Clossey (*Oak Knoll*)

The Neighborhood Newsletter recently established itself as a new group on Facebook.com. We welcome you to join our group and invite others who are Facebook members to become "friends" with the Newsletter. As of now, we have over 50 friends; however, we know we can increase this number significantly by spreading the word.

The purpose of establishing a presence on Facebook.com is to build an online community of Arlington neighbors. It's a means for neighbors to know about others interested in the neighborhood and the Neighborhood Newsletter, communicate with others, post stories, comments, and have an online discussion among fellow neighbors and friends.

If you are not a member of Facebook, we encourage you to join. Just go to: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and sign up; it's free. As a Facebook member, you can type into the search feature "Neighborhood Newsletter, Arlington, MA" and you will see our group. Please join - it is open to all!



## Hope You're Enjoying Our Helping Hands Issue



## HOME IMPROVEMENT

By Steve Johnson (*Jason Street*)

Jeff Whittemore and Robin Cassel couldn't stand it anymore. They had been meaning to update their kitchen since they bought their Jason Street house in 1996, but several other things took precedence. To create more room for the growing family, they had transformed the second and third floors of their formerly two-family house several years ago, adding three bedrooms and two baths. Finally, it was time to consider the kitchen. The cabinets were falling apart—handles were falling off, and wood fiber was falling onto their dishes. They had to wash the dishes before using them!

Full steam ahead! What they did was to expand their kitchen by combining it with the small back porch, which had seldom been used. By removing a wall separating the porch, they kept the windows and shared the light and airy feel of the porch in a bigger kitchen, where they could sit and enjoy meals at a table and built-in bench. They also added an island counter with a cherry countertop, some built-in cabinets, and a granite counter. And, of course you might as well get all new appliances—they chose the “dual-fuel” cooking system: gas burners on top, electric oven below.

The project has been free of the unwelcome surprises and upheaval that plague most home adventures. Robin attributes that to spending a lot of time planning in advance, and having a contractor who was considerate of their wishes. She has nothing but praise for him (Roy Wood, of Woodway Renovations): “He’s been great throughout. He listened to what we wanted, and helped us stay within budget. The subcontractors all show up on time, and the lead carpenter, Mike Goguen, has a really clean, precise working style. There haven’t been any hiccups yet; they’re very well organized, and accurate with the budget. Any overage was our choice. The one thing we splurged on was the countertop.” (They chose a dark granite with embedded flecks called “blue eyes”.)

Another valued partner was the cabinetmaker, Prestige Kitchens and Baths, in Woburn. “Tony Montero,

the owner, took the architect’s plans and designed the cabinets using a program that showed color renderings of the space. It was well thought out, and allowed a very good preview of the result.”

She continues, “We talked to a lot of people about their renovation experiences, to ask what they would change or do differently. Almost all the successes had to do with creating more storage space. You can consult with all the designers and planners you want; and it’s easy to get caught up in trends, and design do’s or don’ts. I’m really glad I didn’t heed those things, and trusted myself, without much second-guessing. You have to do what you like.”

Jeff and Robin had a couple of other advantages most people can’t rely on. Since the first floor kitchen was still available, they were able to maintain a normal lifestyle without having to live in restaurants. Another helpful factor was the absence of dust, thanks to the Zip-Wall dust barrier system, which Jeff invented. (These adaptable dust barriers were featured in a previous edition of the Newsletter.)

Even so, Robin says, “you have to expect that there will be a fair amount of chaos. Just have faith that it will happen, and it’ll be fine. In the end, it’s just a kitchen.

### 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:

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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!