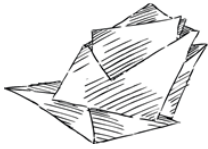




The Neighborhood Newsletter

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The Apparational Issue, October 2007



“THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE....”

Every fall for the past several years, we've taken a moment to reach out to you for your support and voluntary contributions to keep the **Neighborhood Newsletter** going. Fall is here, and so are we, thankfully. And so are you, most thankfully as well; we're grateful for that.

We hope you like this issue. We think it reflects an improved way of operating, with more neighbors involved in planning and writing and putting it all together.

This is good. We'd like to keep it that way, and to keep making the Newsletter as engaging, useful, and enjoyable as possible for you.

Our place in the world is modest – we know the **Neighborhood Newsletter** is just one item that reaches you a few times a year. Still, it helps to remind us that we are part of a larger community. We live here; we care about what goes on here; we have many shared interests and values. In those small ways, our lives are bound together. We are neighbors, after all.

Enough of these words. We'll simply say that if all this matters to you – or even if it could, or should matter – then please join your neighbors and help support your Newsletter by making a contribution, as always in an amount that is comfortable for you. Your checks should be payable to the Menotomy Rocks Neighborhood Association and sent to Bill Berkowitz at 12 Pelham Terrace.

This time we've tried to make it easier for you, by enclosing an envelope right inside the issue. Don't lose it! All you need to do is to insert your contribution, stamp, and mail.

So if you've been a regular once-a-year contributor; or if you have given occasionally; or if you've never contributed before, we ask for your support. We appreciate it greatly, and we thank you.

And one footnote before we close: funding is important, but your own thoughts and ideas are even more important. For us, the more neighborhood voices the better. So keep on sending your story ideas and other suggestions. And be a writer, anytime!

Many thanks again – and looking forward to being back at your doorstep with our next issue.



THE STORY OF SPOOKY WALK

By Carol Band (*Bartlett Avenue*)

As the sun sets on the last Saturday of October and darkness falls, the path around Hill's Pond at Menotomy Rocks Park is illuminated by jack-o'-lanterns, haunted by ghouls, and visited by hundreds of children who count Spooky Walk as one of their favorite neighborhood events.

Since 1994, Spooky Walk has re-

lied on the creative efforts of neighborhood parents and kids to pull off what has grown to be a full-blown celebration not only of Halloween, but also of community. Many who attend have been coming for years, but only a few know how the whole thing started.

In September of 1993, I moved from the end of Lombard Terrace (across from Spy Pond Field) to Bartlett Avenue. The old street was full of kids, and every Halloween, after trick or treating, we had a party in our garage with bobbing for apples and cider and donuts. Flip and Donna Sharff live in that house now, and have continued the annual garage party. As Halloween approached, I missed my old neighborhood and wondered if I could start a new tradition on Bartlett Ave. We didn't have a garage, so I invited a few kids from the school bus stop to a "Halloween Parade." Bring noisemakers and flashlights," I said. "Wear your costumes." I bought a box of Dunkin' munchkins and a gallon of cider, and invited Sharman Nathanson (Woodland Rd.) to help out.

The little Halloween procession was supposed to start at dusk. As the sun set, I began to wonder if anyone would show up. Sharman and I stood on the sidewalk and looked down the street. What we saw then was like the scene at the end of "Field of Dreams," where the car headlights are lined up as far as the eye can see. Okay, maybe I exaggerate. But there were probably 50 or 60 kids in Halloween costumes trooping up Bartlett Avenue with

flashlights. "Sharman," I said, "I think we need more donuts."

The next year, Denise Leone (Bartlett Ave.) and I decided that it would be safer and spookier to have the walk around the pond in the Menotomy Rocks Park. We decorated the park with stuff we had at our houses - paper skeletons, fake cobwebs, pumpkins, and homemade paper bag luminaria. Spooky Walk was born. Because so many of the neighborhood kids attended Arlington Children's Center, meeting at their playground for cider and donuts after Spooky Walk seemed logical.

Spooky Walk happens because people pitch in and make it their own. The cast of characters changes a little from year to year - but there are a few head haunt-chos that deserve recognition for years of unflagging devotion to the creation of a wicked good time. They are: Greg Blass (Brantwood Rd.) who each year spends the entire afternoon (with his daughter Julia) electrifying the park so that there can be power for lights and displays; and then he spends hours in the dark after Spooky Walk taking everything down again. "I'd like to call out Therese Hattemer and Biff Maier (Churchill Ave.) as well as Jim and Kim Britt (Jason St.) for letting us hook into their homes' electricity," Blass says. Greg and his daughters, Nina and Julia, also can be counted on to have one of the most dramatic and creative installations on the path.

Beate Becker (Bartlett Ave.) painted white paper lunch bags and turned them into illuminated works of art for some of the first years. Eventually, painting the bags became an annual project for the kids at ACC. Charlotte Pierce (Brantwood Rd.) is the current luminaria diva. Lighting hundreds of candles (nestled in kitty litter inside of paper bags) and keeping them lit in the wind and even the rain and snow isn't easy; but the ef-

fect of the glowing bags lining the pathway and circling the pond is magical. Meanwhile, Denise Leone (Bartlett Ave.) pulls the permit for the park (who knew you even needed one?) and she and her family create a creepy cemetery that is worthy of a movie set. Denise haunts Costco and Building 19 year-round looking for things to add to what is the grand finale of the Spooky Walk route.

Bruce Clifford (Pleasant View Rd.) has wowed the crowds (and scared kids and adults!) for years with his elaborate displays; last year's Captain Hook was dead on. Irwin Grossman's (Peabody Rd.) hilarious, deranged surgeon shtick has kids vying to be the victim of his malpractice, while Sue Sheffler (Kensington Rd.) originated the first Spooky Walk e-list and, with Clarissa Rowe (Brantwood Rd.), heads up a coven of crowd control witches. Spooky Walk's future is secure with teenagers Katherine Britt (Jason St.) and Tory Knobloch (Academy St.), who always cook up something creative and creepy.

Other memorable installations include: The Hopeman/Starks' (Monadnock Rd.) family giant spiderweb, the Leich family's (Chapman St.) scary shadow theater, the Baynard/Rothchild's (Brantwood Rd.) in-pond bride and haunted Quidditch match, the Wright's (Windermere Lane) creepy café, and the shrunken heads of Monica Bernstein and her son Sam (Norfolk Rd.), as well as the combined efforts of dozens of kids and adults who each year pitch in to create interactive displays, carve and contribute jack-o'-lanterns, and serve up cider and donuts. Thanks also to The Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park, Dunkin' Donuts, Johnnie's Foodmaster, and Arlington Children's Center, who have all been generous in their support of Spooky Walk.

If you'd like to be part of Spooky Walk, join the Yahoo Groups e-mail

list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/spookywalk2007/> and you'll be in the loop. This year's event is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, October 27, after dark.



SAVING ON PROPERTY INSURANCE: A NEIGHBORHOOD IDEA

By Andrew Fischer (*Lombard Road*)

My interest in property insurance was re-awakened last year when neighbors on Wellington Street asked me to help them install a handrail on their front stairs. The lack of a handrail had been cited as a code violation by an insurance representative who had inspected the house during a bidding process.

Amazingly, the annual premium for this owner-occupied two family (condos, actually) had gone up to \$3600 per year. Each of the owners said they would confirm this if requested. They had solicited prices from other companies, one of which bid \$2400 - contingent upon the building being brought up to code after an inspection.

In my informal surveys of Arlington property owners, I've not found any premiums nearly as high as \$3600. Two-family homes consistently cost about \$1000 per unit. Single families have a wider range, from about \$500 to \$1200.

Since there are about 2930 two-family homes in Arlington, about 7900 single-family homes, and 208 three-families, we are talking about a cash flow of perhaps over \$10 million dollars. It is amazing that this outflow of premium dollars is so immune to the scrutiny we apply to our tax dollars. After all, the insurance premium for most of us is compulsory; it is a kind of tax. Why aren't

we asking if there is a way to make this compulsory risk-sharing program more efficient, and capture some of this money to pay for local services?

My insurance agent suggested that there actually is a way to capture a small part of this cash flow, with almost no change in the existing system. Neighbors who wish to participate would change their deductible to \$5000, which would cost about \$300 less than a policy with a \$500 deductible. These neighbors would then pay the \$300 savings to a local entity, which would form a pool to insure any losses between \$500 and \$5000.

If 1000 homeowners participate, the resulting local pool will total about \$300,000 per year. Each year, there will probably be about 15 losses in the range of \$500 to \$5000, resulting in a total loss of perhaps \$75,000 at most. The savings for the first few years would accrue to build a reserve. After a few years of growth, the reserve could be drawn upon to help finance local prevention services.

It's interesting to think about this possibility, because such a local risk-sharing program could increase local awareness, as well as concerns about privacy. Would busybodies complain about... well, lack of handrails, for example? – although apparently we accept it when some outside insurance company requires a handrail on Wellington Street.

Some other positive outcomes could occur – for example, the current conflict around strict enforcement of leash laws could be more informed. A hard-to-accept statistic is that at least 15% of homeowner insurance costs are related to dogs. How has this risk played out in Arlington? When was a person last hurt by a dog? What have dogs cost the insurance companies in this town? Does anyone know?

I suspect that local communities have lost a local context in which to have such conversations, and the resulting void has been filled by emotionalism. Feelings run stronger, because no local facts are available to inform those feelings. This information is the domain of multiple insurance companies. For ex-

ample, do we know the number of losses filed in Arlington in 2005 for damage of over \$1000 caused by (A) lightning strikes?, (B) termites?, (C) furnace malfunctions?, or (D) dog bites?

While a localized plan to cover high deductibles would increase such local awareness, it has a basic flaw: the lack of the necessary cash reserves to pay \$5000 claims to more than 60 homeowners in the first year. (One thousand homeowners paid \$300 each, for a total of \$300,000. Sixty times \$5000 equals \$300,000.) What happens in the event of a hurricane? All plan members would have to sign a waiver acknowledging this risk, with a formal plan as to how to resolve over 60 claims in a single year. This risk is minimal, however, based on past experience: in 2003, Arlington's apartment buildings, commercial property, and some 11,000 houses produced only 180 losses over \$1000. The figure for 2005 was 154.

This information is from the file of reports of insurance claims for all losses over \$1000, which state law requires carriers to send to each municipality. In Arlington, these minimal, one-page statements of loss are kept on file in the Building Department. They are the basis of my earlier suggestion that 1000 homes will probably produce 15 claims, a guess that is as conservative as it is crude. They also provide the answers to the above questions about losses due to lightning strikes and so on in 2005: (A) 5, (B) 0, (C) 12, and (D) 0.

The cooperative program described here could save money, and create a source of funding (the accruing reserve) for local services. It requires no change in existing carriers or agents, and is quite doable without any technical, procedural revolution. What do you think?



LESSONS FROM MY CAT

By Louise Goldstein (*Shawnee Road*)

My friend Kirsten told me about the white kitten who had been hanging around the Dorchester halfway house where she was employed as a counselor.

I came to pick up the bedraggled creature. She had ear mites and fleas. She was sweet and tiny, full of vim and vigor. I named her Zuzu after the youngest child from "It's A Wonderful Life." Andre, my then two-year-old son, wanted her to be called Pearl. We compromised and called her Zuzupearl. The vet gave her a flea bath and all of the necessary inoculations and we were on our way.

That was eight years ago. Since that time, Andre has grown and matured. Clothing which fit him a month ago is questionable now. We have gone through so many pairs of sneakers in the last year that I have lost count. He has gone from Nintendo 64 to X Box to the Wii. He is in the 5th grade and a member of the safety patrol at school. Dave and I have gotten some gray hairs and my eyesight has deteriorated to the point where, without my glasses, I feel like Mr. Magoo.

Zuzu, who was once a fine mouser, has changed as well. Here at 16 Shawnee Road, there is wildlife literally in our backyard. Menotomy Rocks Park boasts a wide assortment of birds, mammals, and adolescents. Dave was home the night a few weeks ago when a mouse literally ran by Zuzu. She did not have her act together at all. Where previously mice trembled to be in the same zip code as my cat, she allowed that one to get away.

I had just come home from a hard day at work. (Librarians have it

rough, let me tell you). I opened the door to see a mouse gaily running down the stairs, looking as carefree as the children who play in our fine neighborhood. My cat was in Andre's bedroom, staring hard at a group of action figures who had surrounded the mouse when it first emerged.

"Zuzu, get the mouse," I said.

"Zuzu, the mouse has gone downstairs," said Dave.

My feline fighter just sat there. She seemed to be a mini version of myself. She acted as though she was still on top of her game. Like me, she did not want to admit to the passing of time, the dimming of clear sight, the ongoing changes that are part of the ebb and flow of existence. Unlike me, she does not color her hair nor does she dabble in corrective lenses. Still, in her mind, she is just as capable and quick as she ever was before.

I think that we can learn a thing or two from our cats. Denial is not always such a bad thing, after all.



NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING MARKET

By Judy Weinberg (*Venner Road*)

The stock market, the real estate market, the mortgage business – all financial sectors are linked to some degree. The financial picture lately seems so wildly erratic it's difficult to know what to believe. I'm far from an economist, but I'm on the front line of the local housing market, and I still maintain – as I've been doing in this column for quite a few issues now – that our local real estate market is healthy.

The chart at the end of this article illustrates sales in our neighborhood in the past 3½ months. There was a good amount

of activity, and prices have held steady. The August report of the Massachusetts Association of Realtors (MAR) notes that the number of single-family homes sold in August was up 6.6% compared to the same time last year, with median sales prices up slightly. A similar 6% increase was recorded for July.

Arlington has had a slight drop in home prices; for single-family home sales, the year-to-date volume has been the same in 2007 (235 homes) as in 2006 (238), but the average price has decreased 4%, to \$514,777.

So where's the doom and gloom we keep hearing about? Well, the mortgage problem is real, and it is local. The cover story of the 9/30/07 *New York Times* Sunday Business section was entitled "Can These Mortgages Be Saved?" It profiled three families in foreclosure, one in East Arlington. What caused this crisis? As home values skyrocketed, banks were more than happy to provide loans. Borrowers with either less-than-stellar credit, or incomes not in line with the expensive homes they desired, were given creative loans such as interest-only or adjustable-rates. Homeowners were offered refinancing based on higher house values. As monthly payments increased, more homeowners became unable to make their commitments. Because this was happening in increasingly larger numbers, mortgage companies became less forgiving to borrowers in arrears, and more cautious in granting new loans. This mushroomed to the problems we're seeing today.

But is our financial future murky and in peril? Hardly. The *Boston Globe* business headline on October 2 reads "Dow sets record high to start 4th quarter, Bank stocks lead rally as investors look ahead." In other words, stay tuned.

Local Sales of Note

The American Bed and Breakfast at 87 Pleasant Street, also known as the Governor Brackett House, officially closed its doors when it changed hands in August, selling for \$1,295,000. The new owners plan to create a residence for people with mental disabilities.

The following chart shows all real estate sales in our **Newsletter** neighborhood between June 25 and October 2, 2007:

Single-family homes

48 Arlmont Street	\$570,000
109 Bartlett Avenue	\$754,000
22 Bellevue Road	\$700,000
11 Devereaux Street	\$801,700
20 High Haith Road	\$502,000
19 Iroquois Road	\$452,000
196 Jason Street	\$710,000
31 Morton Road	\$731,500
16 Pelham Terrace	\$1,065,000
218 Pleasant Street	\$780,000
31 Wall Street	\$400,000

Condominiums

14 Churchill Ave., #1	\$400,000
14 Churchill Ave., #2	\$540,000
57 Churchill Ave., #1	\$381,000
81 Jason Street	\$575,000
125 Pleasant St., #407	\$235,000
128 Pleasant St., #403	\$239,900
28 Wildwood Ave., #1	\$372,000
28 Wildwood Ave., #2	\$450,000

Multi-Families

3-5 Plymouth Street	\$588,000
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Business Use

42 Pleasant St., Unit A	\$525,000
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Backing up Judy's figures, you may have seen the Boston Globe real estate article on October 10, which headlines "Arlington is hottest place in Eastern Mass."

YEA, TEAM!

This issue of the **Neighborhood Newsletter** was brought to you by our **Newsletter** team: (in alphabetical order)

Bill Berkowitz	Pelham Terrace
Joan Black	Bartlett Avenue
Colin Campbell	Morton Road
Mary Cummings	Jason Street
Marianne Curren	Hillsdale Road
Steve Johnson	Jason Street
and Doina Iliescu	
Erin Manna	Bartlett Avenue
Jane Spickett	Gray Street
Cindy Starks	Monadnock Rd.
Judy Weinberg	Venner Road
Chris & Donna Wren	Hillsdale Road

Come join us! We warmly welcome your participation.



NEIGHBOR RELATIONSHIPS

By Bill Berkowitz (Pelham Terrace)

In a recent **Newsletter**, we wrote about neighborhood problems and concerns, based upon interview and survey reports from over 300 neighbors in a random-sample study of life here in our neighborhood. This article continues that discussion, but here with a special focus on problems and concerns involving neighbors, and neighbor relations more generally, based on reports from the same study sample. There are many more findings to describe; we hope to have the chance to do so in future issues.

If we speak of problems and concerns involving neighbors, we must begin with a major qualification and clarification: Neighbor problems in our neighborhood are far more the exception than the rule. The most compelling truth is that the great majority of us like our neighbors, value our neighbors, and care about our neighbors; that's by far the dominant sentiment. And there are plenty of convincing data to support it.

So that particular sky is almost entirely sunny. But occasionally a cloud does roll by, and if we are telling the whole story, it's important to take that cloud into account. With that as context, we can take a look at some of the concerns that neighbors do express about other neighbors, as recounted from interviews and surveys described above. The sample quotes here are verbatim.

One starting point is that if there are issues between neighbors, we're not likely to know about them. Everyone has dirty laundry, but few will air it out. So when it comes to neighbor conflicts and disputes, most of them stay hidden; they'll never see the light of day.

"If there are problems in the neighborhood, I don't know about them."

"I have not seen any conflicts. If there are conflicts, I'm not privy to them. I haven't seen any problems with children. I haven't heard any screaming or yelling. I haven't heard one neighbor be mad at another neighbor."

Of course, though, conflicts do occur. How could they not? But when they do, most of them fall into the category of irritations, more or less minor annoyances, some of which may be inevitable when people live side by side. Like mosquito bites, they often go away, untreated. Or one of the neighbors moves.

That said, those irritations may be more deeply felt than is at first apparent. Ponds and parks and streets and even taxes may affect us, but immediate neighbors who are annoying or troublesome can get under your skin more than inanimate objects.

"One neighbor is a lingering irritation."

"I'd love for my neighbor to clean up his trash. And he knows it."

"We've had an issue in the past with a difficult neighbor who does not like our apartment compound in their neighborhood."

"The people next door used to have drunken pool parties. They had motorcycles, and three big dogs. I don't think they were mean-spirited, but it was a pain in the ass. They moved out and a new family moved in. A big difference."

...And there are, though quite infrequently, other reports of various unsavory activities not always fit for a family newsletter.

There are also occasional comments about social behavior nearby where the source probably doesn't originate with our own neighborhood:

"As a woman, I like to take walks after work in the summer, and once or twice I have had 'cat calls' out on Pleasant Street."

"A lot of shady people are coming into this town because there are troubled teen homes and other types of homeless people coming in who don't live here."

Also occasionally, but apparently not very often, a neighbor seems too nosy. Or there's informal and unwanted neighbor pressure to live up to a certain

standard:

"Living in a condo has not been easy with one or two particular neighbors. They constantly want to know what we are doing to our renovations. It is none of their business what we do to our property."

"There's a lot of neighbor pressure to conform to suburban appearances: you have to rake your leaves, cut your grass, trim your bushes. Neighbors seem to feel free to comment and criticize!"

Sometimes the problem is seen as neighbors not being friendly or welcoming – even though they might still be nosy.

"Neighbors are very nosy about everybody else's business, but not particularly friendly."

"Whether for lack of interest or effort on the part of longtime residents, or a different idea of community for newer residents – it seems that new residents are neither welcomed nor make the effort to be part of the community."

But when there are neighbor conflicts, potential or real, most of them seem to be handled by cool heads and calm tempers. We've acquired a reasonable amount of social maturity about these things, and we know how to use it.

"People go out of their way to be careful with others, and to avoid problems."

"We are careful with each other's feelings. There are social boundary lines that we would not cross."

"No one here is a jerk. No one is not taking care of their property. No one is yelling and screaming."

And that social maturity is often accompanied by effective problem-solving skills:

"There was a barking dog problem. But we discussed it in a cordial manner and they took care of it by having a service come take the dogs away for a run each day."

"Even in winter, when people shovel out their cars, in some neighborhoods people put down barrels. Here people don't. Nobody is territorial about it. They figure there's enough space for everyone."

To summarize so far, most concerns

about neighbors are both temperate and tempered. Rarely do things boil over. It's very unusual that you would see, or even hear about, an ongoing, overtly angry, Hatfield-and-McCoy style feud. Once in a blue moon, I have heard of legal threats or actions, though I usually don't know the details of these, and don't particularly care to.

Actually, though, a full account of neighbor relations would have to include a very different type of concern, which is that some of us want more connection with their neighbors rather than less. The "problem" for them is not the wrong kind of contact, or too much contact, but rather too little. They're looking for closeness. They want to know their neighbors better.

"It seems that fewer people on my block are just 'hanging out' in summer or weekends. We are all so busy!"

"I'd like a little more interaction with some people. But I'm not sure how to go about it. Also, my own schedule has gotten so full, it's hard to know how to schedule anything."

"I would like to have a feeling that neighbors outside my building look out for each other and take pride in the neighborhood as a group."

"I would like to have more places to connect for people my age. But I don't know how to connect with them. There should be places that facilitate that type of gathering. I was in [the former] Carberry's this morning to pay my bills. I'll go there because I live alone and could go the whole weekend without seeing anyone."

What prevents those connections from taking place? Multiple causes, probably. One of them, as noted by the neighbors above, is simple busyness, or perceived busyness, and that is an article of its own.

Another cause may be simple physical barriers, such as the ordinary fence:

"Every house has a fence around their property. It's interesting. When I lived in Cambridge, I had the image of strolling from one back yard to the other, with all that connected space. Though we put up a fence ourselves – for the safety of our daughter, we said." ["Would you prefer not having fences?"] "I think so. It's very exclusionary. It doesn't

seem as welcoming, with the backyards unconnected. There are no kids running through the back yards. Or dogs. Perhaps that has to do with people not seeing their neighbors."

And a third cause may be the changing nature of the neighborhood, at least according to some. What do you think of this neighbor's point of view?

"It's changing. It's become incredibly expensive. People buying here would need a lot of money, and they would want more luxury. Their home represents private pleasures. The newcomers tend to be professional hard-working people, who are not around a lot. When they are around, they want to enjoy extravagances. And they don't want to mix too much, and would rather not know too much about everyone. They're not unpleasant. There's basic civility. But we used to feel that the children were everyone's children."

So it's become more affluent, which means it's become less diverse. Along with the affluence perhaps comes a greater need for privacy. Or a greater desire for it. The focus is elsewhere, more on stuff, rather than on who's living next door."

Money is seen here as a social insulator. Maybe it is. Affluence and diversity are big topics – and for some, sensitive, elephant-in-the-room type topics – about which neighbors have multiple, mixed, and complex feelings. Perhaps we'll get a chance to explore these in future **Newsletter** issues.



PICTURE THE HOOD

Congratulations to Henry Olds who won our neighborhood photo contest. Check out Henry's delightful view of the neighborhood on our website www.jhitesnews.org.

Chris Wren (Hillsdale Road) has found one way we can share neighborhood photos. He posted some photos with the tag 'jasonheights' on Flickr.com. You can find the photos at www.flickr.com/photos/tags/jasonheights and www.flickr.com/photos/tags/arlingtonma. We also have a link to these sites on our own website at <http://www.jhitesnews.org>.

Got any photos to share?



A VILLAGE IN THE 'HOOD?

By Miriam Levine (*Academy Street*)

Some neighbors may have seen the recent *New York Times* article (August 14, 2007), "A Grass-Roots Effort to Grow Old at Home," which reports that more than 100 resident-governed communities of seasoned citizens have been founded in the United States as an alternative to assisted living facilities. ("Seasoned" = neighbors pushing 70 or better, and there are more than a few here.)

How do these communities, sometimes called "villages," work? Residents remaining in their homes organize these village communities. They form a not-for-profit corporation and decide what services they need to help them age at home. They pay a reasonable fee to have these services on hand, then put them in place when needed. There's a working 400-member model for this village concept nearby on Beacon Hill; it could work here too.

If you are interested in forming a study group to look into the feasibility of founding a village in our neighborhood, please contact me: miriamlevine@comcast.net (781-646-2618). You may also access the *New York Times* article at www.nytimes.com/2007/08/14 aging.

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.



CREATING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR OTTOSON STUDENTS

By Cindy Starks (*Monadnock Road*)

When my daughter graduated from 5th grade, I started searching around for after-school options for her for the following year. To my dismay, I found nothing. Both the programs at Arlington Boys and Girls Club and Arlington Children's Center ended at 5th grade. And while the Ottoson had what they call an AM/PM program, I found it lacking in interesting activities for my daughter and unreliable in its availability.

So instead, I joined with other parents to ensure that our children could go to a place where someone would be home; we switched off days when we took each other's kids. While this worked, it took a lot of effort, and it floored me that there was nothing organized that existed after school for middle school students.

With changing families, I thought, our community must change as well. More and more families have every adult in the family working; they need a safe place for their children during the after-school hours of 2:30-6:30. But most importantly, that does not stop once a student enters 6th grade. So many children today grew up with daycare, that it is not normal for them to go home to an empty house. It can be depressing – or worse, it can lead to many risky behaviors.

The middle years are some of the toughest school years for children. Between hormones, social interactions, and the seriousness of the schoolwork, they don't also need to be taking care of themselves after school. Instead, if they have a safe, fun, enriching place to go then we have one more time to reach them and help them.

While all of this was swimming in my head, in the summer of 2006 my friend Kim Holt called me and told me that several parents in the Jason Heights

neighborhood who wanted something more organized and reliable for after school care had approached her; she wanted us to start a program together. It took me a few weeks, but in the end I quit my job and took her up on the offer. The Arlington Enrichment Collaborative was born.

Kim had been working with many students in the Jason Heights neighborhood (her own neighborhood as well) as a daycare provider and organizer of activities for students, so she was a natural. Undeterred by piles of required paperwork, inspections, and requirements, Kim worked tirelessly all summer creating Arlington's first after-school program specifically for middle school students. We both wanted to create an atmosphere akin to a teen center where students could hang out with friends, do homework, try out some enrichment activities, and most importantly be safe. We also hoped that they would make friends and maybe learn something new, or find a new passion that they didn't know existed.

I am so proud of what we have created because I really do believe that middle school is the age that we have to reach out to our children. As much as they push us away, we need to pull them close and reassure them that they are still wonderful. We need to help guide them to find their passion and their voice. It is long and bumpy road, but with a little help they can all make it. As we head into our second year of business, the Arlington Enrichment Collaborative is proud to serve the families of Arlington and their middle school students.

For more information please visit www.arlingtonenrichment.org, call us at 781-643-4794, or email us at info@arlingtonenrichment.org.



ASK YOUR TOWN OFFICIAL

In this column, we begin a series of Questions and Answers with local officials on topics of neighborhood interest. To start things off, here's a question about the Arlington Schools we asked of Sue Sheffler, a School Committee member and neighbor who lives on Kensington Road.

Q: How has enrollment in the Arlington Public Schools changed in the last year?

A: (Sue) We will not have "official" totals until October (as is true every year), but here are the basics: We have increased enrollment at the elementary, middle school, **and** high school levels this year. There is variation in the number of students who enter, for example, 2nd grade every year. The cohort that is now in 1st grade is especially large (over 400 students), and that group was also an especially large Kindergarten class. The cohort that is just entering their sophomore year happens to be a relatively small group – about 255 students – and that has changed little over the years.

Grades K-5, as a whole, have added a few students at every level since last year. The Ottoson has added about 50 students this fall, and the High School has added about 25 students. As stated, these are preliminary numbers: a full report will be available in November.

(Thanks to Sue, and to Cindy Starks for the question and write-up.)

IT'S A FACT ...!

Many highly accomplished people live in our neighborhood, and among them is a distinguished game inventor. That's Rick Onanian of Irving Street, whose game Facts in Five has been a long-time best seller. Facts in Five, "the original game of knowledge," was an early forerunner of Trivial Pursuit; it's now been revised and updated by Rick and colleagues, and newly marketed by University Games (www.universitygames.com).

Check it out for a quiet night of recreation, especially when the weather turns colder. Congratulations, Rick!



We've run some stories about neighborhood parties and celebrations in past issues. Add to this Spooky Walk, featured on Page 1. This fall several other streets held neighborhood events; here are two of them.

Do you have a story, tradition, celebration, or even recipe related to your neighborhood? We'd like to hear from you. Your ideas and contributions are both desired and needed. What's been happening in your 'hood?

DANCING ON DEVEREAUX

By Cindy Starks (*Monadnock Road*)

While many streets in our neighborhood have block parties, those who live on and around Devereaux Street have an interesting twist to theirs. In addition to a mouth-watering array of food and wine brought to share, they also hire a group (Dudley and Jacqueline Laufman) who plays and calls out contra dances. One Sunday in September, young and old alike were swinging their partners, do-se-doing, and sashaying up and down the street. It is certainly wonderful to meet a neighbor over food and wine, but it's quite another thing to find yourself as partners in a large contra line dance!

Started as a response to 9/11, and wanting to promote community and getting to know your neighbors, Judi Berman of Devereaux Street started the yearly gathering back in the spring of 2002. With neighborhood houses turning over and new families moving in, Judi realized that many people didn't even know who they were living next to and she wanted to remedy that. Since then, the gathering has moved to Town Day weekend in the fall. The excitement and warmth of the event are as crisp as the early fall air.

Around 4:15 the doors to the houses start opening, and tables, chairs,

and tablecloths emerge in the middle of the street. Slowly more people start to appear carrying delicious dishes from appetizers to desserts; by 5 o'clock the party is in full swing, with the players having arrived and starting to warm up their instruments. Over a glass of wine you reconnect and find out what your neighbors have been up to all summer. Good books read, interesting places visited, and updates to lives are shared and enjoyed. Before you know it, the band strikes up the call for dancers and we are swept up in the toe-tapping beat. Following the callers' instructions as we go, we change partners and join hands with many who up until now were faces we may not have even recognized. The energy is intoxicating; in a flash, the first 45 minutes of dancing is done and the band takes a break.

Catching our breaths, more food and wine are consumed and the neighborhood buzzes. Kids ride bikes up and down the street – each year some different kid activity seems to have been organized. We comment on how much the children have grown, the renovations and changes to houses, and we ask about our neighbors. It is a great evening. As the party winds down and we all wander back to our own homes, I can't help but feel that the world seems like such a warmer place when you share a meal and a dance with your neighbors.



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...AND A FINE TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

By Judy Weinberg (*Venner Road*)

On the beautiful sunny afternoon of Sunday September 9th, Venner Road was closed to vehicle traffic to accommodate our first block party in years. The unseasonable warmth of the previous day, making Town Day one of the hottest in memory, happily dissipated to make for perfect weather. Everyone on Brunswick, Hillsdale, Pleasant View, Stony Brook, and Venner Roads, and portions of Spring and Pleasant Streets, was invited to bring their favorite dish and spend a few hours relaxing with their neighbors.

Dozens of families attended, and it was wonderful to reconnect with old friends. There are also quite a few families that have recently moved into the neighborhood. It was a great way for everyone to meet each other.

Although no one was assigned a specific dish, it somehow worked out that there was a complete array of appetizers, main dishes, salads, side dishes, and – perhaps most importantly – desserts. Everyone was impressed with the quality and variety of the food; there were very few leftovers.

The organizing was spearheaded by Brunswick Road resident Dolores Schueler, who was ably assisted by Marianne Curren, Jo Hartel, Linda Katz, Chenoweth Moffatt, Lissa Natkin, Judy Weinberg, and Donna Wren. All who attended agreed it was a great event, and it just reaffirmed in everyone's minds why we love living here!

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!