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WMAN NEWS

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“PARTNERS IN PROGRESS”

Photo: Alexandra Morigi



Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Jarma J. Frisby

At its annual meeting in June, West Mt. Airy Neighbors honored six “Partners in Progress,” neighborhood residents and institutions whose work strengthens Mt. Airy.

Also, Mayor Nutter presented a ceremonial citation to Jarma J. Frisby upon her retirement as President of WMAN. At four years, Frisby is WMAN’s longest serving president.

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In the March issue of the WMAN News, we began a three part series on neighborhood leaders who have made a real difference in our community. This is the final article of that series.

THREE CAUSES, THREE LEADERS: PART III Ronda Throne-Murray and the Friends of Ned Wolf Park

At the corner of McCallum and West Ellet Streets, Ned Wolf Park had become a dangerous eyesore. Poor illumination and high tree growth kept light out of the park. Drug users and teenaged drinkers moved in. Ronda Throne-Murray would drive by and notice the overgrowth hiding the park’s patio.

The park was named after Ned Wolf, who died from cancer in 1977 at age 39. In 1969, Wolf founded The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights under Law (now the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia). He was president of WMAN from 1971-1973, and opposed “white-flight” from Mt. Airy.

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Photo: Alexandra Morigi

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2010

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Photo: Nancy Peter



In 1959, people organized to inoculate our neighborhood against a disease that was spreading throughout the city. The disease was discrimination in the real estate market, and its symptoms included realtors spreading unfounded fears among white homeowners that African Americans moving in would destroy the neighborhood and home values, and that any white homeowners remaining would be isolated from anyone like themselves.

The results of the effort were both profound and subtle. Profound, because the lack of diversity in many areas of Philadelphia and other cities is a stark contrast to our neighborhood. Subtle, because it is easy to live in West Mt. Airy today and assume it all just happened this way: that diversity just happened to exist. In fact, the diversity and tolerance we enjoy only happened because of the concerted efforts of a well-organized, hard working group of neighbors.

In 1959, residents formed a new community organization, West Mt. Airy Neighbors, with the mission to create and sustain a racially integrated community. Religious leaders and other individuals went door-to-door to welcome new neighbors of all backgrounds and to convince long-time neighbors not to abandon the neighborhood. While unfortunately many realtors engaged in block busting, some like Shirley Melvin and Doris Polsky stood up to promote racial integration (see article about Shirley Melvin on p. 5).

It is easy to live in our neighborhood and forget that everyone does not live in such a welcoming environment. In June, I went to a nearby suburb with former WMAN President Marc Stier, current Executive Vice President Leslie Winder and a handful of others to stand in unity with people from that community to speak out against an incident of discrimination at a private swim club. In July, a renowned African American Harvard professor was arrested at his own home by police responding to a report of suspicious activity. It is an unfortunate truth that discrimination – racial and other – still exists in our society, and it is our responsibility to continue to name this disease when we see it, and to continue to fight against discrimination whenever it raises its head.

After 50 years, WMAN's role has grown to include zoning, streetscapes, and other quality of life issues, but our ongoing mission of preserving and enhancing the quality of life in our richly diverse urban neighborhood includes the ongoing fight against discrimination in all its forms.

Kevin A. Peter
President



Photo courtesy of Denise Chapline

Shirley Blumberg Melvin, a founder of West Mt. Airy Neighbors and a community activist whose real estate firm was instrumental in helping Mt. Airy become the diverse neighborhood it is today, died on July 21 at the age of 84. Allens Lane Art Center is another mainstay of the community Shirley helped found. Contributions in Shirley's name are being accepted by the Allens Lane Art Center, 601 W. Allens Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19119. For an appreciation of Shirley Melvin's life, see page 5.

SUPPORT WMAN THROUGH UNITED WAY

West Mt. Airy Neighbors is a designee of United Way Funds. When the United Way Campaign rolls around, please consider donating through the United Way Donor Option Program at your place of employment. **WMAN's United Way number is 00707.**



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“PARTNERS IN PROGRESS”

At its annual meeting last June, West Mt. Airy Neighbors honored six “Partners in Progress,” neighborhood residents and institutions whose work strengthens Mt. Airy. Read more about the achievements of those honored below.



Photo: Alexandra Morigi

L to R: Jarma J. Frisby, WMAN President; Dan Winterstein, Mt. Airy Baseball; The Rev. Cheryl Pyrch, Summit Presbyterian Church; Mayor Michael A. Nutter; Boris Dolin, Pomona Cherokee Civic Council and volunteers of the Gardens at Holman Field; Doris Kessler (on behalf of Lincoln Drive/Allens Lane Revitalization Team); and Officer Synell Hall, 14th Police District, not pictured, Mary Greenway.

Mt. Airy Baseball: Getting thousands of children involved with baseball, and their parents involved with coaching, has long been the cause of Mt. Airy Baseball. As WMAN celebrates its 50th Anniversary, it salutes Mt. Airy Baseball for being a champion of the racially integrated ideal which motivated WMAN’s founders. Mt. Airy Baseball reflects our community at its best. **Dan Winterstein**, long-time Commissioner, accepted the award as a Partner in Progress.

Summit Presbyterian Church: One hundred and twenty-five years ago, Summit Presbyterian Church was founded and quickly became a mainstay of the Mt. Airy community. Today, its congregation is proudly integrated, and its building is a community center for religious services, day care and community meetings. **The Rev. Cheryl Pyrch**, Pastor, accepted the Partners in Progress award.

Pomona Cherokee Civic Council and volunteers of The Gardens at Holman Field: A group of volunteers has come together to craft a community garden in this under-utilized park located on Cherokee Street, between Washington Lane and Pomona Street. Two leaders, **Joyce Collins** and **Boris Dolin**, have been instrumental in creating this green and growing spot. We salute their efforts and look forward to the further development of this project.

Lincoln Drive/Allens Lane Revitalization Team: During the last year, a coalition of volunteers and Fairmount Park staff, under the auspices of WMAN’s Streetscapes Committee chaired by Doris Kessler, worked diligently and effectively to replace a broken fence and trim back overgrown vegetation at the intersection of Lincoln Drive and Allens

Lane. The result is an attractive gateway benefiting the whole community. We honor all who have helped, especially **Patricia Crossan**, Park District Manager, and **Gerry White**, District Supervisor, Wissahickon District, Fairmount Park Commission; **Sarah Low**, Restoration Specialist, Environment, Stewardship, & Education Division, Fairmount Park Commission; **Ed Stainton**, Chair, Structures and Trails Maintenance Subcommittee, Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW); **David Dannenberg**, FOW Board Member; and neighbor volunteer leaders **Sharon Corbin** and **Ed Spector**, **Marty** and **Bill Hudson**, **Damaris South**, **Sue Davis** and **Ruth Neifeld**.

Officer Synell Hall, Crime Prevention Officer, 14th District Police: Officer Hall works with residents throughout the 14th District, providing useful crime prevention tips and explaining how they can make their homes less attractive and vulnerable to burglars. Her “house calls” are both helpful and fun.

Mary Greenway: Mary’s leadership in bringing the problems of parking for residents in and around the commercial district in Mt. Airy has resulted in new energy for finding permanent parking solutions. With Mary’s encouragement, WMAN took the lead in dedicating a special meeting of its Quality of Life Committee to this issue, in concert with East Mt. Airy Neighbors, the Mt. Airy Business Association, and the Mt. Airy Business Improvement District. Mary now sits on the Business Improvement District’s Parking Committee, lending the essential voice of near neighbors to that group.

SHIRLEY MELVIN: AN APPRECIATION

Courtesy of Denise Chapline

On Tuesday, July 21, 2009, Shirley Melvin died peacefully in her home at the age of 84. For more than eight decades, this native Philadelphian shared her devotion, convictions, and unflagging energy with family, friends, and the community she loved.

The door to Shirley's home was a wonderfully inclusive revolving door, where family members were joined by people of all races, identities, and backgrounds.

Over the years, anyone needing assistance of any kind was met at that door by Shirley's open heart and helping hands. With her love, she taught people to embrace each other as Family. She saw everyone's strength and potential, encouraging them to use their gifts to make a contribution to the world.

She survived the devastating loss of her first daughter, Janet, to cancer and continued to embrace life with a full heart. Janet's partner and son became valued members of her family. Her "adopted" kids brought precious grandchildren into her life, with whom she shared a deep love and commitment.

Shirley was born October 16, 1924, arriving 30 minutes after her "big" sister and identical twin, Doris. Born to Esther and Jack Blumberg, Shirley, Doris, and Aaron, grew up in Gray's Ferry, where they were one of a few Jewish families in the neighborhood.

Shirley's father, Jack Blumberg, owned a real estate company, where he helped working-class families purchase their own homes. Her mother, Esther, worked to get Jews out of Europe during WWII, opening the Blumberg home to refugee children. Jack and Esther's qualities of fair play, hard work, and community activism made indelible impressions on their children.

In 1942, while still teenagers, Shirley and Doris were recruited directly out of Girls' High to work as mathematicians for the US Army. They worked six days a week for the next three years to help the US win WWII. When the war ended, Shirley married Tom Melvin and assisted at his photography studio. She was then recruited by the Franklin Institute to work as a mathematician to help develop a stabilizer for commercial aircrafts. Shirley was also part of the team that developed ENIAC, the first computer.

She had three daughters, Janet, Hedy, and Nini, and Doris had five children. They raised their children as one family.

During the years they were raising their families in the neighborhood of West Mt. Airy, both Shirley and Doris became community activists, helping to found West Mt. Airy Neighbors and the Allens Lane Arts Center.

By the early 1960s, the unethical real estate technique of blockbusting threatened to disrupt the inclusive and welcoming environment the twins valued in their community. Spurred on by personal conviction, in 1965 Shirley joined her sister Doris in forming Twin Realty of Germantown. This woman-owned, woman-run real estate company was created to gently integrate the Mt. Airy/Germantown areas of Philadelphia. For nearly 30 years they worked side by side as socially responsible agents, advocating racial harmony and neighborhood integration. Through their work, this neighborhood became the first stable, integrated neighborhood in the country.

While Doris retired in 1991, Shirley continued to work in real estate, finally retiring last year at the age of 83. Because of their business activities and their other community efforts, the twins have received many commendations for their civic work.

Shirley Melvin is survived by her daughters Hedy and Nini; her twin sister, Doris; many nieces, nephews, "adopted" children, and grandchildren; and scores of beloved friends.



L to R: Doris Polsky with Shirley Melvin

THREE CAUSES, THREE LEADERS: PART III Ronda Throne-Murray and the Friends of Ned Wolf Park

Ned Wolf Park was originally dedicated in 1979 and Throne-Murray was a driving force behind its clean-up and rededication in October 2008.

Two muggings on Throne-Murray's block brought much-needed attention to the park. In November 2006, a small group met to discuss the park. Included were Throne-Murray and WMAN's Executive Director, Laura Siena, who offered to have WMAN serve as the group's fiduciary. The Friends of Ned Wolf Park is a subcommittee of WMAN's Quality of Life Committee. As the group's fiscal agent, WMAN accepts donations and uses them to reimburse for expenses. Throne-Murray says that "having WMAN as a partner has been very important."



Photo: Laura Morris Siena

Ronda Throne-Murray and Bruce Murray

Throne-Murray started networking.

Roughly ten people attended the first open forum. The attendees were interested in starting a garden club and working on the park. Throne-Murray developed a list of sixteen things she wanted to accomplish in the park. Some were daunting tasks, such as rebuilding a wooden retaining wall.

To gain interest, Bruce Murray (Ronda's husband) and Throne-Murray wrote an article in *The Shuttle*, published by the Weaver's Way Co-op. "It was about finding people with similar interests and making them partners," explains Throne-Murray.

In January 2007, Throne-Murray contacted the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Philadelphia Green, which gave Throne-Murray a start-up loan, shared tools, gave advice, and connected Throne-Murray to the City's Department of Recreation, the park's owner. Additional supplies were provided by the Department of Recreation.

Throne-Murray recognized that "When you don't have the skills, it's time to do public asking for what you need." She found many skilled volunteers in the neighborhood, and matched their skills and interests with the park's needs. Throne-Murray's husband is a very handy former contractor. Other volunteers arranged for park lighting, donated garage space to store supplies, took tree tending classes, helped build the brick patio, rebuilt the wooden retaining wall, organized yard work that was raffled off at the Mt. Airy Village Fair, and shared their knowledge of planting and gardening. During a big planting day, Ned Wolf's family pitched in and planted around the Ned Wolf Park sign. Throne-Murray knew the park was on the Town Watch patrol route, and asked them to check in. Are you seeing a pattern?

Throne-Murray attended community meetings and events such as Mt. Airy Day and the Mt. Airy Village Fair. She created a flier asking for donations of funds or plants, or



Photo: Laura Morris Siena

Volunteers at the 2009 Spring Into Your Park event at Ned Wolf Park

volunteering at a work day. Fliers were delivered door-to-door, especially to those whose yards had nice gardens. A plant sale was held. A Home-Depot manager arranged for a gift card to purchase park supplies, and has even sent over a truck, tools and the help of four employees.

Prior to their first work day (rototilling, pick axing and digging out trees), Throne-Murray asked Weaver's Way General Manager, Glenn Bergman, to donate food. He did, and a neighbor who couldn't help with the heavy work made sandwiches.

Throne-Murray says "If you don't believe in your cause, if it doesn't drive you to get to your goals, then you're going to wind up letting it go." There were times that she wanted to give up, but didn't want to let Wolf down. "This fellow was a remarkable fellow," she explains and he "deserved having people know who he was and what he did."

Throne-Murray has dedicated at least 20 hours per week to Ned Wolf Park. Philadelphia Green has said that she has accomplished five years of work in two years. This year she hopes to accomplish the final 2 of her original 16 goals: installing a commemorative sign about Ned Wolf and erecting a small building to house tools. By her own admission, Throne-Murray was "a little overzealous", and recommends a more comfortable pace. She intends to take her own advice at the end of this year, when she will hand the reins over to other capable volunteers, knowing the park is in the "best shape it has been in in thirty years."

Ned Wolf Park before: "neglected, full of debris, in need of a tetanus shot"

Ned Wolf Park after: "a well-lit, beautiful, restful place to see some unusual plants"

To volunteer with the Friends of Ned Wolf Park contact either Syd Carpenter at scarpn@aol.com, or Mike McCleary at mrmcsg@aol.com. Donations are welcome and can be sent to WMAN at 6703 Germantown Avenue, Suite 200, Philadelphia, PA 19119. Please include "Ned Wolf Park" in memo section.

WMAN MEMBERSHIP ELECTS NEW BOARD MEMBERS

At its Annual Meeting in June, WMAN's membership elected five new Board members to three year terms:



Valerie I. Harrison, a life-long resident of Mt. Airy, is a board member of A Better Chance, the YWCA of Philadelphia, Enon-Coulter Community Development Corporation, and Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church. She also served on the executive committee of The Barristers' Association of Philadelphia and volunteers with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and MANNA. Valerie is the co-author and co-editor of *Color Him Father: Stories of Love & Rediscovery of Black Men*, a collection of short stories published in 2006. In her professional life, she is an attorney on staff at a local university.



Steve Hastie has enjoyed living in Mt. Airy for 20 years – running with his dog in the woods, playing music at the Allen Lane coffee shop, grazing on wine and cheese on Mt. Airy First Fridays, and meeting friends at McMenamins'. For several years, he has coordinated the entertainment at Mt. Airy Day. A consultant to governments and utility companies on energy efficiency and renewable energy, he has used his expertise to create resources providing information about saving energy and reducing energy bills. Steve looks forward to working on WMAN initiatives that will maintain and enhance the qualities that make West Mt. Airy such a special place.



Brian Hester has been actively involved with West Mt. Airy Neighbors' Zoning Committee and serves for several years as president of the Duval Improvement Association, which covers the area around Duval and Greene Streets. He has helped revitalize that organization by creating a newsletter, organizing several clean ups, promoting Town Watch, organizing an annual yard sale, and working closely with elected officials on a range of issues including problem properties. He has also served as part of the coalition working with the developers of the Nugent and Presser Homes. In his "free time" Brian is vice president of an event planning firm.



Tom Hutt is a facilities project manager at a local university and has lived in West Mt. Airy for over ten years. His wife, Cathy, is a music teacher and musician, and his two children both have attended C. W. Henry School. In 2003 Tom was a candidate for 8th District City Council and has since volunteered on several political campaigns. He has also volunteered with the C. W. Henry School, Friends of Carpenter's Woods, and Carpenter's Woods Town Watch. Other local interests include architecture/housing (he was once a realtor) and Mt. Airy Baseball (he cheers loudly for the Mt. Airy Stars, especially the 3rd baseman).



Sue Schrand has been a resident of Mt. Airy since 1997. She grew up in the Midwest, and she and her husband, Tom, relocated to the Philadelphia area in 1995. Their two daughters attend C. W. Henry School, where Sue has served on the Home & School Board for the past three years. Professionally, Sue is a family nurse practitioner. She loves the diversity and vitality of West Mt. Airy. She enjoys being close to the Wissahickon and appreciates the physical beauty of the neighborhood as well.



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Eat Your Heart Out! 2010

Gina and Gary Smith will co-chair the fifth annual *Eat Your Heart Out!* benefit this spring. The Smiths hosted the event's cocktail party last year, and we look forward to working with them again this year.

Eat Your Heart Out!, WMAN's signature fundraising event, features community dinners in the lovely homes of West Mt. Airy residents, and showcases the talents of some of our best caterers, restaurateurs and home chefs. Spend a wonderful evening seeing old friends, meeting new ones and supporting West Mt. Airy Neighbors. Stay tuned for more details.

WMAN Celebrates 50 Years 1959-2009

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