



# Mount Airy Independent

January 14, 2010 • Volume 1 • Number 38

5275 Germantown Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19144 • 215-438-4000 • germantownnewspapers.com

## One Book One Philadelphia Kicks Off Next Week

By SUE ANN RYBAK  
Correspondent

The 2010 One Book, One Philadelphia program will launch its kick-off event, "A Journey to Iran Through Music," featuring intercultural journeys and a screening of *Persepolis*, on Wednesday, January 20, at the Central Library, 19<sup>th</sup> and Vine streets, at 7:30 p.m. The event will mark the beginning of the eight-week program that will run from January 20 through March 17. This year's One Book, One Philadelphia feature selection is *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. It is the first graphic novel or comic book, as Satrapi prefers to call it, to be chosen.

"All children around the world draw... drawing is the first language. I cannot draw the face of a sad person and have someone say 'oh, that person is happy,'" Satrapi said in September at the announcement at the Central Library that her book would be this year's One Book One Philadelphia selection. "Drawing is an universal language ... We all cry for the same reason - a mother losing her child, a lover who has left us ... Human emotion is

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**Cars streamed off Lincoln Drive onto Wissahickon Avenue** all day Saturday as motorists heading downtown were forced to take other routes due to the Streets Department's upkeep and repair work on the Drive between Rittenhouse Street and Ridge Avenue. The announcement of the work and the ensuing detours was not made until last Thursday.

## News in Mt. Airy

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## WMAN Zoning Has Reservations on Building Plans

By PATRICK COBBS  
Staff Writer

After six years of closure, the Upsala House at 6430 Germantown Avenue may finally be on its way to re-use. On January 6 the West Mt. Airy Neighbors (WMAN) Zoning Committee voted not to oppose a zoning variance application by the property's owner, Cliveden of the National Trust (located across the street from Upsala at 6401 Germantown Avenue), to adapt it for administrative use.

"The proposed use, administrative offices, is not permitted in the zoning," said Cliveden's Executive Director David Young of Upsala. "We would like to bring it to life on the Avenue."

Project architect and Cliveden board member Richard Thom called it a way for Cliveden to make a "front door presence on the Avenue."

Although the building dates from 1798, it is what Young called "an historic house where nothing historic happened." It was a private residence until a fire destroyed much of the interior in 1940. After that it was rebuilt and maintained as a house museum until it closed in 2003. Since then the rear portion of the building has been occupied by a caretaker.

Yet despite its long use as a museum the property is zoned R-5 residential, and Richard Thom thinks he might have played a role in that error.

"In 1976 I believe I was responsible for the continued improper zoning for this property," he confessed to the WMAN com-

mittee.

It was just after the oil embargo, and he and a colleague were on temporary assignment with the City Planning Commission to help adjust zoning in Mt. Airy. On a trek through the neighborhood the pair examined the house museum along with all the other nearby properties.

Just like the other homes Upsala had curtains in the windows and appeared from the outside to have all the trappings of an occupied home, Thom said. He and his colleague were fooled and they recorded the property as a residence.

Regardless of the reason for Upsala's R-5 designation, the Zoning Committee was thrilled to support Cliveden's bid to bring the building back to life. Committee Chair Ralph Pinkus even considered departing from the standard "non-opposition" language in the committee's letter to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) and wanted to use the word "support."

The ZBA hearing will be February 16 at 9:30 a.m. at 1515 Arch Street.

The zoning committee and neighbors were considerably less thrilled with Yuri Yakhnis' bid to build two twins (four residential units) at a vacant lot on 506 West Springer Street.

"To sacrifice that block with what you would be doing is totally unacceptable," said nearby neighbor Sylvia Carter.

Carter's and other neighbors' main problem was with the density of the plan. Four houses - two twins - is too dense for that block of Springer Street, which has only single homes, they

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## WMAN Zoning Has Reservations About Springer Street Plans

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said.

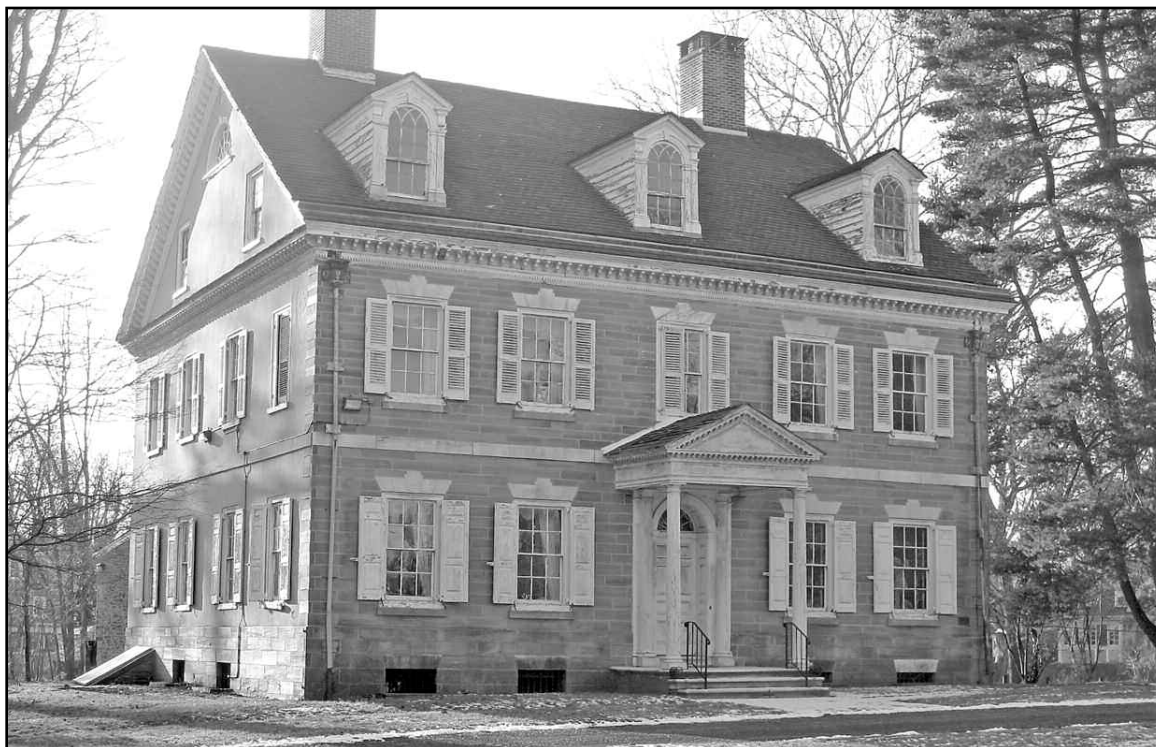
Unfortunately for Yakhnis, the zoning code agrees with them. Springer Street's R-2 residential designation does not allow twins even though several exist just around the corner on Wayne Avenue. But Yakhnis and his lawyer Richard Demarco think the property has a hardship that the ZBA will look favorably upon for the variance.

"We're going to present a case to the board that this is the only viable use of this lot," Demarco said. "The compliance with the code for this property is not sellable. It's just not going to happen."

But neighbors and zoning committee members had another problem with the plans for 506 Springer – it wasn't pretty enough.

"It's the ugliest house I've seen," said committee member Yvonne Haskins. "The aesthetics of this neighborhood have been very important to all of us. It does not look like West Mt. Airy."

The three-story roughly 4000 sq.-ft. homes would have a short driveway to a garage in the front of each house. The façade would



The Upsala House at 6430 Germantown Avenue, which except for a caretaker has stood unused and empty for the past six years.

be a mixture of stucco and brick with a shallow-pitched salt box roof overhead. Demarco said his client was flexible on the look of the houses, but in private deliberation Committee Chair Ralph Pinkus had a warning to neighbors relating to that.

If WMAN does not oppose the four-unit plan it could have a say in the way the new construction looks, Pinkus said. But if it rejects the four-unit plan in favor of an as-code development, the lot was likely big enough to allow for two single homes by

right. And if the owner takes that as his fall back position, WMAN could lose all of its sway over the looks of those two new singles, according to Pinkus.

Committee member Patrick Hauck was opposed to a variance that would allow two twins. He

believed allowing greater density in R-2 would create a "bad precedent" for Mt. Airy.

Member Stephen Anderson brought up yet another concern. He worried about Yakhnis' numbers and what they could mean for the quality of construction.

Yakhnis said he expects to sell each of the twins for about \$400,000. But given the planned square footage for the units and the fact that he bought the land for \$240,000 according to the Board of Revision of Taxes, Anderson thought Yakhnis would need to build each home for far less than \$100 per square foot – something he thought was unrealistic. The average cost for new residential construction in 2008 for the North East was \$114.36 per square foot, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

"The neighbors should be very concerned about the quality of construction," Anderson said.

"The quality of construction will be controlled by the city of Philadelphia," Yakhnis replied.

The zoning committee voted to oppose the variance application.

The ZBA hearing for 506 Springer will be January 27 at 2 p.m. at 1515 Arch Street.

## A 'Walk-a-Palooza' of a Concert at LTSP



Among the performers at Walk-a-Palooza are (above, left to right) Prose From Dover, vocalist Rhetta Morgan, rockers the Walkin' Malaakas, and singer/guitarist Art Miron, who will also serve as master of ceremonies.

By **KARL BIEMULLER**  
Editor

After what owner Greg Williams called "the best December we ever had," the future of Walk A Crooked Mile Books at Gowen Avenue and Devon Street looks rather brighter.

The bookstore, which has become an integral part of the neighborhood over the past 15 years, had been facing possible closure in the face of financial difficulties but now, says Williams, "That month [which featured a number of special events at the store] was very encouraging, very exciting. I'm very pleased and it looks like we're going to be able to stay."

One of the things that has made Walk A Crooked Mile a part of the neighborhood over the years is its series of free summer concerts held on the bookstore grounds at the R7 Mt. Airy Train Station. The concerts are free and donations are accepted for the performers, but there is some expense involved in staging them, and, says Williams, "I don't have that kind of money any more." So what will be happening on Sunday, January 17 4-8:30 p.m. at the Brossman Center of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia is something of a "concert for concerts" event.

The concert, called "Walk-a-Palooza," will feature ten musical groups and indi-

viduals who have performed at Walk A Crooked Mile in the past, most of them repeatedly. Williams says, "The performers came up with the idea – what can we do, can we do a concert, that sort of thing ... donations will go just to support the summer concert series."

It will break down into two parts: an hour of children's music from 4-5 p.m., followed by the adult portion of the concert from 5-8:30 p.m.

Performing in the children's portion in 15-minute segments will be Have Fun, Will Travel; Rhetta Morgan; Tom Gala; and Two of a Kind and the Give 'em a Hand Band.

Performing in 20-minute segments dur-

ing the adult section will be, in order: Acoustic Blender, Art Miron, Prose from Dover, Rhetta Morgan, Saint Mad, Drew Calvin, The Fretnoughts, Tom Gala, and the Rockin' Malaakas.

All the performers are enthusiastic about the event and the concert series it will support.

The well-known children's music duo Two of Kind is made up of David and Jenny Heitler-Klevens, who have been appearing under that name for about 20 years. They will perform as Two of a Kind during the children's portion, then welcome two other performers – Hope Wesley Harrison and Justin Solonynka –

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