



# The Neighborhood Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 1

The Baton-Passing Issue, Winter 2010

## “NEITHER SNOW NOR RAIN...” THE NEWSLETTER RIDES AGAIN

By Jessie Brown (Jason Street)

Thirteen neighbors gathered during a recent blizzard to brainstorm about our newsletter’s future. As Bill Berkowitz and Mary Cummings prepared to relinquish their editorial posts, the debate roiled: would the publication fold or flourish?

We heard praise for the website and plans for a blog, yet neighbors still prized our paper editions. A new, streamlined format emerged. While enjoying cider and doughnuts, we envisioned a six-page version that could be issued quarterly, showcasing shorter articles. It was decided that a team of two producers would oversee each issue.

It only required coordinating—who among us couldn’t write or invite columns?

They might be as brief as calendar items, or run to several paragraphs. We foresaw a rich variety: letters to the editor, surveys, new neighbor notices, book groups, park updates, local theater productions, recipes, baby announcements, garden articles, interviews, kids’ writing, contests, etc.

What speaks to you? Pass it on! Doina Iliescu and Judy Weinberg have offered to take on the shepherding this winter, with Steve Johnson lending his editing skills. You may reach them at [steveanddoina@comcast.net](mailto:steveanddoina@comcast.net). Every voice adds energy!

We’re on-line, at [www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org](http://www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org).



## WELL, WHY NOT?

By Mary Cummings (Jason Street)

“A newsletter? Produced by neighbors, for our neighborhood? WELL, WHY NOT?” This was the first line in the first issue of The Neighborhood Newsletter when it hit the streets in the summer of 1987. With the help of a remarkable group of neighbors, the Newsletter has been produced and distributed to 1300 households two to four times every year since then with just a brief break between 1989 and 1992. As The Neighborhood Newsletter takes a great leap into the 21st century under a completely new management system, I’ve been looking back at 22 years of issues to get a snapshot of neighborhood history, the fun we have had, and the role we have played in the community.

I joined in 1992 and became coeditor in 1994, but Bill Berkowitz has been involved in the newsletter from the start. He has worked as writer and copy editor, and, while the Newsletter has always been a team effort, often served as organizer and general facilitator. I have done the basic layouts and clip art searches, and Bill and I usually did the final editing together.

As I look back, there are some pieces of the newsletter that I particularly enjoyed. Letters to the editor abounded, and gave rise to several enterprises, including a babysitting co-op, book groups, and our traffic committee. I do hope we can find a way to reestablish those letters. Welcomes to new families and new babies were also a good chunk of every issue, and I miss them. For many years, every issue had a “Coming Up” or “Wrapping It Up” section summarizing the news and reminding us of upcoming events. In October of 1997 there were 16 items on the “Wrapping It Up” list, including a bird walk, book clubs, and a traffic committee meeting.

We followed the adventures of Hawkeye the Turtle (so named by Charlotte Pierce) through the Hills Pond dredging fiasco, which gave birth to the Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park. We kept up to date on Spy Pond through articles written by Nancy Flynn and other Friends of Spy Pond. Ever since 1998, we have had an annual insert reminding people of the impact that lawn chemicals might have on the Great Pond.

“Renovation Review,” by Andrea Davis, (Jason Street) was our first home renovation article in June 1995. I visited many renovated homes on behalf of The Neighborhood Newsletter since then, and collected ideas for our own renovation which I wrote about in November of 1999.

In June 1995, we expanded our four page publication to six pages, and shortly thereafter we expanded to eight. We almost never ran out of money, as there was always a steady stream of donations. Every issue included some plea for funding (occasionally frantic), but the neighborhood never let us down. Following John Worden’s suggestion, we enclosed envelopes with our fundraising spiel a couple of years ago and that campaign was so successful that we decided to do it again sometime soon. Watch for your envelope.

In March of 2002, Elles Gianocostas, a professional designer living on Jason Street, put together our largest issue ever. It included an insert compiled by Bill Berkowitz and titled “Our Musical Neighborhood.” The eight-page insert listed 16 musicians living in our neighborhood with brief biographies of each. We have also had shorter pieces about artists and authors living in our midst. Many neighborhood scholars and experts in fields shared their knowledge, including: ichthyologist and birder Karsten Hartel; landscape architect and gardener Cricket Lewis; master chef Andrea Davis, ecology expert Gene Benson; neighborhood historians John Worden and JoAnn Robinson; and realtor Judy Weinberg, who continues to keep us up-to-date with the real estate market with every issue.

Bill’s Around the Neighborhood column has been a journal of community news. The first time I saw it was in the summer issue of 1988, when Bill declared that Baby Boomers had produced the public schools’ first enrollment increase in 15 years. “The addition of 53 new elementary school aged children necessitated the hiring of three new full-time and one part-time teacher, forcing the school over budget.” One of my favorite announcements was, “First thing in the morning on the first day of first grade, Jenny Diaz of Stony Brook Road lost her first tooth!”

In February 2004 Jessie Brown and her son Ben Kuhn (Jason Street) started a delightful column called “Roving Reporters” in which they surveyed neighbors on the street with intriguing questions like “If you ruled the neighborhood, what would you do?” Cindy Starks and her two children, Morgan and Ian, wrote a delightful survey of neighborhood playgrounds.

Not satisfied with reporting, we often created some news of our own by organizing neighborhood picnics and contests. In October of 2001, we had the Find Your Neighbor contest that involved collecting information from neighbors whom you had never met before. You earned extra points if you ran into the “Mystery Neighbor” on the streets. I nearly expired in the heat when it was my turn to play the role wearing the heavy costume robe and huge turban. There is a picture of Bill as the mystery neighbor in the following issue.

We hit the World Wide Web in April of 1997 with the help of Ken Lubar (Gray Street). We now have an e-mail list with about 500 members, which Chris Wren (Hillsdale Road) carefully guards while he maintains our blog. Alyssa Krinsky Clossey (Oak Knoll) is the talented webmaster of our newest website: ([www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org](http://www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org)).

I am compiling a collection of all the volumes into a searchable PDF document that we will post on our website, and I welcome anyone who would like to extract categorized lists of its contents, which could include biographical pieces, families and babies we welcomed, groups and committees we brought together and/or followed, community events we organized, publicized, and enjoyed, issues that stirred our passions, contests we ran, our ventures with technology, the very few complaints that we sometimes had, and the many delights that we shared. Perhaps the document could become a Wiki as people add updates to the lives and projects we documented.

The Neighborhood Newsletter has allowed me to feel embraced by this marvelous community and I trust that we can maintain it and expand its value to the neighborhood in the next 22 years. Thank you for making it possible.

*Editor’s note:* When Mary invited editor emeritus Bill to review her article, he made some tidy changes, but he modestly also struck out a lot of praise directed toward himself. We let his changes stand, but want all who read this to know that the praise was just, and well deserved. Both Bill and Mary have been stalwart captains of the Newsletter, giving generously of their time, energy, and hospitality. There were delicious refreshments served at the casual meetings, but it’s the congenial sense of community pride and progress they maintain that nourishes us all. We relish Bill’s astute observation of community life, and Mary’s boundless, cooperative energy. While many others have also contributed, it is now time to acknowledge the dedicated effort Mary and Bill have given us. What wonderful neighbors they are. Thanks and praise to both!

#### **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 Steve Johnson, Editor:

Write to: 124 Jason St.  
E-mail: [steveanddoina@comcast.net](mailto:steveanddoina@comcast.net)  
Website: [www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org](http://www.neighborhoodnewsletter.org)

To make a contribution to **The Neighborhood Newsletter**: Make checks payable to “Menotomy Rocks Neighborhood Association” and send to Bill Berkowitz at 12 Pelham Terrace. Thank you for your support!



## FALL OF THE WALL: FROM BERLIN TO ARLINGTON

By Barbara Costa (Woodland Street)

Twenty years ago, the Berlin Wall fell in Germany – a momentous event which changed the face of the world, and has also resonated with at least a few people here in our own neighborhood.

I went to Berlin recently with my husband, Eric Stange, who is producing a film for broadcast on PBS about the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent reunification of East and West Germany. Eric has been directing interviews with several of the main players of that time, including then President George H.W. Bush and members of his administration, then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. These three principals reunited in Berlin in late October for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Eric has also interviewed a number of German citizens who related harrowing personal stories about surveillance, imprisonment, and escapes.

Talking about this dramatic time period with our neighbors, I found out that some of them were there to witness the fall of the Wall firsthand.

A few weeks before the Wall came down, Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer (Lincoln Street), students at the time, were in East Berlin talking to members of the opposition movement. Otto was very active in the peace movement in East Germany and was being watched by the Stasi, the East German secret police.

Otto had brought an international group of 28 students to the meeting. The professor who accompanied them suggested that the Wall dividing East and West Germany would come down before Christmas, but none of the students believed it. Katrin recalls, “That was quite an experience — we were all looking at the same situation, but we could not even think that the Wall might come down. And then that night, we all went to the border to greet the incoming East Germans. We were all crying! I will never forget that.”

Sharon May (Woodland Street) was there, too. She was living and working in Berlin from 1987-91, and recalls driving to Checkpoint Charlie the morning after the Wall was first opened,

finding thousands of West Berliners hanging out of windows and milling about near the Brandenburg Gate, cheering whenever people emerged from the East. At nightfall, Sharon joined the many people who lifted each other up to stand on the wall, where they passed out sparklers and chanted, “Die Mauer muss weg!” (“The Wall must go!”) They were wary of causing a flashpoint, as Eastern guards had used water cannons to keep the crowds at bay. In the end, not a shot was fired.

Ultimately, the Wall was completely opened and relegated to history, a dramatic event with powerful images that everyone remembers so well. What people know less well is that tense negotiations and international diplomacy took place over the next several months to unify Germany. That equally important part of the story is still being played out in some ways.

Eric’s film focuses on the diplomatic efforts that enabled this course of events. The film is scheduled to be broadcast on PBS during the year of the 20th anniversary of German reunification, in 2010.

## FOMRP THANKS VOLUNTEERS



By MaryAnna Foskett (Brantwood Road)

The Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park sponsored monthly volunteer work sessions from April through October in 2009, and, despite the cold and rainy weather that marked so much of the year, were able to hold five of the seven weekend workdays that were scheduled. Among the invasive plants that were weed-wrenched, cut back or just plain pulled out were: autumn olive, burning bush, common buckthorn, garlic mustard, Japanese barberry, Japanese knotweed, multiflora rose, Norway maple, oriental bittersweet, and purple loosestrife.

Volunteer co-ordinators Becky Edmondson and MaryAnna Foskett would like to thank the following friends and neighbors for their hard work: David Bean, Judy Belliveau, Carl & Ren Beckett (from Somerville), Melissa Carr, Lucia Catano, Jo Hartel, Emily Hirsch, Carol Kalauskas, Judy Krulewitz, Tom Ladenburg, Suzy Nauman, Debbie Philips, Dolores Schueler, Don Vieweg, Elizabeth Woods, Phil Young, and everyone else who helped give our Park’s native plants, and their dependent wildlife, a fighting chance to survive and thrive. Many thanks as well to Don Mattheisen who recently repaired the broken boards on the boardwalk near the “swamp”, making it safe for winter walking.

Folks who live adjacent to the Park may have noticed that many of the invasive plants that we – and all of New England – are struggling against are growing near their back yards along the Park’s perimeter. Any assistance that neighbors could give in

rousting out some of these “public enemies” would be greatly appreciated. Contact the Friends next spring if you need help in identifying the plants. An outstanding exemplar of this kind of Park stewardship is Peggy Gardiner of Menotomy Rocks Drive, who has organized her neighbors over the past two years to improve the Shawnee Road entrance to the Park. By removing invasive plants and replacing them with native varieties, Peggy and her crew have upgraded both the appearance and health of that area of the Park. Peggy also organized the removal of several old, dead trees that would have caused serious damage if allowed to fall. Many thanks, Peggy, for your hard work!

## POETRY CORNER

### The Neighborhood

By Lillian Wilcox (Brantwood Road)

The fall is coming to a draw. The winter’s almost here.  
Putting up our shorts and stuff, and getting all our gear.  
I wish fall would last forever but not really...I guess?

## ARLINGTON FRIENDS OF THE DRAMA

By Judy Weinberg (Venner Road)

Almost mid-way through its 87<sup>th</sup> season, the first two productions from AFD Theatre this fall have been incredibly well-received. October’s show was *Our Town*, the American classic set in the fictional N.H. village of Grover’s Corners. In December, *Moonlight and Magnolias*, a farcical re-telling of the *Gone With the Wind* script re-write, elicited enthusiastic laughter from the almost sold-out audiences. Theater Mirror, a Boston-based organization, had the following to say: “It isn’t just in the downtown theaters where you’ll find solid performances and professional production values. Take Arlington Friends of the Drama’s production of *Moonlight and Magnolias*. Nancy Curran Willis is one of the best directors around and her cast for *Moonlight* gives the comedy all they’ve got, right



down to the finely tuned slapstick”.

The upcoming shows are:

***Proof***: This play centers on Catherine, the daughter of Robert—a recently deceased mathematical genius and university professor—and her own struggle with mathematical genius and mental illness. It also explores her relationship with Hal, a grad student of her father’s, and her sister Claire. In 2001, this thought-provoking drama won both the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and Tony Award for Best Play. (February; \$18)

***She Loves Me***: Maraczek’s Parfumerie is the setting for this romantic musical comedy about the many entanglements of love. Break out of the winter doldrums with this award-winning play. (April/May; \$20)

***The Odd Couple***: First staged in 1965, “The Odd Couple” has stood the test of time: couples are still getting divorced, and guys sometimes fall into strange and comical alliances. This Neil Simon comedy is a great way to end the ’09-’10 AFD season. (June; \$18)

Purchased separately, the cost of attending these three plays would be \$56. However, a mid-season membership for \$39 would get you a ticket to each production. Live theatre, in our own neighborhood, for only \$13 a show! Please contact me for further information about this mid-season membership.

Other theatre news:

- December 19<sup>th</sup> marked the first annual holiday open house and sing-along. Guests sang to live piano accompaniment (by Neighbor Brian Rehrig), toured the theatre, and nibbled on refreshments.
- The 2010-2011 season will be announced in late January. Once again, we can count on the AFD Board and Play Reading Committee to create a slate that is entertaining and thought-provoking.
- The AFD website has a wealth of information: past seasons, theatre history, awards, photos, etc. A new feature explains what is involved in set design and set building, and provides a link to those who oversee the technical aspects of mounting a play. Should you want to volunteer, or just learn more about the behind-the-scenes activities, hit the “want to help backstage?” link on the homepage. You’ll be directed to contact information for those in charge of everything from set building to costuming, lights, sound, make-up, and props.

The web address is [www.afdtheatre.org](http://www.afdtheatre.org). I’m pleased to be a member of the Arlington Friends of the Drama board this season, so feel free to contact me as well with any questions: [judyweinberg@remax.net](mailto:judyweinberg@remax.net) or 781-646-0643.

## PROFILE OF BARBARA WENIGER, OWNER/CHEF OF LAKOTA BAKERY

By Helena Halperin (Gray Street)



When you walk into the back rooms at Lakota Bakery, you sense immediately that it's both a busy and a happy place. There's music playing, and everyone is absorbed in work. Barbara Weniger's office is a tiny cubicle with a small desk and chair for Barbara and almost enough room to squeeze a visitor in beside her. There are a million CDs, and a wall of photos. My eye immediately caught the one of her eating a cookie with her twin sister, but she was more interested in showing the photos of Obama with his Lakota birthday cake.

From the beginning, Barbara felt quite confident that Lakota would succeed. She already had a good base of wholesale customers inherited from the Chocolate Box, where she worked until it closed. Building on that foundation, she added retail sales thirteen years ago.

Now, Lakota has ten employees, and Barbara has no desire to expand the operation. Although many businesses, including Whole Foods, have asked to sell her cookies, she has refused. Her reasoning: "Twice the number of stores doesn't mean twice the money. Look at what happened to Mrs. Field's. She became very successful, expanded, and then had to contract. I don't want that. I like what I'm doing now. If an employee wanted to start a sideline like selling coffee here, I might accept that, but I don't want to change the way I'm working. It takes a lot of work to solicit new business. I have always baked, and this suits me well. I can be relaxed about my work. It's not brain surgery."

Barbara was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Both of her parents grew up on farms. Her father worked in meat packing, and her mother was a secretary. She has an older brother and an older sister, as well as a twin. "It's fun being a twin. We're very close. She still lives in South Dakota, and is an English teacher. I might have become a teacher, and likewise, she could easily be running my business."

Many people know Barbara for her political activity. She began in politics during high school, working for the McGovern presidential campaign. Later, she worked on his Senate re-election campaign. She soon moved to Washington and joined McGovern's

staff in the mailroom. During the Reagan administration, she dropped politics completely. She moved to Arlington two years ago, and wanted to make more connections, so joining the Arlington Democratic Town Committee seemed natural. She really threw herself into politics to support Obama, reflecting: "I am happy that he has changed the way the rest of the world sees the US."

She moved to Massachusetts for family reasons, but even as a child she had wanted to move to the East Coast because, "there's more going on in the East".

Barbara went to college in Ohio, majoring in history, but didn't finish her degree, which has not been a problem. She has worked in other sorts of jobs, including bookstores, and still loves to read. She is enthusiastic about her non-fiction book club.

The recession hasn't hurt Lakota terribly, because their retail business is on such a small scale. "People may not be able to afford a meal in a restaurant now, but they can still buy a cookie."

*Although many businesses, including Whole Foods, have asked to sell her cookies, she has refused. Her reasoning: "Twice the number of stores doesn't mean twice the money."*

## EARTH DAY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

By Ellen Reed (Woodland Street)

On Saturday May 1st, the Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park will be hosting a fun day in the park to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EARTH DAY!

Earth Day was started in 1970 to increase public awareness of environmental issues. Since then, we have all become more concerned with water conservation, air quality, the quality of our food, and the use of land.

In the past, we have had geology walks, ponding activities, plantable card making, bird watching, and a recycling relay. This year we are hoping for even more fun ideas and enthusiastic volunteers to help us organize. Interested? Please contact Ellen Reed at [eltreed@earthlink.net](mailto:eltreed@earthlink.net) or John Pickle at [picklejohnmr@gmail.com](mailto:picklejohnmr@gmail.com).

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## Neighborhood Real Estate

By Judy Weinberg (Venner Road, and RE/MAX)

Some thoughts from the front line of real estate:

- In the past week, I've received two requests for anecdotes about the difficulties of selling houses in the current market. One was from a real estate attorney for her winter newsletter to clients; the other from a Boston Globe reporter. Other than a seasonal slowdown, the market has been strong, but the obvious negative slant of those two articles just perpetuates people's perceptions. Please know that Arlington is still doing very well.
- It's not often that our Neighborhood sees new construction, but there have been a few tear-downs recently. A 3-room 850 s.f. house on the corner of Wall and Spring Streets was replaced with a 2,800 s.f. home that sold in October. A 2-bedroom ranch on a double lot on Bellevue Road is being replaced by 2 new homes, both of which abut Menotomy Rocks Park.
- A friend of mine in Arlington Heights decided to refinance to take advantage of attractive mortgage rates. The appraisal came in at \$350,000, which she felt was way too low. I provided her with more realistic comparisons which she showed the bank; they agreed to order a second appraisal which came in at \$461,000! How could this happen? Federal guidelines instituted in 2008 mandate that lenders can't select their appraisal companies, so often appraisers unfamiliar with communities will be hired to provide the appraisals. If you feel you've received an unrealistic appraisal, petitioning your lender with data that supports your claim may prove successful, and would be worth your time.
- A quick recap of Arlington sales from 2008 to 2009: there were 247 single family homes sold last year, compared to 218 the prior year, and the average home price has remained consistent (\$510,301 last year, and \$511,018 in 2008). Arlington is doing great!

Following is a list of all sales in our Neighborhood from June 29, 2009 through January 7, 2010:



Single-family homes:		Condos:	
60 Arlmont Street	\$607,600	7 Bartlett Ave., U 1	\$173,000
44 Churchill Avenue	\$687,000	57 Churchill Ave., U 1	\$405,009
60 High Haith Road	\$370,000	74 Gloucester Street	\$340,000
78 Jason Street	\$785,000	11 Irving Street	\$375,000
		15 Jason Terrace, U 2	\$414,000
25 Kensington Park	\$739,000		
81 Kensington Park	\$715,000	60 Pleasant St., U 109	\$167,000
20 Oak Knoll	\$463,340	60 Pleasant St., U 423	\$180,000
23 Pleasant View Road	\$565,000	114 Pleasant St., U 102	\$209,000
115 Spring Street	\$342,000	114 Pleasant St., U 405	\$214,000
248 Pleasant Street	\$507,500	125 Pleasant St., U 301	\$216,000
35 Wall Street	\$835,000	125 Pleasant St., U 403	\$189,800
32 Woodland Street	\$480,000	125 Pleasant St., U 405	\$267,000
115 Spring Street	\$342,000	184 Pleasant St., U 2	\$520,000
		125 Pleasant St., U 301	\$216,000