March 2005

Village News

Volume 38 Issue 6 Serving the people of Cabin John and beyond

Last Reminder to Buy Tickets for February 26 Deanna Bogart Dance at Community Center

Come and dance to the Deanna Bogart Band this Saturday evening, February 26, at the Clara Barton Community Center, from 7:30 - 11 pm. Net proceeds from the sale of tickets will be used to support the Center. Tickets in general are $25/person, but once again we are hoping that a number of individuals will pay $50 a ticket in order to ensure that we cover the costs of the evening and raise a decent amount to fund some new purchases and activities at the Community Center over this next year. You must be 21 or over to purchase tickets. Desserts and munchies are included in the ticket price, and a cash bar will be available for beer, wine and soda/water. Please contact Trudi Bick at (301) 229-5929 or trudibick@comcast.net for tickets. Checks should be made payable to "Friends of Clara Barton Community Center" or "Friends of CBCC." Feel free to make a donation even if you can't attend the festivities. If you are interested in helping out with this event (decorations, setup, stage set-up, food serving, cleanup, etc), please contact Lori Rieckelman at (301) 320-6299 or rieckell@aol.com.



© Jim Richards

Deanna Bogart

Susan Stewart: Not the Retiring Type

by Ginny Dean

Susan Stewart is not a desperate housewife. She doesn't chase hyperactive kids around the house. (Grady, a Terrier mix, is her only child.) She's not ditzy. (Her alma mater is the brainy Connecticut College for Women.) She isn't having an affair with the gardener. (What gardener? She's tilling, planting, pruning, mulching or watering nearly every week-end.) She does share the Martha Stewart do-it-yourself/take-charge gene, but it's a much more user-friendly strain. (In the 30 years I've known her, she has crafted stained-glass windows, tiled a bathroom floor, stitched draperies, and made her own compost, but she draws the line at doing ice carvings in the shape of a turkey for Thanksgiving. And to my knowledge, she's never done time in the slammer.) She's so handy, neighborly and multitasking that it makes me want to go out and shoot myself.

She's from sturdy, self-sufficient stock. Her 80-something mother line dances, makes her own clothes and holds forth on political issues as if she were running for office. Susan's maternal grandmother designed furniture that her maternal grandfather would then fashion out of wood. The DNA is uncorrupted by lazier chromosomes.

Susan was born in the shadows of the Glen Echo Fire Station and remembers ice skating on the canal in winter and swimming off of Sycamore Island in summer. She was part of the first

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Neighborly News

by Barbara Martin

Ella Fisher died last month, in Hampstead NC. She was 75. The Fishers lived for many years on 76th Street. Ella had 7 children, 21 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren. Ella's husband, **Donald Fisher**, died in 1995; he was a retired fire chief. Ella's daughter, **Dawn Denell**, who lives on 75th Place is the only one of Ella and Donald's children still in Cabin John. Others live in Poolesville, North Beach, Harpers Ferry, and Montana.

Have you seen someone shovelling the bike/pedestrian path on Macarthur Boulevard, after every snow we've had this winter? That good citizen is **David Naylor**. David has been shoveling not only the path in front of his house on Macarthur, but all of the way down to the Parkway turnoff. Thank you, David, you've made life easier and safer for many people.

The Clara Barton Day Care Center, will hold its annual auction on Saturday, April 9, at the Community Center. Put the date on your calendar, and call Marc Pearce at 301-320-3475 for details.

William Brown, son of **David** and **Lisa Brown**, is in Puebla, Mexico, for the winter term, studying at a college there (all courses in Spanish) and living with a local family (no English). William is a student at Dartmouth College; this total immersion experience is a part of Dartmouth's Language Study Abroad Program. The Browns live on 81st Street. William is the oldest of their four children.

Virginia Robinson, a 1995 graduate of Walt Whitman High, who grew up on Cypress Grove Lane, has had her first book of poetry published. The theme of her book is Virginia's community of Navy SEALS, and her military friends in Iraq and Afghanistan. Virginia now teaches high school English in San Diego. Her mother **Ginger Robinson**, moved to her present home in Currituck, North Carolina, in her native state, after retiring from IBM.

Please call Barbara Martin at 301-229-3482 or email (barbmartin@comcast.net) with news about Cabin John residents—present or past. If there are new neighbors on your block, new babies, families who are moving elsewhere, deaths, marriages—let me know.





Community Calendar

FEB

22 ..... CJCA Meeting
Clara Barton Center
7:30 pm (see p. 4)

26 ..... Community Dance
Clara Barton Center
7:30 - 11 pm (see p. 1)

MAR

22 ..... CJCA Meeting
Clara Barton Center
7:30 pm

The Artists of Cabin John — Part 2

By Judy Welles

More than a dozen artists – painters, sculptors, potters, wood turners, art photographers – have settled in Cabin John, an area known for kayakers, towpath joggers, and Sears houses. Their art is as eclectic as the community in which they live. Their work appears in shows and in galleries in the District, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Alexandria and in other states and countries too.

A Delight to the Senses

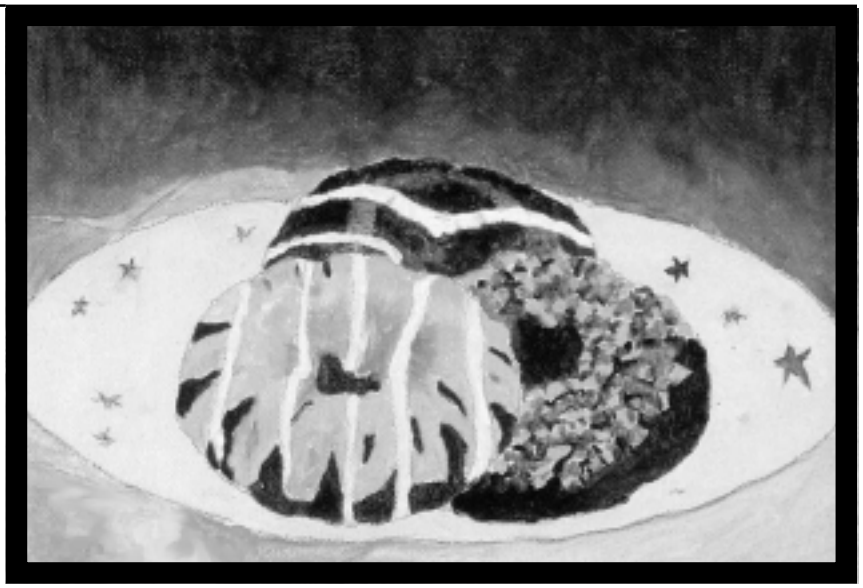
Living directly on the C&O Canal, Harriet Lesser paints in oil on large canvas. She has taught for more than 20 years at the Corcoran School of Art, Fillmore Arts Center, Smithsonian Institution, and University of the District of Columbia. She was drawn to the glimmer of water from the Potomac River and C&O canal which she sees directly from her front windows and deck.

She and her husband moved to Cabin John eleven years ago, for her "water fix" and also because of its "diverse and appealing mix" of people and vintage and retro homes.

"In Cabin John, there are more differences in a little space than anywhere and yet it all works together," she said. A kind of harmony, or things that go together, is the basis for her thematic series of paintings.

With the north light streaming through floor to ceiling windows, she paints in a loft over her living room and the canal view. "For me, a sense of place is crucial," she said. "If you walk quickly on the towpath or jog, you see it one way, almost abstract. If you slow down, you see it more intensely. The point of view makes the change and that's what I love."

While her point of view doesn't change, her subjects do. She paints to themes such as blankets, for which her series of canvases show a blanket on a chair, on a nude, on a canvas. She will have a series on Cuban Cars for a show in April, 2005, at the Norman Parish Gallery in Georgetown. The paintings will depict individual cars of the 50's in bright primary colors at different angles on the canvasses.



© Greogory Staley

"Donuts" is an oil painting by Harriet Lesser.

Her last show "All's Fare," at the Studio Gallery in Washington, featured large paintings of food and 28 small paintings displayed as if in an automat. "There are both sensual and social qualities to eating," she said, a quality captured in films such as "Babette's Feast" and "Like Water for Chocolate." Her show's program was in the form of a cookbook with 12 of the recipes for foods she painted.

Lesser graduated from Hunter College and the Parsons School of Art and Design and currently exhibits at the Studio Gallery.

A few blocks away, Myra Polsky is currently painting landscapes and still life in acrylic on watercolor paper on a table in her kitchen.

(continued on page 6)



CJCA News

by Burr Gray

The next meeting of the CJCA will be Feb. 22, 7:30 pm at the Clara Barton Community Center.

Next CJCA Meeting Agenda - 1) Need/ possibility of Teen Fun Activities at Community Center, 2) possible CJCA sponsorship of local Boy Scouts troop, and 3) stormwater puddles on MacArthur Blvd.

Summary of November 22, 2004 CJCA Meeting - Discussion dealt primarily with house assessment, and with a particular zoning ordinance being considered by the County. Summary to follow in next issue.

Donation by Cabin John Choir - When the Cabin John Choir dissolved recently, they had a bit of dues money left over. The organizer, Denise Britti, donated the funds to purchase a piano cover (cost of about $140) for the piano donated by the Omori family that sits in the corner of the large social hall at the Community Center. Susan Roberts did the measurements for the coverer, so thanks go to Susan as well. The cover looks great so hopefully it will preserve the piano from any abuse for years to come!

Crossing the 500-Pint Mark. According to the Red Cross personnel, our most recent blood drive (Feb. 6) generated exactly 50 units of blood, which was our goal. Many thanks to the donors (present and past) who helped us cross the 500-pint level in terms of total blood collected since we began the blood drives four years ago. We don't list the donors' names for privacy reasons, but the blood drive activity is the most immediate lifesaving thing that our community does. We also want to thank those folk who managed the sign-in table: David, Andrew & Judie Brooks, Larry Heflin, Jackie Hoglund, and Ann Cochran. As usual, Karen Melchar expertly handled recruitment and Neil Helm handled publicity. Burr Gray bought the reading material, including such desirable publications as Vogue, Vanity Fair, People, etc. (People donate blood just so they can do the reading.) Our next blood drive is set for June 5.

Updating of the CJCA E-mail List Serve - If you want to receive the occasional e-mails sent out by CJCA, please send an e-mail to Gary Barnhard (barnhard@barnhard.com) making that request and making sure that he has the correct e-mail for you. About 300 homes currently receive these e-mails, which come out at a rate of about 3-4 per month and deal almost exclusively with CJCA events and activities. We do not provide the e-mail addresses to any other entity.

New Officers - CJCA is looking for new officers for the next year (starting June 5). If you are interested, please contact Bruce Wilmarth (CJCA Treasurer) 301-229-8528.

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LOCAL ARTISTS
cont. from page 3



© Myra Polsky

This acrylic painting by Myra Polsky is entitled "Just in Time."

She and her husband moved to Cabin John 30 years ago, and started their family while she developed her art, at the Corcoran and at nearby Glen Echo Park. With a BFA from Boston University School of Fine Art, and a master's degree in fine art from George Washington University and the Corcoran School of Art, her career as an artist spans 35 years.

The small town atmosphere and the natural setting were the initial attraction, she said, especially the presence of water, with the C&O Canal just beyond her back yard. It was also the light in her home, with cathedral ceilings and large windows that bring that light to the large table in the kitchen where she does her work.

She follows a classic tradition, and her work brings Cezanne or Roualt to mind because of her use of color and layering approach. She paints in pairs, or dyptic, and triplets or tryptic, making her work sought after by interior designers. Her collections can be seen at Avante Garde gallery in Chevy Chase and Designer Art Gallery in



© Robert Epstein

"Portrait in Blue" exemplifies the panoramic style favored by Robert Epstein.

Bethesda. She also does commissioned work and recently completed a tryptic of large flowers for an art collector's bedroom.

More Gallery Cabin John

Robert Epstein, who taught ceramics for 28 years at the Corcoran, has moved to art photography in his Cabin John home studio. Using a camera with a rotating lens and infrared film, he does panoramas that have a soft glow and suggest a sense of motion. As he photographs, he moves with the rotating lens camera which, he said, is like "painting with a camera." He has also done studies of motion in a series titled "Automobilia" depicting sports cars at angles that make them appear at high speed.



© Pamela Zilly

Pamela Zilly's "Burning Leaves" won multiple awards at the Art League Gallery.

His series on men at work finds a graphic geometry between building construction and the workers. He strives for a sense of growth, he said, "an intimacy between structures and humanity, from which we can learn something." He moved to Cabin John about 12 years ago, finding "the last good deal," and feeling comfortable in the "anarchist's paradise." In addition to his own art photography, he is sought after to photograph the art of other artists for their shows, including several he knew at Corcoran and some who live in Cabin John, and he does commissioned work as well.

Around the corner, Pamela Zilly is an art photographer whose work is currently at the Touchstone Gallery juried exhibit in Washington, D.C. She is also one of nine artists selected for a solo show at the Art League, in the Torpedo Factory, Alexandria, Va., in 2006. Zilly studied fine art at La Universidad de las Americas in Cholula, Mexico, and has her BFA degree in photography from the State University of New York. She has been showing her work regularly at the Torpedo Factory and also at her Web site, zillyphoto.com. Her photographs are easily mistaken for oil paintings because of the texture and color she captures. "When I go out to take photographs for myself, I seek the solitude of abandoned buildings, alleys, and industrial yards. I search for "paintings" and dramatic design elements in these decaying, man-made environments that would normally go unnoticed," she said.

Her Web site features four "Galleries" where prints can be ordered of her work showing Flora, Walls, Details, and even 1950's-look black and white photos of an air stream trailer. She also photographs animals and birds, landscapes, architecture, and portraits. As one magazine editor commented, "Pamela's photography is the visual statement of her…delight in the world she sees through the eye of her camera." —❧

Judy Welles talked to many more fine artists who call Cabin John their home. Watch for their stories in the next issue of the Village News.

Looking Back in Cabin John

by Andrew E. Rice

The Tale of the Rammed Earth House

People have often commented on the many styles of housing in Cabin John. Among the most unusual is the house that stands at the head of 75th Street.

The story begins in 1923 when Dr. Harry B. Humphrey, chief of plant pathology at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, came across a pamphlet from South Africa dealing with rammed earth construction. Since 1915 he had owned a four-acre lot known as "Oakmont" (because of its tall oaks) but had never built a house. Now he saw the possibility of building a house at lower cost by compacting the clay-sand-gravel-earth mixture that he could excavate right on the property.



© Minnesota Historical Society

Hubert Humphrey in 1948 as mayor of Minneapolis.

According to Morris Fradin, for many years Cabin John's historian, Dr. Humphrey tested the load-bearing quality of the material in a simple fashion. He filled a large glass jar with earth, tamping it down very tightly, than broke the glass and baked the clump of soil in the oven overnight. "Then he took it outside and stood in it. While he was so poised....one of his young sons took a running jump and leaped onto his father's back. Dr. Humphrey wobbled a bit, but his rammed earth pedestal didn't crumble underfoot; it supported the weight of both father and son."

Dr. Humphrey's wife, Olive, who was an architect, designed the house, and with much of the labor contributed by family members, the Humphreys were able to move in on Christmas Eve 1923. Although rammed earth construction has now become better known in the United States, particularly in the West, the nearly 82-year-old structure in Cabin John may well be oldest "mud house" residence in the country.

But the story of the house extends beyond its unusual construction. In 1935 Dr. Humphrey invited his nephew, Hubert, who was working in the family drug store in Huron, South Dakota, to visit him. It was young Hubert's first time in Washington and he was enthralled. Sitting in the gallery of the Senate, he began to dream of a different future for himself. His uncle encouraged him to think big, and before he left Cabin John, he had written to his fiancee, Muriel Buck, "I can see how some day, if you and I just apply ourselves and make up our minds to work for bigger things, we can live here in Washington and probably be in government, politics or service. I set my aim at Congress..."

Thirteen years later Hubert H. Humphrey was elected to the Senate and in 1965 he took office as Vice President of the United States.

But the house in Cabin John was not only the incubator of Hubert Humphrey's dreams. In 1951 the residence was purchased by Dr. George L. Weil, a nuclear scientist who, in 1942 under the direction of Dr. Enrico Fermi, had been the person who had withdrawn a cadmium-plated rod from a pile of uranium and graphite under the University of Chicago squash courts, thus causing the first man-made sustained nuclear chain reaction on earth. Dr. Weil erected a tall radio tower on the property and regularly transmitted calls from Antarctica, between the scientists stationed there and relatives at home.

(The current occupants of the house, Christopher and Susan Koch, have collected further information about their home's history on which I hope to be able to report in a subsequent column.)

STEWART
cont. from page 1

graduating class of Walt Whitman High School, a rite of passage that was followed by her four-year stint at Connecticut College and a Masters from American University in Public Administration/Organizational Development. Along the way she was an exchange student in Economics at Esso/Nederland in The Hague and stays in touch with friends made way back then. Rarely does Susan let a friendship wither on a vine—even a vine planted long ago and far away.

After four years with a stock brokerage firm and working for the National Association of Securities Dealers, she logged over 30 years with the Federal government. First with the Federal Energy Office (which later became part of DOE) during the energy crisis, working in the gas rationing and price controls area. Then it was on to the General Services Administration, where she was involved in government real estate dealings. Post-9/11 she helped set up emergency quarters for 2000 of the Pentagon's displaced Army and Navy employees, an assignment that transitioned to related work with the Office (now Department) of Homeland Security.

In 1986, Susan had moved from Great Falls, Virginia to Cabin John, where she could walk to the bank, post office, food store, and tow path and befriend dozens of nice new souls. Here she could take her consecutive string of terriers through the town's back roads and past its lovely wooded lots. Husband Rodgers (who takes the evening shift walking Grady) uprooted himself from Annapolis, where he still keeps a cottage, and transplanted himself into Cabin John's soft soil in 1993, when they married. And here they live, happily ever after.

She retired from the DHS last January, but Susan's not the retiring type. The Department has leased her back ever since to work on the construction of its new headquarters at Ward Circle, so she's still putting in close to 40 hours a week.

But office work sheds little light on Susan's diverse tastes and talents. In addition to the gardening, stained-glass window-crafting, floor-tiling, draperies-stitching, and compost-making, she reads to a delightful blind woman, has hosted her Thursday night Stitch-n-Bitch sewing



© Lesley Trembath

Susan Stewart with her loyal dog, Grady.

session (she knits, sews, quilts, needlepoints and cross-stitches) for 12 years, frames pictures, supports animal welfare organizations, and presides over the MacArthur Park Board on which she has served for 15 years. If you're not making headway shoveling snow from your driveway, she'll march over and dig in. She'll pinch dead blossoms off your azaleas while she chats. Need to know the paint formula for your house in the subdivision? A good electrician? Which garage door to buy? Why your petunias are wilting? How much the last house on the street sold for? Susan's got more good answers than that Ken guy on *Jeopardy*.

If she ever ends up in an old age home, she'll be trimming the shrubbery, putting shingles on the roof, organizing shuffleboard tournaments and outings to craft shows, rearranging the furniture, and mending broken bird wings.

Dedicated, dogged, deliberate, determined, diligent, yes. But never desperate. —

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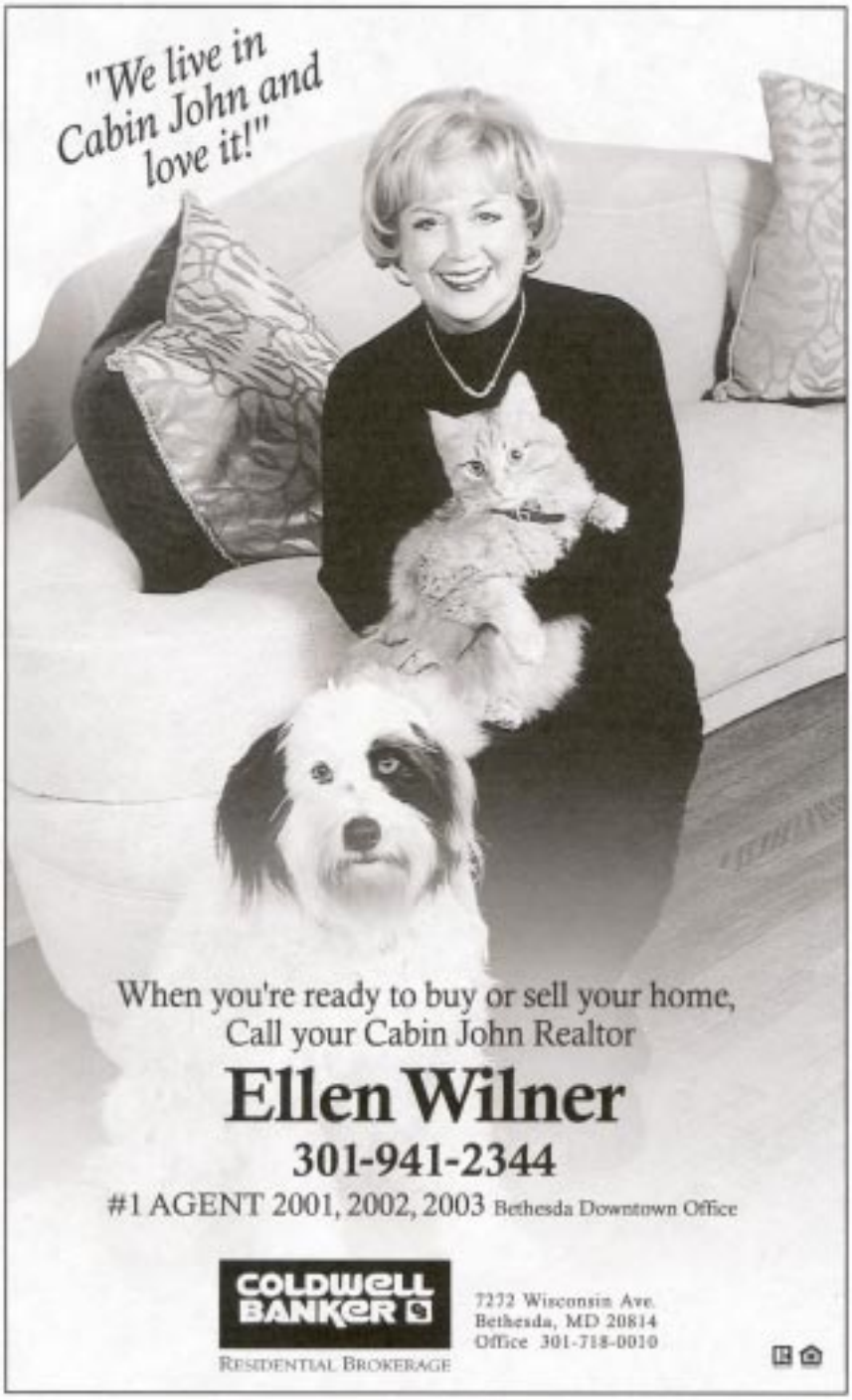
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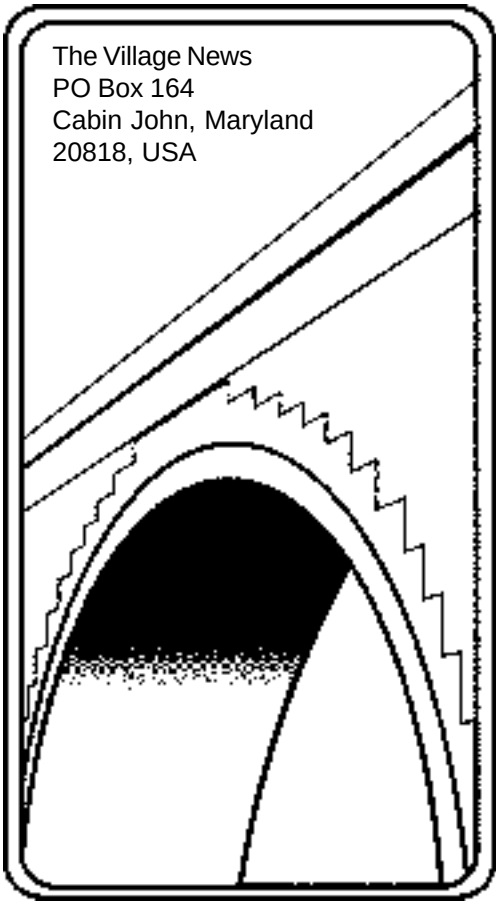
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Regular Contributors: Burr Gray, Andy Rice, Barbara Martin.

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