The Village News

SERVING THE PEOPLE OF CABIN JOHN AND BEYOND

November 2025 | VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 10

MARYLAND RETURNS CEMETERY LAND TO MOSES HALL DESCENDANTS

by Charlotte Troup Leighton

Sixty-four years ago, during the construction of the Capital Beltway, Maryland used eminent domain to take land from an African American cemetery in Cabin John. On Oct. 22, the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), with the approval of the Maryland Board of Public Works, gave a piece of that land back. The parcel of less than a quarter-acre potentially holds 26 graves.

This action comes two years after the SHA conducted a survey of the Beltway right-of-way that abuts the Morningstar Moses Cemetery in Cabin John. The survey was conducted using ground-penetrating radar, which enables archaeologists to see potential burial shafts and other subsurface anomalies without digging. It found over two dozen possible and probable unmarked burial sites in the state-owned land. At the urging of Friends of Moses Hall, the SHA committed to conveying any unneeded right-of-way land containing graves to Morningstar Tabernacle Number 88, whose board of trustees oversees the cemetery.

The land conveyance marks a significant milestone for the descendants of those buried at the cemetery and the Friends of Moses Hall, the non-profit that was formed in 2023 to preserve the cemetery site. "This important action by the state of Maryland not only helps restore sacred land historically connected to the cemetery but also affirms the cultural and ancestral significance of Morningstar's legacy," said Shannon Steward, descendant and Friends of Moses Hall board member.

See CEMETERY on pg. 2

OPAL DEVELOPERS PRESENT TOWNHOUSE PLAN TO COMMUNITY

by Susan Shipp

The potential new owners of the commercial property at the corner of MacArthur Blvd. and 77th Street formally presented their five-townhome plan to the community in a lively meeting October 29 at Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center. Some 75 people attended the meeting and another 40 joined via Zoom.

OPaL Design Build, run by CJ residents Sean Ruppert and Jason Woodard, has a contract on the property. They were required to hold the community meeting as part of their plan to file for a commercial to residential reconstruction application. Elizabeth Rogers, a land use attorney at Lerch Early, hired by OPaL, presented the plan, which did not differ dramatically from what Sean Ruppert had presented informally at a community meeting on May 29.

With the revised plan, the five townhouses will be attached with green roofs on the carports that connect the residences. While

See OPAL on pg. 2

ANNUAL CABIN JOHN TURKEY TROT FIGHTS HUNGER WITH FUN

Thanksgiving Day (November 27) at 10:00 am

by Scott Lewis

Held since 2017, our Annual Turkey Trot is a great way to start Thanksgiving. Bring yourself, your family, your visitors, and your furry friends to this widely attended event.

Give thanks by giving back – we ask everyone to **bring a few non-perishable grocery items** to the Turkey Trot for donation to Manna Food Center's Smart Sack program. The Smart Sack Program provides backpacks of food each weekend to some 2,850 Montgomery County school kids. Popular food items include jars of peanut butter, boxes of granola bars, instant oatmeal, and canned vegetables and fruits.

See TROT on pg. 2

CAN YOU DONATE TO THE CJ HOLIDAY GIVING TREE?

by Lori Rieckelman

So Others Might Eat (SOME) is a local, DC-based nonprofit that fights poverty and homelessness by providing housing, healthcare, training, and social services, and this joint effort by the communities of Brookmont, Glen Echo, and Cabin John has become the largest source of holiday-season support, empowering parents to provide gifts for their children on Christmas morning and obtain basic necessities for themselves.

This will be Cabin John's 16th year of providing holiday gifts to the 200 families in SOME's transitional housing. It is always so heartwarming to see how many of our CJ families participate each year.

See TREE on pg. 2

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OPAL *Continued from pg. 1*

described as two-stories with a cellar, each townhouse will also have a loft bringing the height to 32 feet and be sized at roughly 4,100 square feet. OPaL said they plan to price the units in the mid $2 millions.

Under the project timeline, OPaL would submit its application before the end of 2025, complete the property purchase in March 2026, and allow approximately nine months for zoning changes, stormwater management review, and building permit approvals, with final permits expected by the end of 2026. They also spoke of a phased construction plan, with three homes being built starting in early 2027 and the remainder following after the initial sales.

The timeline prompted the question why Level Fitness was only given 90 days to vacate the space. The response by Rogers was that the seller gave Level Fitness notice to get the property ready for sale. Later in the meeting, she added that for the zoning process they intend to use, the property needs to be vacant at the time of application.

Despite significant community concern over potential stormwater drainage issues raised at the May meeting, OPaL did not present a comprehensive stormwater management plan to the community. They did say they would be reducing the impervious land from 65% to 46% of the property and that "some kind of bioretention" to store water would be included and indicated that the net water runoff would be reduced. They did not provide any additional detail when asked about the impact the five large basements would have on underground water flow and containment.

While a number of community members spoke in favor of the proposed development, others spoke passionately about the current building that dates from 1930. One attendee said the building "represents the spirit of Cabin John" and asked for a compromise that could preserve the building. OPaL responded that there is no way to save the building and plans to move forward. ~*vn*

TREE *Continued from pg. 1*

HOW TO GIVE:

There will be an artificial tree inside Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center with donation ornaments. Each ornament designates a gift card sum and there will also be several tags with specific gift requests for children who live in SOME housing.

Gifts usually range from $50-$60. Any dolls should be African American; please supply batteries with toys, and no toys of violence (guns, pistols, etc.). Visa gift cards are a great idea for teenagers!

Do NOT wrap your gift! Parents will wrap the gifts for their children. PLEASE REMEMBER TO ATTACH THE ORNAMENT TO YOUR GIFT.

As in the last couple of years, gift cards in $50 increments to stores such as Amazon, Target, Walmart, and Macy's as well as gift cards for Visa and Mastercard would be most appreciated. You do not need to select an ornament from the tree in order to donate.

Purchase the cards yourself and drop them off at Lori Rieckelman's house (6423 79th Street) or order them from the merchant online and have them sent directly to her. Text her at 301-655-4404 when leaving cards in the bin on her porch so that they can be quickly retrieved. Please write the amount on the gift cards if it is not specified.

Venmo/Zelle - You can send your donation to Lori by either Venmo (@Lori-Rieckelman) or Zelle (rieckell@aol.com) and she will purchase gift cards in your name.

Ornaments will be hung the weekend of November 22. Gifts can be dropped off at Lori's house or she can pick them up from you. Gifts need to be delivered by December 9.

Questions: Contact Lori Rieckelman at 301-655-4404 or. Thank you so much! ~*vn*

CEMETERY *Continued from pg. 1*

Several organizations submitted letters of support to the Board of Public Works in advance of the October meeting, including Friends of Moses Hall, the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites, and the Maryland Sierra Club. These letters now form part of the public record, ensuring that the community's advocacy and the historical significance of the site are documented for future researchers, descendants, and preservation efforts.

The history of this property dates back to 1880, when a formerly enslaved couple, Robert and Sarah Gibson, purchased land along what is now Seven Locks Road in Cabin John. Over the next decade, nine other African American families joined them, forming a self-sufficient settlement first known as Gibson Grove (later No. 10). These families built a supportive community rooted in faith, mutual care, and education.

In 1882, they opened the first school for Black children in the district. Three years later, they founded Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 of the Order of Moses, a benevolent society that provided financial support to those in need, burial assistance, and community fellowship. The society's two-story building, known as Moses Hall, and the adjacent cemetery became the heart of community life. In 1898, the Gibson Grove AME Zion Church was established on land donated by Sarah Gibson.

The stone foundation is all that is left of Moses Hall and there are very few headstones visible in the cemetery today. But the land holds the graves of community founders, including Sarah Gibson, and Emma Jones, a respected midwife and longtime housekeeper for Clara Barton in Glen Echo. By combing death notices in old newspapers and other extensive research, Friends of Moses Hall has identified 131 men, women and children who were buried in the cemetery between the 1880s and the 1970s. An extensive ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey conducted in 2021 found the likelihood of hundreds more resting across both the cemetery property and portions of the land surrounding it. Learn more at: friendsofmoseshall.org ~*vn*

TROT *Continued from pg. 1*

REGISTRATION AND VOLUNTEERING:

Registration is free but we ask that you register so we can gauge numbers. When registering you will have the opportunity to buy event T-shirts and to volunteer to put up course signs beforehand or to be a course monitor to keep our runners/walkers on track. Questions about registration or volunteering? Contact cjcapresidents@gmail.com.

COURSE:

The 2.5-mile run/walk starts and ends near the parking lot at the Cabin John Local Park, making a loop via MacArthur Blvd., 79th St., the C&O Canal towpath, and back up to MacArthur at the Union Arch Bridge.

T-SHIRTS (order deadline NOV 14) :

We will have two types of shirts this year!

Navy, long-sleeve cotton shirts. Adult sizes XL, L, M, S and child sizes L, M, S.

Bimini blue, moisture-wicking, long-sleeve shirts. Adult sizes XL, L, M, S and child sizes L, M, S.

LIABILITY WAIVER:

Participants understand and acknowledge that the activity is voluntary and may be dangerous and hazardous and by its very nature poses potential risk. Participants assume liability and responsibility for any and all potential risks. CJCA, officers, and volunteers are not liable for any accidents or injuries incurred by participants.

~*vn*





CJCA News

by Scott Lewis and Kelly Banuls

The October CJCA meeting was held on Wednesday, October 22 at CBNRC.

1. The motion to accept September meeting minutes was seconded and approved.
2. eCommerce Update–CJCA requires an eCommerce platform for the Crab Feast, tee-shirts, trivia night and other events. Cheddar Up is the current provider, built for non-profits but is a bit clunky. CJCA will consider other options.
3. OPaL, a Cabin John-based builder, has scheduled a land use meeting, as required, for October 28.
4. November 4 meeting with Andrew Friedson to discuss current zoning laws and the impact to our community. Friedson will specifically address Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-03 which enables expedited approval for rezoning property from commercial to residential. Developers of the Level Fitness property have said they expect to use this expedited zoning. Heidi Lewis, Susan Shipp and Taffy Kingscott plan to connect to prepare for the meeting.
5. The Turkey Trot was discussed and a t-shirt design vote was taken. Long sleeve cotton tees were the winner.
6. Crab Feast financial update–revenue from this year's event was $11.5K. Net revenue was $1.4K, which was lower than in the past but attributed to additional investments in equipment. Street sellers were again discussed.
7. New Cabin John directory–distribution is planned for November.
8. Cabin John sign–the current version was previously been voted on and approved. The question of revisiting the design and placement was raised.
9. Can we improve CBNRC with Level closing? After pursuing this option it does not seem like there are many avenues to improve the existing space, equipment or hours.

The November CJCA meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 19 at 7:30pm at CBNRC. CJCA will facilitate a discussion on land use in Cabin John, broadly construed. *~vn*

LISAN MARTIN THERAPY



Lisan Martin, a psychotherapist with 35 years of experience, provides counseling to individuals, couples, and families. A Cabin John resident, Lisan is licensed in DC, MD, and VA and sees clients virtually and in person at her Cabin John office.

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Local History

by Rachel Donnan

NOVEMBERS PAST IN CABIN JOHN

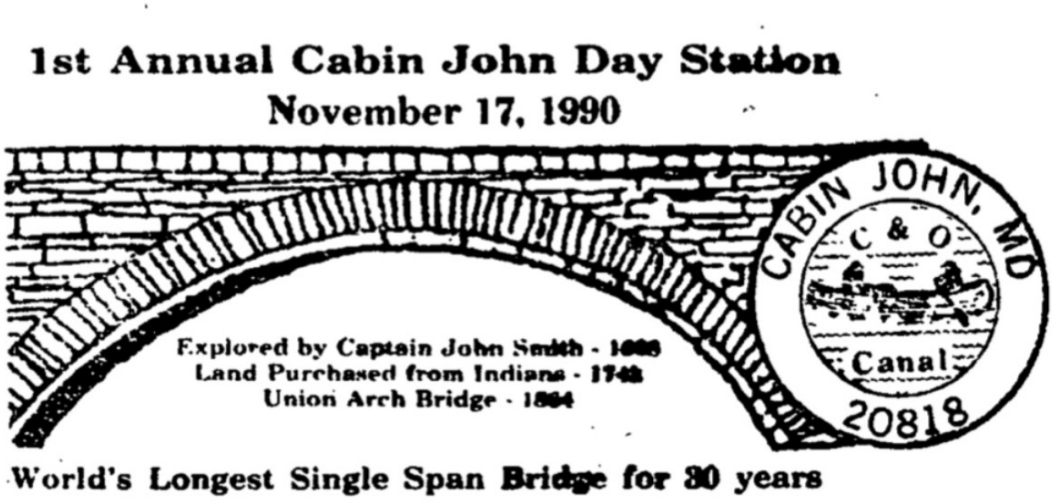
The Village News has been going strong for over fifty years. Looking back through the November issues of the newsletter (or any issues) offers a brief snapshot of Cabin John throughout the years. It goes without saying that the Chicken & Crab Feast got top billing in many of them! But it is also interesting to note that some of the community's concerns in the 1970s and 1980s—airplane noise, development—are still being collectively addressed today.

Here are some of the headline stories and tidbits from past November issues:

In 1970, just a few years after the *Village News* started, a bake sale sponsored by the majorettes and the PTA raked in $90 on Election Day. Over 70% of registered voters in Cabin John and Bannockburn came out, "and that's something to be proud of." A classified ad in 1972 read "Needed: One Village News Deliverer. We need a deliverer for the 100 houses in the Cabin John Gardens! This will earn some lucky person $1 every month!" In 1975, "the protests by the Cabin John community concerning 'noise pollution' by jet plane overflights brought about a meeting with officials from the FAA, EPA and various elected officials...about 400 jets roar overhead daily." "Goodbye, N-8 Bus Line." On November 12, 1976, with champagne and pretzels being passed around, the N-8 bus made its final trip through Cabin John. "The little buses—their small size geared to weight limitation on MacArthur—had been running since 1960 when the last of the old No. 20 trolley cars had given up their ghost." "Cabin John has finally been granted two crosswalks on MacArthur Blvd" following several accidents with cars and pedestrians, declared the 1984 issue. An advertisement in this issue listed a "House for Sale: 6503 81st Street, 3 bedrooms for $128,000." A 1987 story with some urgency explained "'Cabin John's Future is Directly Involved in Updating Master Plan. Citizen and Community Action Gets Under Way.' Your involvement is needed now if you want to influence the type of community Cabin John will be in the next decades." Issues included transportation; facilities and services; historic sites; development and environment, which noted that all development must be considered in the context of preserving the existing sense of space in Cabin John by maintaining trees and narrow streets; protecting streams, springs and drainage; and retaining the current housing scale and density.

In 1990, the Cabin John Post Office celebrated its first Customer Appreciation Day. A 1929 postal van was on site and customers could get a specially designed Cabin John cancellation on their mail. The Wild Bird Center on MacArthur Boulevard (where Level Fitness is today) celebrated its 8th birthday in 1993 by hosting two bald eagles and a peregrine falcon for local visitors. In 2004, cyclist Lance Armstrong and the Tour of Hope rode down "Cabin John's 'Main Street." In addition to 20 team members, over 1000 local riders joined the last leg from Rockville to the Mall," passing by many residents who lined MacArthur Boulevard. A photo of Cabin John's unofficial mayor, Danny Harris, and his wife Margaret smiling with their huge black walnut haul for the Potomac Conservancy's "Growing Native" program appeared in the 2007 issue. In 2011, Landell's Barbershop took over the space previously occupied by Sharon's Bouquet Florist by Captain's Market. Hair cuts were $16 and a hot shave $14.

"Cabin John Citizens Association Meeting Looks at Air and Street Traffic" yet again in 2016, one of many times these serious concerns were raised in the newsletter over the decades. In 2017, "The Inaugural Cabin John Turkey Trot Set for Thanksgiving Day" was announced. The 2.5 mile run/walk goes down MacArthur, along the C&O Canal, then up to and across the one ane bridge. The Turkey Trot continues to be a community favorite. "Cabin John Citizens Association Commits $2000 for Moses Hall Cemetery Clean-Up." In 2019, half the profits from the 50th Annual Chicken & Crab Feast funded the initial clean up of the culturally significant African American burial site on Seven Locks Road. The Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Cemetery and Hall was named one of America's Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2021. ~VN



In 1990, the Cabin John Post Office celebrated Customer Appreciation Day with this specially designed Cabin John cancellation stamp.

LEAVE THE LEAVES AND SAVE OUR FIREFLIES

by Cathie Nelsen



Fall is traditionally the time for raking up leaves and removing them. But, what if you didn't and left them under trees, bushes, and in your garden beds?

Some years ago, I began putting native plants in my garden for pollinators and birds. I'd read that they were under great stress, and one of these was loss of habitat. So I set out to create food and shelter sources. The more I noticed the myriad little bees, butterflies and even hummingbirds feeding at my flowers, the more I wanted to learn.

What I've learned is the vital importance to wildlife of leaving a three to five inch layer of leaves in your garden, wherever it's appropriate. If this blanket of leaves is under an oak, which supports a staggering 519 species of moths and butterflies, there will be countless hibernating caterpillars, and firefly larvae, who both shelter under the leaves and hunt for the tiny mites and insects they eat. Birds will dig into the leaves for these insects as well. About 80% of a bird's preferred diet is insects.

While you're cleaning up the garden for winter, if you leave your perennials the birds will eat their seeds, and tiny native bees hibernate in hollow stems. These bees are mostly solitary, and not aggressive, and are extremely important for pollination in our ecosystem. If you do cut the plants back, leave the bottom 12-18" for the hibernators.

A mulch of leaves also nourishes the soil, decomposing over the winter, retaining moisture as well as buffering sudden temperature changes, and preventing erosion. And it's cheaper and better than wood chip mulch. Groups such as the National Wildlife Federation, the National Park Service, Xerces and Wild Birds Unlimited all recommend this gardening technique.

Please help to protect the wildlife that sustains us!





Numerous organizations are encouraging gardeners to leave a layer of leaves on their yards during the fall and winter. This practice provides habitat for insects and the birds who consume them. ~vn

Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center

Winter Program Registration

Wednesday, November 18, at 6:30am for county residents for most programs and activities. Registration for all senior programs will begin at 9am. Registration for our programs will take place online at ActiveMONTGOMERY.org and in person.

Annual Craft Show -- Sunday, December 7, 2025

Free Admission 1:00pm - 5:00pm



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CLOSED:
November 27
December 19 - January 4

Ad funded by Friends of Clara Barton Community Center, www.FriendsCBCC.org

Our Town

by Annemarie Economou Gormley

BARRY WHO?

I seem to meet someone every time I drop by to chat with Bernie Saal at the Cabin John Post Office. In addition to providing efficient and friendly customer service, Bernie enjoys sharing anecdotes with me and others. Bill and I think he could be a standup comedian if he desired. Frequently, I get to know the customers in his audience.

One customer asked me, "Oh, are you the lady that writes for *The Village News*?"

"Yes."

"You need to write about Barry," she encouraged.

"Barry who?" I asked, as I silently reminisced of the days when I had revelled in the music of Barry White, Barry Manilow and Barry Gibb.

"Barry Jones, over at the Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center."

I was in the Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center (CBNRC) last December for the annual holiday party where I had been a judge of baked goods entered in The Great CJ Bake Off. What a fun day that had been! Obviously, it was time for me to return.

Barry was hired in 2016 as director of Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center. By all accounts, he has done a great job. Barry described his childhood to me: "I grew up around recreation centers and going to community centers in Arlington. They were always the place for kids to come to and hangout, and do different activities after school. They were always safe places for people to go to."

Two things are clear about Barry: he loves sports, and he loves working with teens. During his youth, Barry played basketball and football and dreamed of being involved in sports in some way as an adult. He earned a degree in sports management from George Mason University. For a period of time during his years at GMU, he worked for the Washington



Barry Jones, director of CBNRC, accompanies a group from the 55+ program at CBNRC on a hay ride.



Barry Jones in front of the "ice" rink at CBNRC's Winter Festival.

Wizards in their basketball operations department and also with the equipment manager and players. He then met a classmate who worked for "Neighborhood and Community Services" through the Fairfax County government. His classmate needed help with the teen programs, so Barry took a part-time job there; he enjoyed it immensely and stayed for five years.

After his Fairfax job, Barry lived in Arizona, just outside of Phoenix. The beauty of the scenery and the warmth of the sunshine left a lasting impression. The West will always tug at his heart. Upon returning to the DC area, a school principal offered him a teaching assistant job that included physical education classes for middle school students, which he loved. Barry has a passion for working with teens and hopes more will come to the rec center. "The center is a place for teens to come-in, hang out, enjoy themselves, be with their friends and be sociable," explains Barry. He recognizes that many kids in Cabin John have extracurricular activities in

See BARRY on pg. 11

"Neighborhoods along the canal are my specialty - I live there and love it!"



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View From Minnie's Island

by Joe Saliunas

RESTORING TREE CANOPY ONE SAPLING AT A TIME

If you look at old photos of Minnie's Island, one of the first things you notice is the abundance of trees across the island. This started changing in the 2010s, as the emerald ash borer spread to our area, rapidly killing ash trees of all sizes within several years. The impacts to Minnie's Island were significant, as ash trees were among the largest and most common trees on the island. Areas that used to be fully shaded were exposed to the sun, often resulting in explosive growth of non-native, invasive vines, which further impacted the remaining trees. The large sunny expanses also limited use of much of the island during the summer months.

When Minnie's Island Community Conservancy (MICC) was formed in 2021, an early goal was to restore the tree canopy on the island. Four years in, we are making good progress toward that goal. In 2022, we planted about ten small (one foot) hybrid American chestnuts. Several are now over ten feet tall. In 2023, we made a large purchase of saplings (also about one foot) from the Maryland State Tree Nursery. We planted dozens of Virginia pine, white oak, cherry, locust, and river birch trees. Many of the Virginia pines are now over four feet tall, and the slower-growing oak trees are about three feet tall. We planted the water-loving river birch closer to the river, but it is not clear if they survived several floods. This spring we planted about fifteen larger (six to eight foot) white oak and red oak trees using funding provided through a Chesapeake Bay Trust grant. Oak trees are considered a keystone species that supports a large variety of insects and animals. All of the newly planted oak trees appear to be doing well. We also planted a small number of native ornamental trees, including red bud, American plum, and sweet crabapple.

Joe Saliunas is certified as a Maryland Master Naturalist and is Vice-Chair of Minnie's Island Community Conservancy.

Another early MICC goal was to remove (or control) the significant growth of the non-native invasive plants. As the removal continued, it became apparent that there was significant growth of naturally occurring saplings that self-seeded, including bitternut hickory, hackberry, elm, ash, locust, and beech. These are some of the fastest growing trees, as they started from seed and developed healthy root systems early on.



Minnie's Island Community Conservancy volunteers have been hard at work planting new trees for island canopy. Seen here is an eight foot white oak.

Our success has taken significant effort. We cage all of our larger saplings in fourteen gauge wire to protect them from deer browse and buck rub, and we often need to increase cage size every year to match the trees' growth. At least twice a year we clear the cages and areas around the trees of invasive vines. In addition, we have had to water newly-planted trees during dry times, including significant effort this summer to ensure our newly-planted oak trees had access to water. We have not noticed beaver impacts on the island

See MINNIE'S on pg. 14

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BARRY *Continued from pg. 7*

addition to their school work, so their time is limited, but he wants them to know that they are always welcome to stop by with friends and chill over a game of pool or ping pong. He is very eager to fulfill your vision for the center. If there is a program you would like to see at the center, talk to Barry.

Outside of work, Barry loves sports and plays basketball and football. He enjoys following teams and watching their games. Barry also enjoys traveling. He has a brother in Colorado that he loves to visit. To this day, the warmth and mountains of Arizona lure Barry back for vacations. "I don't like the cold weather at all. I usually take off for a couple of weeks in December and go out west because I miss the weather. Even though I am from here, I miss the West. I love the heat." He also loves dogs. He has had three Akitas, a large, loyal, powerful dog breed from Japan. His current dog is Kyuss, who was adopted when the then 7-month old dog's owner died. The dog had already been named after the band Sons of Kyuss. Barry liked the name because it reminded him of his previous Akita, Kai, a sweet female that he had adopted from a shelter.

When you are out walking in the neighborhood, stop in and meet Barry. He is a gentle soul who loves our community and wants what is best for it. "I enjoy coming to work everyday." He is proud of his staff and enjoys working alongside them. He loves spending time with the regulars who come into the center, and looks forward to seeing and meeting new people.



Barry Jones and Brandi Scott-Swales, director of the 55+ program, enjoy bowling and lunch at Pinstripes with Lolita Swarup, Roger Swarup, Susan Gelb and Elaine Hornauer.

If you have a story to tell, or a suggestion for a story, please reach out to me at annemarie.gormley23@gmail.com or 703-509-7008. ~*vn*

NEW TO CABIN JOHN?
EMAIL US TO RECEIVE A WELCOME KIT:
cjcapresidents@gmail.com



Poems For Passersby

Presented by Meredith Griggs

NOVEMBER WITH ANIMALS

The sunflowers have gone to seed.
A squirrel made off with the head of one
Holding it square in his little paws, like a sandwich.
The laying hen won't lay, though she looks
Up to the job.

The moon went from small to half to full.
Popular opinion about the future turned sour again.
The gourds had swelled, and plump were the hazel shells.
The sun stayed hot, and shone and shone,
And burned up some of the mountains.

The moon went full and it turned blue.
Relations with the neighbors went south again.
When the leaves fall you can see straight into the kitchen,
You can see me, if something goes wrong with the dinner,
Stamping my feet like a child.

The light's gone wan and thin as an egg white.
The ink stain on the sofa fades of its own volition.
The stabled animals settle and fluff.
The laying hen won't lay, though she looks
Up to the job.

---Lindsay Turner

Poet, critic and translator from the French, Lindsay Turner is an Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Case Western University. She has published two collections of poems.



On their way home from Pyle Middle School, Phoebe Fishburn and Tegan Welch of Tomlinson Terrace along with Mila Wang of 78th Street stop to read a poem. New poems are posted each Sunday on upper 78th Street.

Letters to the Editor

The Village News welcomes letters to the editor on topics affecting life here in Cabin John. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

A letter to my Cabin John neighbors:

If you haven't met me before, my name is Sean Ruppert. I have lived on 79th Street for 13 years in a house my company built. I have raised my twins, Maddie and Patrick, in Cabin John. Maddie attended Bannockburn and now Pyle; Patrick, with special needs, attends other nearby public schools with programs that work for him. We frequent MacArthur Plaza daily and took our recently deceased dog, Obie, to Alpine Veterinary Hospital. My husband has run in the Cabin John Turkey Trot and the Cabin John 4th of July Parade gathers on our lawn. Cabin John has not only been our home, but it has been a source of pride and community for our family. We love living here.

So I would like to apologize to anyone who feels uncomfortable about our development plans at 7687 MacArthur Boulevard. My intent in all of this was to follow my passion—for homebuilding, for Cabin John and for providing unique options to the region's homebuyers. I would never do anything to intentionally cause harm to another neighbor or, worse, to this special community we live in. This letter is my attempt to provide some understanding and context around the homes we are building.

My development company, OPaL (www.opaldc.com), has been in business for 24 years. We specialize in historic renovations and developing infill parcels of land. We are currently working on five historic properties in DC plus several new homes in Rehoboth and Cabin John. We intentionally design the homes to be unlike others you see around you. This may include, for example, a new Sears home. Or a century-old chapel on Capitol Hill. Or it may include thoughtful features that other builders don't think of., like using natural light in creative ways to brighten and warm a home. Feel free to visit our site and see the quality of work we do and learn the story behind our company.

Our journey with 7687 MacArthur Boulevard

The property had actually been brought to my attention prior to being listed for sale with the intent for me to purchase the property. I declined because I knew anything built on that lot would be controversial. Several months went by and the land was put under contract by another developer. Upon seeing their plans for 11 4-story homes, I was just as offended as you were, and I attended their community meeting. It was a horrible plan. Thankfully a few months later the buyers withdrew their offer.

A few more months passed without any legitimate offers on the property. After seeing the proposal for 11 homes, the possibilities for what could be built there legally were a bit frightening; I assumed everyone would feel the same. I felt if my company developed the project, we could ensure a scaled down proposal with more attractive and appropriate single-family homes. Someone was going to develop that parcel and at least with us doing it, it wouldn't be such a crapshoot as to the quality of the homes and the integrity of the location. I also thought most people would agree.

Over the years, the property has been home to a myriad of small businesses, from a penny candy store, post office and hair salon, to a bike shop, outdoor equipment sales, franchise sales, wild bird

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DID YOU KNOW?

According to the *Journal of Light Construction*'s "2025 Cost vs. Value Report," the following improvements to your home will maximize return on your investment:

1. Improvements to your home's exterior reap maximum rewards, with garage door replacements garnering a 268% return on investment, new entry doors seeing a 216% return, and stone veneer facades bringing a 208% return.
2. Minor mid-range upgrades to kitchen and baths, like new fronts for your cabinets and upgraded countertops, bring a 113% return, while major kitchen overhauls see just 51% return.
3. Expanding the footprint of your home with a new composite or wood deck brings an 89% and 95% return, respectively.
4. New vinyl or wood windows, as well as HVAC upgrades, all earned returns at or above 70%.

"Living in Cabin John for over 30 years I'm invested in the success of selling homes here."

Rachelle Cherol
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LETTERS *Continued from pg. 12*

center and a gym. Long-term success was fleeting for each business. When the property was listed for sale, the next logical consequence, if the gym operators could not purchase the property, was the gym needed to find a new home. This wasn't something we did. It's what happens when private properties are sold. As former members of the gym, we often wondered how they were making ends meet with the limited number of people we saw using the facility. Sometimes we were the only people there. Certainly, there were times of success, however, that was not our experience prior to or after Covid. We have been surprised that everyone didn't see the end of the gym was imminent when the property was listed for sale.

If the property stays commercial, there are concerns in the community about its business viability, based on the history of commercial ventures at that address. In total, there were only three legitimate contracts with deposits written on the property—two residential offers and a 24-hour emergency veterinarian. After almost a year on the market this should demonstrate the real-world possibilities of the property.

For those who want the property to remain commercial

Just some perspective for those who want the address to stay commercial... what kind of business would be something the entire community would get on board with? What about dumpsters? Where will they be and what time of the morning will they be emptied? What about rats? Or parking and traffic if the business is successful? What about delivery trucks? (I can tell you firsthand as someone who lives across from MacArthur Plaza, the deliveries by diesel trucks and dumpster pick-ups at 6 am are not wonderful.) Retaining the existing buildings for commercial use is also problematic. None of the three buildings are ADA-compliant and none of them have modern fire suppression systems. All three buildings would require retrofitting, the costs of which would outweigh the value of the buildings.

If the 24-hour emergency veterinarian bought the property, what about round-the-clock traffic? A parking lot lit up all night? Outdoor dog runs? How about the property values of the homes adjacent to it? As an example, the only home not to sell in Cabin John after a year on the market was a new home that shares a property line with MacArthur Plaza—the owners decided to rent the property after 12 months on the market and several price reductions. During the same 12-month period all other homes for sale in Cabin John were sold and settled.

Mixed opinions on our plans for 7687 MacArthur Boulevard

We've received a lot of criticism about the five mid-century inspired homes we plan on building on the lot. But we have also received a lot of support. Some of our neighbors have told us they feel there is nothing that would make everyone happy. They told us that, if the current business was going to stop operating regardless and the lot was going to be developed into homes, that they trust us to do it the right way and have the community's interest in mind. And we do. It is our community too. It is the only place our children have ever called home.

With 34 modern, contemporary or mid-century modern homes in Cabin John, 43 modern rowhomes just across the street and 83 mid-century modern split-level homes off Persimmon Tree, we feel there is a tradition of the style we propose, and it fits in quite well. We adore the architecture. It may not be your preference, but these homes are beautiful and will be impeccably appointed, befitting their Cabin John neighborhood.

See LETTERS next page

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REAL ESTATE ACTIVITY IN CABIN JOHN

ACTIVE

6514 76th Street
List Price $3,499,000
6 BR, 5/2 BA, 2 GAR
4,471 sq. ft.

6525 76th Street
List Price $2,549,000
6 BR, 4/1 BA, 3 GAR
5,5551 sq. ft.

6629 81st Street
List Price $1,975,000
6 BR, 6 BA, 2 GAR
3,794 sq. ft.

7509 Arden Road
List Price $999,000
3 BR, 2 BA, 0 GAR
1,478 sq. ft.

27 Carver Road
List Price $1,000,000
3 BR, 3 BA, 0 GAR
1,147 sq. ft.

4 Russell Road
List Price $649,000
2 BR, 1 BA, 0 GAR
926 sq. ft.

CLOSED

6410 Wishbone Terrace
Sold Price $975,000
4 BR, 3/1 BA, 2 GAR

Courtesy of Cabin John Realtor Rachelle Cherol

LETTERS *Continued from pg. 13*

After hearing the feedback for the original, 11-home proposal from another builder, we chose to create low rooflines and carports. These traits make the homes more pedestrian friendly and allow 2-car covered parking without the large, forward-facing 2-car garage doors that are typical on garage homes. Our homes are only 32' tall and far less dense than the previous proposal. To help alleviate concerns about storm water we offered partial green roofs and permeable driveways along with reducing the current lot coverage by 20%. To ensure the streetscape resembled single family homes rather than townhomes a great deal of effort was placed on the separation of the homes, the pattern of the roof lines and keeping the attached areas between the homes to a single story while also planting the roof to further obscure the connection. Currently there are fewer than three trees on the property, we plan to install 18 trees and over 12 dozen other plantings, far exceeding the current plant and tree inventory on the site. We have also adjusted the appearance of the homes based on constructive feedback from our voluntary meeting over the summer.

Thank you all for your continued support

We are buying this property as a way of preserving the Cabin John way of life, not to impact it negatively. We have a thriving business that has lasted throughout the years, including the great recession. It's not about just making a buck as some have said. It's about creating a community Maddie and Patrick can feel proud to live in—one I and my husband and our neighbors can be proud to live in. Maybe one day our kids will bring their partners here and say with pride, "My dads built that."

Things have gotten heated over this project. I hope you can all know we're just dads trying to do right by our community. A community we love. A community that opened their hearts to us and our unconventional family. A community we have built homes in in the past and even moved in next door to those new homeowners because we have no problem owning our work and being accountable for it. If you don't know us, we are a lot like you. We certainly share your love for the neighborhood and its natural surroundings. It's a gem. And gems have many facets.

To our dozens of supporters, thank you. Thank you for the kind words and your incredibly thoughtful emails; I have never seen such thought put into support emails and I appreciate it. To the many supporters who whisper their support when we run into each other in the neighborhood, just know we hear you and we respect your wish to cheer us on from the sidelines. And to those who don't support us, we get it. It's hard to trust change, especially when it comes to something you love. We are going to come through for you and this community because we love it too. And if we don't fulfill that promise, you know where to find us.

Sean Ruppert

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO RUN THE DEC. 14 CJ HOLIDAY PARTY

Please contact Scott and Heidi Lewis (cjcapresidents@gmail.com) if you can help with one of the following things: decorations/set up, food pickup/setup, table & chairs setup, kids crafts, Santa's gifts to kids, contacting local merchants to get raffle items, Christmas tree pickup/setup, and cleanup.

MINNIE'S *Continued from pg. 9*

in the last several years, but we constantly monitor and we would cage our larger trees if beaver activity is noticed.

As we approach the winter months, I'd like to remind prospective island visitors to exercise caution due to the dangers of cold water. While Minnie's will remain open to visitation during the day, MICC typically does not sponsor events from November through February, when the combined air and water temperatures are below 100 degrees, or when the river level is above five feet as measured at Little Falls. ~*VM*





Minnie's Island Community Conservancy volunteers have planted hackberry (left) and Virginia pine (below).

ANNUAL CABIN JOHN HAUNTED HOUSE

by Burr Gray

The annual haunted house held at the Clara Barton Neighborhood Recreation Center proved once again to be a big draw. Approximately 250 kids attended, dragging their reluctant and frightened parents behind them. Many middle and high schoolers got SSL hours by guiding, assisting, chopping, screaming or casting spells. CJ resident Shannon Rosenthal organized the event, with help from other Friends of Clara Barton Community Center (FCBCC) Board members, in conjunction with the rec center. The event is a true partnership with the county. CBNRC Director Barry Jones and his staff arranged for and set up all of the tents, draping, supervision of outdoor games, and pitched in with takedown and cleanup. Perhaps the scariest part for those who were brave enough to ask were the observations and advice of our three fortune tellers, Caroline Casey, Jan Iris Smith, and Mary Tyszkiewicz. Glen Echo Pizza & Subs opened on Sunday solely to provide the 64 pizzas needed to feed the frightened and hungry masses. Many thanks to the owner, Girma, and his assistant Candy. ~vn

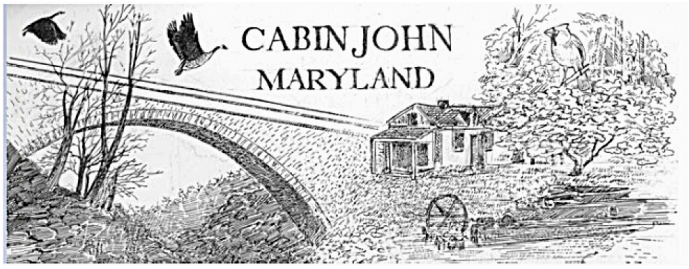








Many brave souls dared to celebrate Halloween at the haunted house sponsored by Friends of Clara Barton Community Center at the rec center. Festivities extended onto the blacktop and playground areas.



The Village News is a monthly newsletter published since 1967 by the Cabin John Citizens Association. Ten issues are published a year and mailed free to every household in Cabin John. Others may subscribe for $12 per year. Send news, articles, and letters to: VNeditorial@gmail.com. Send advertising inquiries and subscription requests to: VNbusinessmanager@gmail.com. Reach CJCA leadership at cjcapresidents@gmail.com. You can contact *The Village News* by mail at Village News, P.O. Box 31, Cabin John, MD 20818.

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CJCA, P.O. Box 31, Cabin John, MD 20818

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Community Calendar

NOV	*All events at Clara Barton Neighborhood Rec Center unless otherwise noted*
19	CJCA Meeting 7:30pm
27	Turkey Trot 10:00am
DEC	
7	Craft Show 1pm - 5pm
14	Holiday Party 5pm - 7pm

Plan to Attend the Holiday Party Dec. 14

- Fantastic kids' crafts with the Rec Center staff
- Food, drink, live music, and merry-making for all ages
- Raffle! Restaurant vouchers, local services, a Christmas Tree donated by Hughes Landscaping, and more. All proceeds go to support our SOME families
- Perhaps a visitor from way up North!