

Community Relations Committee Activities: Jan. 2013–July 2014

The Committee is proud to report the following activities for the latter half of the year:

Events/Community Service

- **Holiday Gift Drive** – Thanks to the efforts of Cathy Wolf, Committee member emeritus, the Town partnered with the Montgomery County Abused Persons Program and Chesapeake Counseling for the annual Holiday Gift Drive for domestic violence victims and their children. A final report showed that the drive had raised about \$2,500 in gift cards, and 12 families/residents had opted to give gifts (some with gift cards) to adopted needy families.
- **Property Tax Assessment Talk** – Gerard Barber, Assessor Manager of the State of Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation, gave a very informative talk on and answered questions about the property tax assessment process and related issues on February 5. Twenty-three interested residents attended. Mr. Barber not only agreed to respond to phone calls from residents, but also urged residents to appeal their assessments when they receive them. A follow-up Town Crier posted Mr. Barber’s contact information to give more residents the opportunity to ask questions about the state’s assessment process.
- **Movie Nights for Families** – The ever-popular first Friday Movie Nights for Families continued in 2014, featuring *The Lorax* on February 7 and *Despicable Me 2* on March 7. Pizza was served before the movies began.
- **Movie Nights for Grown-Ups** – Launched this year, Movie Nights for Grown-Ups proved very popular. About 30–40 residents turned out for the first showing, *Red Obsession*, which also featured matching Bordeaux wine and assorted cheeses. The second movie, *20 Steps from Stardom*, which won the Academy Award for best documentary film, was viewed by an appreciative crowd on March 14. Wine and refreshments were served. Both Town movie events were suspended after March, thanks to daylight savings time. A new round of both sets of films will resume in the fall.
- **Annual Chili Dinner** – The Town’s annual Chili Dinner on February 23 at the Chevy Chase Elementary School had a new twist this year: the addition of an ice cream sundae bar, which was a great hit. Magician Michael Chamberlain returned to entertain children. This year’s attendance exceeded that of last year, but without past years’ tendency for overcrowding, thus allowing residents time to enjoy their dinner. A total donation of \$530 continued the Town’s support of Manna Food Center. The Committee will look into having the Compost Crew help reduce trash at this event in the future.
- **Round House Theatre Event** – Twenty-one residents attended the play *Seminar* and the reception after the show on the rescheduled (thanks to snow!) date of February 26. Arrangements were made so that those who had purchased tickets but could not attend that night had another opportunity to attend the show. Given the success of Round House outings to date, the Committee plans to hold two theater nights next year.
- **Winter Clothing Drive** – This year’s drive, partnered with the Lawton Center’s B-CC Youth Advisory Committee, ran from January through February, collecting about 80 winter wear items, which were donated to Bethesda Cares.
- **Classical Music Concert** – Town resident musicians Jeremy and Jessica Eig organized and played in a Mozart and Stamitz program for the March 16 concert, which was well received, with more than 50 attending. The Committee discussed continuing these concerts next year featuring other musical genre, such as jazz, country music, swing, and the like. (over)

- **Progressive Dinner** – The March 22 Progressive Dinner (Moveable Feast) was a great success with nine dinner homes and four dessert homes featuring food supplied by eight dinner chefs and eight dessert chefs. Approximately 85 attended. The Committee approved increasing the stipends for hosts and chefs and hopes to continue this event every 2–3 years.
- **RainScapes Workshop** – In cooperation with the Climate and Environment Committee, the Committee hosted a well-attended presentation by the Montgomery County RainScapes Program. The program offers a rebate for planting rain gardens, installing rain barrels, replacing hard surfaces with permeable pavers, etc. To encourage the reduction of runoff, the County will perform a free property assessment on request and then make recommendations.
- **Drum Circle** – Back by popular demand, on March 29, the Drum Circle gave adults and children the fun opportunity to play drums together in varied rhythms. Engagingly led by Jonathan Murray, the event entertained in all about 50 adults and children, with a number of them coming and going throughout the event’s timeframe.
- **Play Dates in the Park** – Two Play Dates for toddlers, their siblings, and parents were held at the Lawton Center playground. Both were very popular and will resume in the fall. Well over 50 parents and children enjoyed the April 26 event, followed by more than 40 residents on May 31. Coffee and bagels were provided.
- **Town Bake-Off** – Although this popular annual event, unfortunately, had to be cancelled this April because of a lack of baker participation, the Committee plans to hold it again next year.
- **Garden Tour** – On May 18, seven Town gardens and one specimen tree were on view from 1 to 5 p.m., followed by a reception at 5 p.m. About 70–80 residents, with one home reporting more than 100 visitors, took part. A number of those attending had not come to prior Town events. Two Master Gardeners toured all the gardens and attended the reception where they offered literature.
- **Arbor Walk** – On June 7, Tolbert Feather, Town arborist, conducted a workshop focused on pruning techniques and then led a brief tour to demonstrate the skills he had taught. Close to 30 interested residents attended and were treated to coffee and bagels.
- **July 4th Parade and Picnic** – This year the big event will be held on the Lawton Center grounds because the school is unavailable. An estimated 450 residents and guests are expected to attend the parade and picnic, which will feature a reading of the Declaration of Independence; a variety of food, including the ever-popular Ben & Jerry’s truck; a three-member Dixieland band; and games. The Compost Crew and the Climate and Environment Committee will assist with efforts to recycle as much as possible, thus leaving little trash (only six bags last year!).

Communications

- **Microphone Recommendation** – The Committee recommended that the Town purchase an improved microphone system for the Town Hall.
- **Town Contribution Policy** – In January, based on the Committee’s work in 2013, the Town Council adopted a revised Contribution Policy and a set of implementation procedures.
- **Social Media** – In April, the Committee, with the help of resident Mary Flynn and Committee member Aki Peritz, examined the possible launch of the Town’s presence on Facebook and Twitter to provide additional ways to communicate with residents. The Town Council was receptive to the Committee’s recommendation that the Town become involved in social media. The Town’s Social Media Policy was drafted by the Town staff and Council, and both information tools were launched to residents on July 1. The Committee plans to hold an event in the fall to explain to residents how to use these new information tools.