

## Is Your Property Properly Assessed?

The Society Hill Civic Association (SHCA) hosted a neighborhood meeting on Thursday, May 24 to discuss the recent hike in market value of many properties in this neighborhood. Our councilman, Mark Squilla, invited James Aros Jr., Deputy Chief Assessment Officer of the Philadelphia Office of Property Assessment (OPA), to answer questions from the capacity audience gathered at the Pennsylvania Hospital's Zubrow Auditorium.



**Standing room only at the May 24 neighborhood meeting addressing property assessment hikes.**



**Deputy Chief Assessment Officer James Aros Jr., (left) and Councilman Mark Squilla.**

As readers might be aware, property assessments released by the city showed a rise in home values across Philadelphia, with sections around Fairmount Park and South Philly most affected.

The 2019 assessment presented an overall 10.5 percent increase in the median market value for single-family homes. Nearly every neighborhood below South Street saw assessments spike more than 20 percent. This comes on the heels of a 4.1 percent proposed property tax hike, which Mayor Jim Kenney requested from city council in order to cover school funding.

Mr. Aros informed attendees that OPA considers a number of factors to determine assessed values of residential properties. These include the size and age of the property, its location and condition, whether it is used as a home or business and recent sales of similar properties in the area.

Fortunately, residents have options if they wish to dispute their new tax assessment. Although the deadline of May 25 for the optional "First Level Review" has passed, there is also a formal appeal process conducted by the Board of Revision of Taxes. The deadline is October 1, 2018.

For those who have lived in their homes for more than 10 years and have had their property taxes triple from one year to the next, there is a real estate tax abatement program called LOOP.

If you own a primary residence in Philadelphia, you are eligible for the Homestead Exemption on your real estate tax. It works by reducing the taxable portion of your property assessment by \$30,000, with most homeowners saving about \$400.

Meet certain age and income requirements and the amount of property tax you pay each year will not increase, even if your property assessment or the tax rate changes. This is called the Low-Income Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Freeze.

Contact OPA at 215-686-9200 or online at [www.phila.gov/opa](http://www.phila.gov/opa) for more information on any of these options.

*As this issue goes to press, Councilman Squilla has informed us that a new budget package has been passed by City Council. It nixes the 4.1 percent increase in Philadelphia's 2019 property tax rate and raises the Homestead Exemption to \$40,000.*

**SHCA INSTRUMENTAL IN McCALL MUSIC**

**Find out more about how your membership dues are spent on page 3.**

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The views set forth in the opinion articles are the views of the authors and are not necessarily those of SHCA.

**Submissions**

If you have news that would be of interest to Society Hillers, email Sandra Rothman at [sandra.rothman@aol.com](mailto:sandra.rothman@aol.com). Materials must be submitted in writing and include the name of a contact person. Edited submissions will be considered for publication if space permits. Letters to the Editor must be signed, with contact information.

**SHCA Mission Statement**

The aims and purposes of SHCA are: to promote the improvement of the Society Hill area of Philadelphia, including its cultural, educational and civic activities, and the preservation and restoration of its historic buildings; to represent the residents of Society Hill in matters affecting the City of Philadelphia generally and Society Hill in particular; and to interpret the value and significance of Society Hill to the public.

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**P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E**

BY ROSANNE LOESCH

**The Microcosm We Call Home**

The long days of summer are here, and I do so enjoy strolling our historic neighborhood during this season. It is an especially good time to enjoy the beauty of Society Hill's many shade trees that line our streets and walkways. I have noted that there is almost a sharp divide in the amount of shade in and out of our neighborhood's boundaries, which are Walnut to Lombard Streets and the Delaware River to 8th Street.

Society Hill's abundance of large shade trees means that particular effort has been made by residents over the years to cultivate this lush greenery. Our trees keep us cool and provide beauty and interest at every turn. But I realize that we have to be vigilant as a community to keep them healthy and alive. Trees have a life cycle, but sometimes they sustain injury or disease and die. That is why our association has multiple ways to assist residents in paying for the care of and replacement of trees.

We offer subsidies for getting professional pruning, dead tree and stump removal, and for the planting of new or replacement trees. We also offer professional expertise through members of our association who are part of the citywide Tree Tenders program. (A shout out to Laura Lane, Bob Curley and their team!)

All of this information can be found on our website [www.societyhillcivic.org](http://www.societyhillcivic.org).

It is most important to pay attention to this microcosm of the natural environment in our urban setting. We need to think about watering the newly planted trees and regularly pruning them, especially in their first years of growth. The early pruning will start shaping the mature tree. Choosing the limbs that will give the best structure and cutting all of the suckers, especially around of the base of the tree, is really important. Don't let ivy grow up the tree, because it will quickly overtake it. Plants or organic mulch at the base can keep the soil from compacting too much and will allow for more water absorption.

I didn't know I was such a gardener until I wrote this column! But I know our residents share this common interest. The attention that Society Hillers pay in caring for their trees, planters, urns and window boxes make this neighborhood a truly pleasant place to live.

**Rosanne Loesch** is an attorney and former president of SHCA. She, her husband and two children have lived in a historic house on Spruce Street since 2002 and, before that, lived for 14 years in the Washington Square West neighborhood.



**Rosanne Loesch, SHCA President**

**M E M B E R S H I P D O L L A R S A T W O R K**

**Did You Know...**

That your membership dues help to support our neighborhood public school, the General George A. McCall School at 325 S. 7th Street? Most recently SHCA funded the keyboard lab, as well as hand bells, a Cajon pack drum and other instruments. In addition, we helped to improve the school's auditorium with new acoustic panels and spotlights.

**SHCA Board members visited McCall's new keyboard lab recently. Left to right: Dave Rucki, Mary Tracy, Mary Purcell, Sissie Lipton, Madeline Miller and Ben Speciale. Bill Jantsch not shown.**



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## SHCA COMPLETE STREETS COMMITTEE UPDATE

## Spruce &amp; Pine Streets Left Side Bike Lane Bill

Legislation to switch the existing bike lane to the left side of Spruce and Pine Streets as part of a repaving project scheduled for the fall of 2018 was considered at a recent June hearing by City Council's Streets Committee, chaired by our Councilman Mark Squilla. Three members from SHCA, including president Rosanne Loesch, appeared before the Committee and read their testimonies into the record. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the legislation, which combined the left side bike lane bill with more than 25 other bills in a single vote. It then moved on to the full City Council.

The city's Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems (oTIS) testified first and did not present any new evidence to bolster their fairly weak case that left side bike lanes are safer. Washington Square West and Center City Residents Association, which are the two other civic associations on Spruce and Pine Streets, both submitted testimony supporting the left side bike lane plan. Several people who have tragically sustained some very severe injuries while riding bikes testified, but there was no evidence presented that showed those accidents would have been avoided by left side bike lanes.

There was a strong call for safety measures to protect cyclists. SHCA testified that it also wants more safety, specifically pointing out the 13 recommendations in the Complete Streets study that SHCA commissioned in 2017. The city will be incorporating at least one of the recommendations — bike lane markings that continue through the intersection — as part of this repaving project.

In the end, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the legislation, and it was passed by the full City Council on June 22nd. SHCA was not at all surprised by this result. Our own councilman sponsored the legislation and shepherded it through the committee. The city obtained the approval of Washington Square West and Center City Residents Association. The other members of the Streets Committee deferred to two council members who represent the three civic areas, Councilmen Mark Squilla and Kenyatta Johnson, because the bike lanes on Spruce and Pine are entirely within their districts. SHCA will continue to work with the city to ensure the best outcome for our residents in the shift from left side parking to right side.

#### Unanswered Questions

For SHCA's part, we believe that throughout the process we raised important and seriously

warranted questions about the rationale for the left side bike lane. But those questions were not answered. The data that we requested in four separate meetings with oTIS was never provided. Specifically, oTIS declined to collect bike and vehicle turning counts on the intersections on the Spruce and Pine Streets corridor.

Absent crucial bike turning counts, it is impossible to know whether left side bike lanes will increase or decrease the rate of bike accidents on Spruce and Pine Streets.

Representatives of oTIS repeatedly stated that the blind spot issue is the major reason for putting the bike lanes on the left hand. But none of the expert sources in the transportation literature that oTIS cited as a basis for switching the lanes states that this would be the remedy for this issue. By its own admission, oTIS told SHCA that they are proceeding on limited data but with a strong belief that left side bike lanes will prevent accidents caused by the blind spot. The expert sources say that the best way to avoid blind spot crashes is to implement a public education campaign to encourage bicyclists and pedestrians to stay out of blind spots. The city is not doing this.

We certainly hope that the repaving project will provide more safety, such as smooth pavement, lane markings that you can actually see and bike lane markings that go all the way through intersections, which is not currently the case and is one of the recommendations from our Complete Streets study.

We thank the community for your involvement in analyzing this issue from a safe streets perspective. We thank those who attended meetings, circulated and signed the SHCA petitions, which were personally delivered to Councilman Squilla, and spent time engaging with neighbors on this issue. We respectfully acknowledge those members of our community who agreed with the majority of our board that oTIS needed to do more to demonstrate that this lane change would lead to more safety, and those members who strongly felt that the left side bike lanes will improve safety.



**The left side bike lane bill was passed despite unanswered questions. Repaving on Pine and Spruce Streets will begin this fall.**

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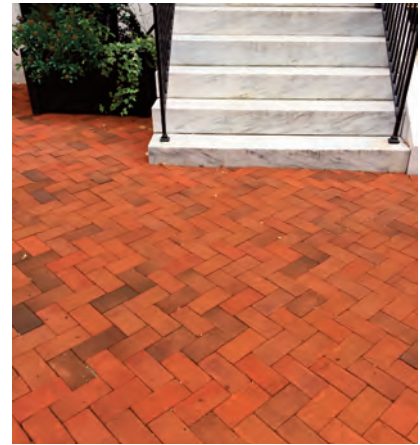
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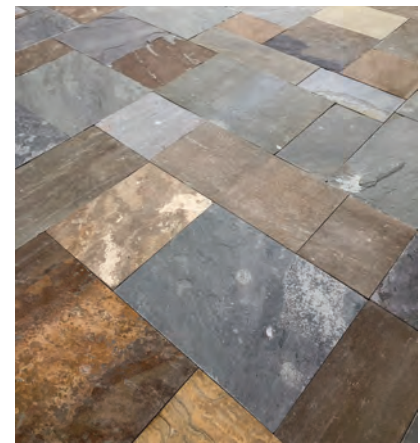
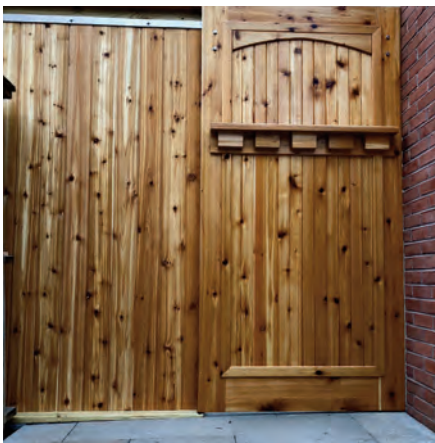
Brick sidewalks in Society Hill and downtown Philly are being renovated to provide a smooth, safe walking surface for pedestrians. We have experience and have repaired many sidewalks and patios in the city. The upheaval caused by tree roots can often be carefully corrected without removing or killing trees. Call McFarland to inquire about fixing your bricks.



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## COMMON SENSE EQUALS SAFE STREETS

BY CLAUDIA CARABELLI

## A Little Courtesy Minimizes the Need for Bureaucracy

“Complete Streets” is a popular topic in Philadelphia news these days. It’s all about ways to make city streets safe for all of us — pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users and motorists. With the recent and very tragic deaths of two bicyclists, the need for change has become even more pressing.

SHCA hired a professional traffic-engineering firm to do a Complete Streets study for our neighborhood. It includes solid research based on recommendations that were shared with the community and is on our website at [www.societyhillcivic.org](http://www.societyhillcivic.org). The city has also put forth its own proposals to improve safety for bicyclists, which include left-side bike lanes on Spruce and Pine Streets that are slated to be installed as part of a repaving project this fall. See Page 5 for more on this topic.

As someone who straddles all four groups, I’d like to offer some suggestions that are free, simple to implement and just make sense. We can start right now as we wait to see what the future holds.

#### Automobiles

Like it or not, if you’re driving a two-ton vehicle on city streets, you bear the bulk of the responsibility. You’re wielding a potentially deadly weapon that can kill at even moderate rates of speed. Did you know that fatality rates for car versus pedestrian accidents go from five percent at 20 mph to 45 percent at 30 mph? That small increase in speed can literally kill a human being. Even when the other person is in the wrong or slowing you down, the onus is on you. Your car is way too dangerous for it to be otherwise. Take a deep breath, slow down and yield. You may just save someone’s life.



**On the morning of June 8, a driver ran a red light at 5th and Lombard, causing a collision. Luckily the passenger in the flipped car was extricated alive by EMTs and transferred to the hospital.**

**Lots** of cars run red lights. Yes, I know there’s a three second delay from when your light turns red until the opposing traffic gets a green. That doesn’t mean you run it. Even a preschooler knows that “red means stop.”

Remember that driving safely requires your full attention. **Stay off the phone!** Drivers text with impunity while navigating around the city. If the temptation is too great, put your phone in the back seat while driving. Unless you’re on the list for an organ transplant, pretty much everything else can wait until you park.

Be sure to look twice before making a turn, opening your door into traffic or pulling over. Someone may be in your blind spot.

Buckle up to keep safe. And please don’t block the pedestrian crosswalks.

#### Bicycles

Riding a bike does not exempt you from traffic laws. Bicyclists are supposed to adhere to the same rules as motor vehicle operators, with very few exceptions. Stay off the sidewalk (unless you’re under 12), stop at red lights and stop signs, ride in the same direction as traffic and be courteous to others. Just as bicyclists have been killed by cars, so have pedestrians been killed by bicycles.

Biking is great exercise. It takes automobiles off the road and helps decrease our carbon footprint. It can also be dangerous. Remember that helmets save lives. Traumatic brain injury can result in devastating injuries and long-term disability. Being hardheaded doesn’t mean your skull is any competition for motor vehicles or concrete.

Visibility is key. It’s tough for drivers to see a non-illuminated biker in the dark. Lights, bike reflectors and reflective clothing make it much easier for everyone to spot you at night. It’s a small investment to stay safe.

#### Pedestrians

Walking has its own hazards. Never assume that a vehicle is stopping. Look both ways no matter what color the light. Make eye contact with turning vehicles before stepping out in front of them. Cross only at intersections. Look at the signal before stepping into the street to make sure you have the green. Don’t step out into the bike lane in front of cyclists, because you can cause them to suddenly brake or swerve, which is a constant hazard facing them. Please, no texting while crossing the street. Focus, people, focus!

#### Public Transit

Bus drivers navigate huge vehicles around the city. Don’t block the bus stops. They need room to pull over. Be careful stepping out from the front of the bus into traffic. It’s not a school bus, so cars won’t necessarily yield to you. And as much as we all hate to miss a bus, running into moving traffic to catch one is never a good idea.

None of this is difficult. Follow the rules. Be courteous. Pay attention.


**Claudia Carabelli** serves SHCA as a director at large.



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**WEED PATROL**

BY CLAUDIA CARABELLI AND MADELINE MILLER

# Seeking Volunteers for a Pesky Problem

Society Hill is filled with beautiful homes and gardens. Many residents take meticulous care of their properties by sweeping, weeding and planting. Others chronically neglect the outside of their homes and allow weeds to grow unchecked.

**Some facts about weeds**

Weeds are quite prolific, especially during spring and summer. The root system, along with the age and entrenchment of the weed, significantly affect the ease of removal. Growth is more likely where organic material accumulates, as it provides a bed for them to germinate. Some weeds also spring from seeds of nearby plants.

**What to do**

We propose a small group of volunteers to take on the challenge of weeding, sweeping organic debris, weed whacking and bagging. We'd prefer not to use weed killer, as it can contaminate the ground water and pose a risk to pets.

Block Coordinators could solicit help from residents on their blocks, encouraging more people to get involved. Properties we clear would receive an information sheet encouraging owners to follow up and providing specific weed-control advice.

Interested in being part of the solution?  
Contact Madeline at [eliotmill@aol.com](mailto:eliotmill@aol.com).

**Thank You Sissie, Welcome Sherley**

We thank board member Sissie Lipton, chair of the SHCA Washington Square Committee, for the years of labor she has dedicated to the beautification of our neighborhood park. We welcome Sherley Young as new chair of the Washington Square Committee.



**Sissie Lipton**



**Sherley Young**

**Become a Tree Tender!**

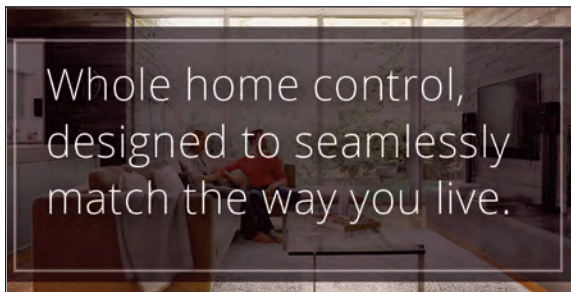
Society Hill Tree Tenders need new volunteers. We are a group that receives training and works under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Every spring and fall we plant street trees and periodically through the year do tree care, such as basic pruning, to be sure the tree gets off to a healthy start. The next training session will be in October.

For more information see:  
[phsonline.org/events/tree-tenders-fall-basic-training/](http://phsonline.org/events/tree-tenders-fall-basic-training/).

Before then, join us for one of our clean-up sessions.  
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## KEEPING POSTED

BY AL CAVALARI

## Surprising Facts About Our Nation's Birthday

For this July/August issue of the *Reporter*, let's visit Independence Hall for a scene that will surprise many of you and that some may remember from their youth. The Liberty Bell, as you see it in this postcard from 1936, was once on display at the Hall. There it remained until 12:01 a.m. on January 1, 1976, when it was moved into a glass building at the Market Street end of the block. This change was to better receive the crowds expected both at the Bell and inside Independence Hall for the Bicentennial Celebration. In 2003, it was moved into the museum built just for the Bell, where it remains today.

Here are some surprising facts about our long national experience with the Fourth of July.

**The Continental Congress did not declare independence from Great Britain on the day we celebrate as Independence Day.**

The first vote on the question took place on July 1, at which time only nine colonies were willing to make the break. Pennsylvania and South Carolina were opposed, the New Yorkers abstained and the two-man Delaware delegation split its vote in a tie. This initial vote was not binding due to the parliamentary device of Congress, then sitting as a committee of the whole. Think of it as a trial balloon. Nine votes would be enough to carry the resolution "that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown," but there was hope solidarity could be achieved for an act of such seriousness. The final vote would take place the next day in open congress.

Pennsylvania and South Carolina reconsidered the matter and, for the sake of unity, switched their positions. The Delaware tie was broken by a dramatic 80-mile, overnight ride through a thunderstorm by delegate Caesar Rodney, who had been alerted in Dover that his vote for independence was needed in the assembly room

the next morning. Despite suffering from asthma and cancer, he arrived just as Congress opened for official business. His vote pushed Delaware into the "aye" column. Only the New Yorkers remained as holdouts, but their hands were tied. Their instructions were to not support independence. They abstained with the hope that expected new instructions would soon permit their support. Independence was declared on July 2 with 12 "ayes," one abstention and no negative votes.

**Then why don't we celebrate July 2nd?**

After the vote, Congress turned its attention to Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, which he and his committee of five had completed by June 28. For the next three days, Congress debated every word and made 80 changes. The final text was approved and the document was adopted on July 4. The Declaration's glorious language captured the hearts and minds of people around the world, which is why we remember and connect to this date rather than the date of the actual vote declaring independence.

**So then they all signed it, right?**

Wrong! Congress, on July 4th, had only Jefferson's rough draft marked with changes. It took some time to make the beautiful parchment ceremonial copy we all recognize. It was not until August 2 that 50 of the eventual 56 signers gathered in the assembly room. Some of the men who worked and voted for independence in July were no longer in Congress and missed being immortalized. Eight men who were new to Congress in August signed with their delegations, but had nothing to do with the events of July. Hence Henry Wisner is lost to history, while Benjamin Rush is a well-known signer.



**This post card from 1936 shows the Liberty Bell on display at Independence Hall.**

**Is the original Declaration in the National Archives?**

Not if the word original means the one that came first. After the document was adopted, Congress ordered that Jefferson's draft marked with changes be taken to the printing office of John Dunlap on Market Street, near Christ Church. That night he printed several hundred copies. Some 27 survived. One is in on display in the West Wing of Independence Hall. And you can watch Park Service rangers print very fine facsimiles on a functioning printing press at Franklin Court.

**Where is Jefferson's original draft that was submitted to Congress and brought to the printer?**

No one knows. There is a theory that Dunlap might have torn it in half so that two typesetters could work on it at the same time. It was a rush job. By this theory, the torn draft was later simply discarded. Five other copies in Jefferson's handwriting, made after the event, are known to exist. One is owned by the American Philosophical Society, which sometimes puts it on display at its headquarters right across the street from Independence Hall.

**Al Cavalari** is a certified member of the Association of Philadelphia tour Guides and gives tours as a volunteer for the national Park service. For a day job he operates the Flag Guys®, a flag business in upstate New York. Send comments to Al at [flagguys@aol.com](mailto:flagguys@aol.com).

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## MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BY CLAUDIA CARABELLI

## Meaningful Help for the Homeless

Homelessness is an ongoing problem throughout the United States. Typically fueled by substance abuse, mental illness and economic downturns, the number of people living on the streets has increased exponentially in response to the current opioid crisis. Federal Government cuts have made it even more difficult to sustain programs that address the issue in any substantive way. As the number of people in need increases, the money to offer them a way out has dried up.

It's estimated there are approximately 800 to 900 individuals living on Philadelphia streets. About 5,700 more are in shelters or other forms of temporary housing. An uncounted number spend their nights in abandoned cars or buildings, while others couch surf between homes of family and friends.

Passing a homeless person on the street always gives me pause. If I offer loose change, can that really help move people out of poverty? Am I being "played" by a person looking for drug money? Will buying someone a meal make a difference? Does that guy really need train fare or does he make a living panhandling?

As Marilyn Appel noted in the May/June *Reporter*, **Hub of Hope** may be that first big step towards providing something more comprehensive for those struggling with housing insecurity. Located in SEPTA's Center City Concourse at 16th Street and JFK Boulevard, Hub of Hope offers a safe, welcoming place for those who seldom feel accepted. The 11,000 square foot facility opened in January 2018 at a cost of \$1.4 million shared by SEPTA, the City of Philadelphia and Project Home. This is 10 times larger than Project Home's former quarters that offered a walk-in engagement center for the last six winters. Hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends. This is the only site of its kind in the country that offers extensive homeless services in cooperation with a transportation agency.

While many and varied services are offered on site, and referrals to outside providers are available, individuals are free to access as much or as little as they're comfortable accepting. It can be anything from coming in out of the elements for a meal and shower to accepting medical/mental health care and referrals to housing or treatment. The hope is that welcoming people and allowing them to establish trust will make them more amenable to other interventions. It's no panacea, but it's

definitely a way to make a dent in a very complex problem.

So, how does all that translate to the average person making a difference? Well, despite all that the center offers, they still need **volunteers**. Your hard work can help keep this great facility up and running.

There are both one-time and recurring opportunities for a variety of skill sets. The online application gives you an opportunity to specify what you have to offer. Project Home has a volunteer waiver that needs to be completed, and some of the positions may also require a background check and child abuse clearances. Their staff can help you complete these. You'll need to attend both a general orientation and a Hub of Hope orientation. Either individuals or groups can apply.

Openings are available in hospitality services, the laundry facilities, sorting in-kind donations, gardening, street cleaning, medical help, arts and crafts classes, meal service and holiday parties. The list is quite extensive. You can even donate and serve a meal at Project Home locations. Mingling with the guests while they're dining is encouraged.

If you're open to making an ongoing commitment of two hours per week, Hub of Hope needs tutors to work with children, young adults and adults in both K-12 and after school programs. This does require the child abuse clearance and background check necessary to work with children.

If you want to help in other ways, there is also a list on their website of needed items to donate.

**Project Home Contacts:**

Emily Hopkins, Hospitality Coordinator:  
emilyhopskins@projecthome.org, 215-309-5225

Taylor Clement, Volunteer Coordinator:  
vcoordinator@projecthome.org

Check out the Hub of Hope website, [www.Projecthome.org/help/volunteer-program](http://www.Projecthome.org/help/volunteer-program), to fully appreciate all the opportunities. You can be part of something wonderful.



**Karen Orrick, coordinator for Hub of Hope in Philadelphia, serves a hot cup of coffee to a homeless visitor to the Hub.**

Make a difference in your community. From purchasing a newspaper from a homeless vendor to making a birthday cake for a child living in a shelter, the *Reporter* has been suggesting ways for neighbors to help others. There are many opportunities. Please let us know about any other volunteer opportunities you find worthwhile.

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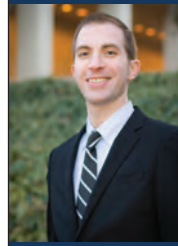
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WELCOME BASKET RECIPIENTS

BY MARTHA LEVINE

# What Could Be Nicer Than This Warm Welcome?

Imagine moving into a new neighborhood and being welcomed with this valuable gift: a Welcome Basket filled with fresh foods and useful neighborhood information, plus gift certificates to area theaters, restaurants, shops, services and museums! That is precisely how SHCA welcomes new home (and condo) owners to our community.

We have presented 43 baskets in the 2017-18 Welcome Basket season. After a summer break, we will start the new season in September. If you are a new first-time owner as of 2017-18, and have not been contacted or received a basket, please let us know. The baskets are presented in your home by an appointment that takes about 45 minutes.

Many thanks to the generous businesses who make these baskets possible. See our website, [www.societyhillcivic.org/welcomebaskets](http://www.societyhillcivic.org/welcomebaskets), for a full list.

Contact me at 215-629-0727 or [marthalev6@gmail.com](mailto:marthalev6@gmail.com).

Photos by **Martha Levine**



**Colleen & Jerry Oetzel**



**Chris Chimacles**



**Kristine & Jon Derewicz**



**David Wolfson & Alexandra Ginoux**



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45TH ANNUAL HOUSE & GARDEN TOUR

BY LINDA SKALE AND MARTHA LEVINE

# Rain or Shine, The Tour Must Go On

Despite a week of rain and the forecast of a thunderstorm on tour day, the 2018 Society Hill Open House & Garden Tour went off without a hitch, attracting 450 attendees and raising \$14,500. Each year, we provide a collection of houses and gardens not seen on the tour in the last five years. We sincerely express our gratitude to all

of the generous homeowners who showcased their exceptional homes and gardens. We cannot thank them enough for their great community spirit. Thank you to all who were involved: the homeowners, as well as the 120 dedicated volunteers and our faithful sponsors. All proceeds benefit SHCA and are used for neighborhood improvement projects.

Photos by **Martha Levine** and **Jonathan Skale**





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# A Magnificent Washington Square Affair 2018

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And special thanks to Chair Joan Rollins Tropp and her committee for all their hard work!*



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**Betty, Marie and Terry McCabe  
with Rosemary Fluehr**



**Jonathan Burton and First Troop  
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TALL SHIPS DOCK AT PENN'S LANDING

BY BONNIE HALDA

# Sail Philadelphia

Thousands of visitors crowded Penn's Landing for the Tall Ship Festival during Memorial Day weekend. Pictured is the Parade of Sail with nearly a dozen majestic tall ships from around the region and the world, including New Jersey, Delaware, Rhode Island, Bermuda,

and Portugal, which opened the five-day event. Whether seen from the New Jersey side of the river with Philadelphia's awesome skyline as the backdrop or from Philly with Camden's waterfront on display, the parade was splendid to behold.



**Kalmar Nykel, Sagres, and Gazela**



**When & If and The Spirit of Bermuda**



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**AJ Meerwald**



**Parade of Sail**



**Oliver Hazard Perry**



**Lynx**

Photos by  
**Bonnie  
Halda**

**'FIX THE BRIX'**

BY MARTHA LEVINE

## Fix Your Bricks and Prevent Trips

“Fix the Brix” is SHCA’s highly successful subsidy program for all homeowners who need to level their front sidewalks — brick or cement. Summer and fall are great times to do this.

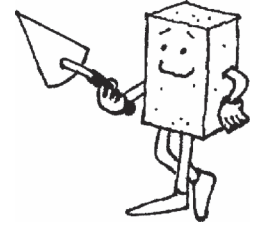
Since late 2009, **we have helped over 200 households** make their sidewalks safer for all of us. Regardless of how fit you are, uneven brick and cement sidewalks can cause falls and injuries. Although we have had much success with this program, many of our sidewalks are still in bad condition due to tree roots and settling of soil. Bricks tend to move.

FYI: Although we don’t actually own our sidewalks and trees, the city says we are responsible for their maintenance.

SHCA has been motivating residents to “Fix the Brix” by offering a refund of 40 percent of the total invoice up to \$400 for current members and up to \$300 for non-members.

Here is how to get started:

- Take a “before” photo of your sidewalk problem area, and email it to me at marthalev6@gmail.com.
- Choose a mason or arborist to do the work; we can provide a suggested list if needed.
- After work is completed to your satisfaction, make a copy of your paid invoice and mail the original to us at: SHCA PO Box 63503, Philadelphia, PA 19147. If possible, include a copy of your cancelled check.
- A check will be mailed to you within several weeks.



**Rick the Brick**

**For more information on this program, go to our website at [societyhillcivic.org](http://societyhillcivic.org) and click on “Fix the Brix.”**

**Martha Levine** is vice president of SHCA.

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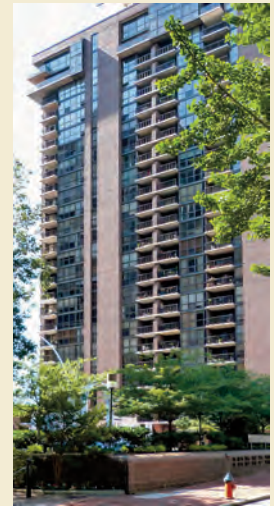
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## ON OUR SHELF

BY VIVIENNE WOODWORD

## Find the Perfect Summer Read!

The title of the book *Heartbreaker* by Claudia Dey might sound like the bodice-ripping, dollar-bin variety of summer read. In fact, it is anything but. Dey's forthcoming novel, due out August 21, is richly textured, vividly conjured and wholly transportive.

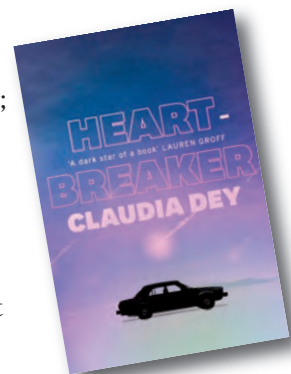
Events take place in 1985 in "the territory" — a swath of land containing what remains of a cult begun decades earlier. Billie Jean Fontaine, the only person in the territory not to have been born there, disappears one evening into the frozen night with no shoes, no jacket. She takes her husband's truck, but leaves him and her daughter Pony behind. A frantic search for the beautiful, enigmatic Billie Jean begins.

The book is not organized by time, but by three separate perspectives. As one of the characters notes, time is not the primary concern for a group of people completely shut off from the rest of the world: "Tell us how time could possibly matter. Birth. Love. Murder. *These* were the forces we

were contending with. The tragic impulses of the heart." Instead of time, the narrative moves forward through revelation. The effect is haunting; reading the book feels like being caught in a dream that has no beginning, middle or end, but you still know exactly what's at stake.

On the surface, there is a teenage girl whose mother has taken off, but underneath that lies something even darker. It takes a minute to adjust to the narrative, to accept that the rules of time and society aren't our own, but you'll quickly get sucked in by the characters, especially Billie Jean. Where is she going and where has she been? As the characters search for her, they find truths that shed light on her mysterious disappearance.

*Heartbreaker* contemplates the self, family, community, freedom and whether we can have all of those things within a single lifetime. In the final pages, linearity is restored. As the disorder in the plot is untangled, time becomes chronological, a vehicle forward.



Please bring in a copy of this review and receive 20 percent off any one title in our store or ordered online at [HeadHouseBooks.com](http://HeadHouseBooks.com).

## WHAT TO READ THIS SUMMER

**If you love...**

**Graphic Novels:** *All the Answers* by Michael Kupperman. In this moving graphic memoir, Eisner Award-winning writer and artist Michael Kupperman traces the life of his reclusive father.

**Essays:** *Maeve in America* by Maeve Higgins. These essays create a startlingly funny and revealing portrait of a woman who aims for the stars but hits the ceiling.

**Literary Fiction:** *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* by Ottessa Moshfegh. A novel about a young woman's efforts to duck the ills of the world by embarking on an extended hibernation with the help of one of the worst psychiatrists in the annals of literature.

**Light-Hearted Fiction:** *The Kiss Quotient* by Helen Hoang. A heartwarming and refreshing debut novel that proves one thing: there's not enough data in the world to predict what will make your heart tick.

**Poetry:** *New Poets of Native Nations* edited by Heid E. Erdrich. A landmark anthology celebrating twenty-one native poets first published in the twenty-first century.

**Short Stories:** *Some Trick* by Helen DeWitt. A baker's dozen of stories, all with Helen DeWitt's razor-sharp genius.

**Non-fiction:** *How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan. A brilliant investigation into the medical and scientific revolution taking place around psychedelic drugs, and the spellbinding story of Pollan's own life-changing psychedelic experiences.

**Kid-Friendly Reads**

**Ages 4-8:** *Julian is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love. In an exuberant picture book celebration of self-love and individuality, a glimpse of costumed mermaids leaves one boy flooded with wonder and ready to dazzle the world.

**Ages 9-12:** *Bob* by Wendy Mass. A magical story about the enduring power of friendship and a girl who helps an old friend find home.

**Ages 10-12:** *All Summer Long* by Hope Larson. A coming-of-age graphic novel about summer and friendships, written and illustrated by the Eisner Award-winning and New York Times-bestselling Hope Larson.

**Ages 13-18:** *How I Resist* edited by Maureen Johnson. Essays, songs, illustrations and interviews about activism and hope, featuring an all-star group of contributors.

**Ages 16+:** *Young Frances* by Hartley Lin. An intimate study of work chaos and close friendships over time in this long-awaited first collection.

**Richard De Wyngaert** is the proprietor of Society Hill's only local, independently owned bookstore, Head House Books, located at 619 South 2nd Street. Events Coordinator **Vivienne Woodward** wrote this article.

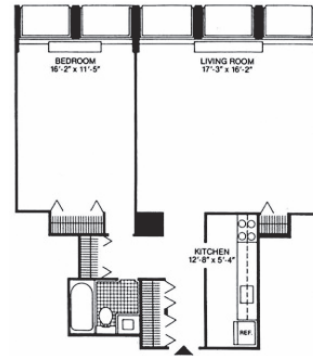
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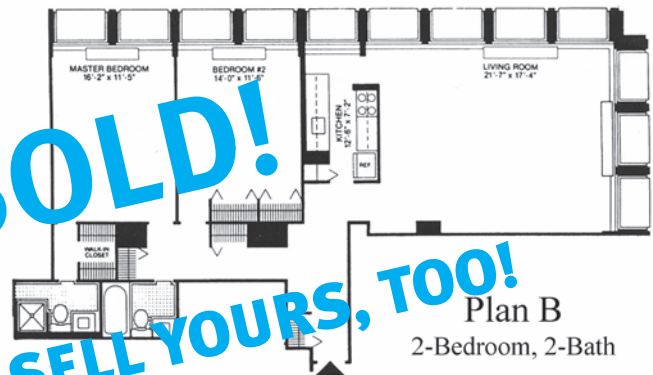


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| 23B South | 5B North  | North     |
| 26C West  | 19A North | 4E South  |
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HEADHOUSE FARMERS' MARKET

BY LIZ KELLY, THE FOOD TRUST

# Dinner Courtesy of the Farmers' Market

Headhouse Farmers Market is bursting with local summer produce, which is good news for cooks and non-cooks alike. Fresh fruits and veggies deliver so much flavor that a simple dinner is well within the skill set of the most culinary novice.

The following dishes can be prepared almost exclusively with ingredients from the Market, supplemented by some pantry staples. If your crew needs animal protein to consider dinner complete, grilled sausages, chicken or fish from the Market provide a perfect complement. A loaf of bread from one of the bakers and tossed green salad accompanied by these recipes make an ideal summer supper.

### Farmer's Market Pasta

Vera Pasta's linguine was terrific in this dish, but any dry or fresh pasta would work fine.

#### Ingredients

- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large, perfect tomatoes, coarsely chopped. Be sure to preserve the juice to include in the sauce.
- A handful of basil leaves, cut in slices with kitchen scissors or a sharp knife
- Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste (be generous)
- 1 pound pasta
- 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese



#### Directions

Place all ingredients except pasta and cheese in a large, shallow bowl. Stir to blend. Cook pasta in rapidly boiling salted water to just barely al dente, reserving 1/2 cup cooking water. Drain thoroughly and dump it into the bowl on top of the tomato mixture. Toss well; if it seems dry, add pasta water a little at a time until consistency is right. Before serving, top with cheese and toss again.

### Exercise and Socialize

**The Walkie/Talkies** meet at Three Bears Park, Delancey Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets, on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 8:15 a.m. for an hour-long stroll through our historic community. Anyone is welcome to participate in this non-stressful, one-hour exercise and socialize program.

**"Philly Is Walking In The Park!"** meets at the fountain in the center of Washington Square, 6th and Locust Streets, at 8 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for a half-hour, self-paced walk through our historic, beautiful park led by neighbor Dr. Lisa Unger. All are invited.

### Summer Fruit Crisp

Amble through the market in search of perfect peaches and berries, then grab oats from Morganics and maple syrup from Spring Hill Farm for this recipe.

#### Filling:

- 8 fresh peaches, peeled and cut into slices
- Juice of half a lime or lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup fresh blueberries, rinsed and picked over

#### Crisp Topping:

- 3/4 cup flour
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 pinches salt
- 1 stick butter, cut in pieces
- 1 cup rolled oats (not instant or quick cooking)
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- Zsa's vanilla ice cream, for serving

#### Directions

Heat oven to 375 degrees.

Mix the filling ingredients in large baking dish. In a mixing bowl, blend flour, brown sugar, salt, butter and oats until pea-sized clumps are formed. Crumble over fruit mixture and press gently. Drizzle maple syrup over crumble topping and bake for 45 to 50 minutes. When done, the topping is browned and crisp. Serve warm, topped with vanilla ice cream and sprinkled with cinnamon and allspice, if desired. Serves 8.



**The Food Trust**, in partnership with Get Healthy Philly, operates more than 25 farmers' markets in Philadelphia, including the Headhouse Farmers' Market, Philadelphia's largest outdoor market. The Food trust has been working to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. To get involved with The Food Trust, see our website [www.thefoodtrust.org](http://www.thefoodtrust.org).

### Warm Welcome to Sue's Produce Society Hill

Sue's Produce Society Hill, a family-operated business, recently opened in the empty market space at Society Hill Towers. Many of you may know Sue's from their 18th Street location, where they specialize in fine produce and related items. This new location also carries fresh produce, but stocks grocery and household goods as well. In addition, they have a deli and a juice/soup bar. Sue's is open Monday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Call 215-982-1678 for more information.

Photo by Bonnie Halda



# INDEPENDENCE PLACE

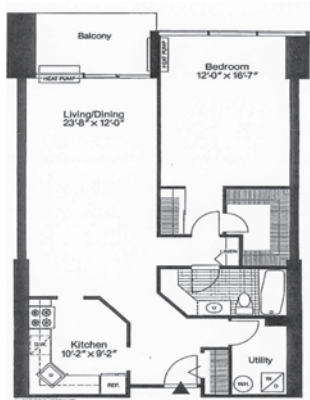
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**SOUTH STREET HEADHOUSE DISTRICT**

BY CLAIRE BATTEN

# Our ‘New Contemporary Art Scene’

“I majored in Theater Design and Tech at the University of the Arts,” says Sara McCorriston, co-founder of **Paradigm Gallery** at 746 S. 4th St. “I knew 4th Street mainly for being Fabric Row. I’ve always liked this area, because it felt like a proper neighborhood. Even back then, as a student, I’d be hanging out here to visit Bus Stop for shoes and go to Practice Yoga — so it seemed like an obvious choice for a location when my co-founder, Jason Chen, and I were researching locations for a new gallery. We wanted to be part of all this energy.”

From the start in 2010, Paradigm Gallery set its sights on creating a commercially robust gallery that would show diverse contemporary artwork from around the world, while still maintaining a focus on and supporting local Philadelphia artists. “We don’t want to be spending our time writing grant applications. We need to help our artists become successful, so they too have a viable future,” comments McCorriston.

Both Paradigm Gallery and the gallery Arch Enemy in Old City have been instrumental in putting Philadelphia artists on the map and helping define what has become known as the “New Contemporary Art Scene.” This clunky moniker has been given to the work of artists who are creating accessible and affordable contemporary art in the city, such as sculptor Drew Leshko, painter Katherine Fraser and Caitlin McCormack, who is enjoying widespread recognition for her sculptural crocheted skeleton pieces. As McCorriston explains, “A number of artists that we represent are earning international recognition for their work.”

Drew Leshko, one of the regular exhibitors at Paradigm, is also making waves at leading art fairs such as Miami Art Basel. *Sacred Lands* is the most

recent Leshko exhibition to be shown by Paradigm Gallery. His work consists of handcrafted facsimiles of the iconic, but often now derelict, buildings in Philadelphia that are fast disappearing from sight as a result of gentrification. His works lovingly capture the city’s interesting nooks and crannies, replicating these buildings at a 1:12 scale. The artworks are exact — down to the graffiti, chain link fences and even the broken windows characterizing Philadelphia’s warehouses, churches and former cafes. While this captivating exhibit closed mid-May, the works featured in the show are available for sale online at [www.ParadigmArts.org](http://www.ParadigmArts.org).

The Gallery has an adventurous approach to raising awareness for its stable of artists. Paradigm regularly works on projects with interior designers in the neighborhood and, further afield, on larger commissions working with hotels, for example. The Gallery has also taken works on tour, including sponsoring an exhibition on a cruise ship. This innovative approach to public outreach extends to art education. Paradigm runs free art classes throughout the year. As McCorriston explains: “Seventy-five percent of those who sign up are adults, but children are always welcome. In addition to providing all materials required and hands-on coaching to assist in the creative process, we stage a live auction.”

At the auction, students attending the class and their friends and family are encouraged to bid on the works of art produced in class. This process helps democratize art and makes buying art, and even visiting a gallery, a less scary experience.

For further information about the gallery, to sign up for art classes or for Paradigm’s newsletter, please visit [www.ParadigmArts.org](http://www.ParadigmArts.org).



**Drew Leshko with a piece from his *Sacred Lands* series.**

According to Mike Harris, CEO of the South Street Headhouse Business District, the neighborhood has long been a magnet for artists. “There has always been a tremendous amount of creative vitality in our neighborhood. Look around many of the side streets off South, and you can spot Isaiah Zagar’s dazzling mosaics. He and Julia Zagar (the owner of Eyes Gallery at 402 South Street) have been living and working in our neighborhood for over 40 years. And The Magic Gardens is a must-see for anyone visiting Philadelphia.”

**Fourth Friday Kicks Off**

As the weather brightens, the crowds swell at the monthly Fourth Friday on South 4th Street. Join the festivities on 4th from 5.30 p.m. onwards on the fourth Friday of every month.

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- Francis Lightfoot Lee

The historic Cadwalader House offers the opportunity to create a custom mansion in the heart of Society Hill by restoring this historic property to its original splendor. The home spans five stories and will offer grand entertaining space and large bedroom suites. There is a private garden and space for two parking spots.

Built in 1829 by Joseph Norris, this historic home became known as The Cadwalader house thanks to Judge John Cadwalader who both resided in and had his legal office there. Cadwalader was best known for serving one term in the US House of Representatives and then later becoming a United States District court judge, an appointment made by his good friend President James Buchanan. Over the years the residence has served as the home of the Mutual Assurance Company and offices for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.  
 9,003 sf | **\$2,650,000**

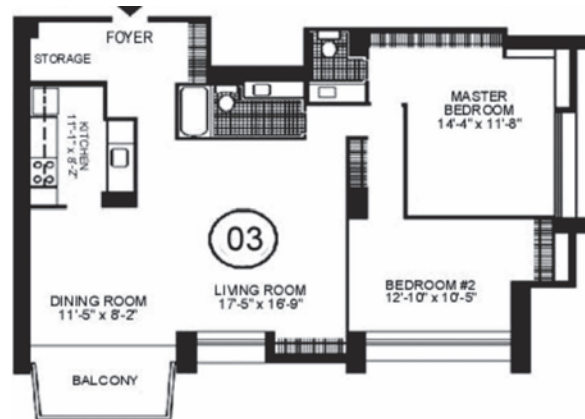


# Hopkinson House

604 S. Washington Square



Completely renovated studio with alcove overlooking Washington Square and boasting wood floors, a modern open kitchen and designer appointed bathroom.  
**600 sf | \$259,900**



Bright and sunny corner 2 bedroom, 1.5 bathroom with townhouse views to the south and east. The home features an open floor plan with large living and dining rooms. Both bedrooms are generously sized and there is a private balcony.  
**1,200 sf | \$475,000**



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## IN MEMORIAM

### Deen Kogan

We regret to inform readers that neighborhood pioneer Deen Kogan, cofounder of the Society Hill Playhouse, passed away at her Delancey Street home on March 28. She was 87 years old.

A native of Hagerstown, Maryland, Deen met her husband, Jay, on the first day of acting class at Temple University. They then attended the University of Colorado to earn master's degrees in the arts.

In 1957, she and Jay opened the playhouse that became a platform for experimental and avant garde theater. She started a youth theater project and founded a school for the arts. While desegregation of theaters was still a concern, Ms. Kogan created Philadelphia's first street

theater with integrated casts from 1968 to 1970, bringing productions to neighborhoods on a flatbed truck that served as the stage.

Deen was also co-owner of Port Richmond Books, which houses her collection of over 40,000 volumes of mystery and crime fiction. Over the years, she chaired four World Mystery Conventions, as well as numerous national conventions. She was also chair of the International Crime Writers' Dashiell Hammett Award Committee and reviewed crime fiction for several mystery magazines.

Donations in her honor may be made to the Philadelphia Foundation, Jay and Deen Kogan Fund, 1835 Market Street, Suite 2410, Philadelphia, PA 19103.



**Deen Kogan**

### Wallace A. Wing

We offer our condolences to the family and friends of "Wally" Wing, who died on June 11. Sadly, SHCA has lost a true friend.

He and his wife, Sherry Shamansky, moved to Society Hill from New York City in 1997 and soon became involved in our neighborhood. Wally served on our board for three years, before becoming a block coordinator. In addition, he was our graffiti "czar" for 10 years and also chaired Clean-Up Day for a number of years.

Wally attended Bowdoin College. He was then drafted and entered Officers Candidate School, hoping to see the world. Instead, he ended up in the Army Finance Center in Indianapolis. Wally worked for 34 years in international accounting for General Electric before retiring.

Wally leaves behind his wife, his son Eric and three grandchildren. Contributions in his memory may be made to Congregation Rodeph Shalom, 615 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123 or to the Alzheimer's Association, 399 Market Street, Suite 102, Philadelphia, PA 19106.



**Wally Wing**

## LOOKING FOR PLACES TO TAKE SUMMER VISITORS?

### Reading Viaduct Rail Park

13th and Noble Streets, between Spring Garden and Callowhill Streets; [www.therailpark.org/](http://www.therailpark.org/)

The first phase of the Reading Viaduct Rail Park has opened, giving the public access to an elevated quarter mile of trail in north Philadelphia.

The eventual aim is for the park — similar to the High Line in New York — to run for three miles through downtown Philadelphia. The current quarter mile stretch includes new landscaping and seating, a major shift from the overgrown weeds and haphazard path that greeted visitors who, for many years, were trespassing when exploring the viaduct.

Designed by Studio Bryan Hanes and Urban Engineers, the park is meant to project its industrial roots and reuse portions of the rail park, which dates back to the 1800s.

The park is free and open daily from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

### Revolution Place @The Museum of the American Revolution

101 S 3rd Street; [www.amrevmuseum.org](http://www.amrevmuseum.org)

What was life like in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War? The Museum of the American Revolution's new discovery center, **Revolution Place**, brings to life the Museum's lively, diverse Old City neighborhood during the 1700s and invites visitors to learn through hands-on exploration.

Revolution Place features four key recreated historical environments — a military encampment, a tavern, a home and an 18th-century meeting house — to immerse and engage families, especially 5 to 12-year-old kids, in the places where the American Revolution took root. Visitors will enjoy experiential elements, interactive touchscreens, reproduction objects and special programming set against colorful murals that evoke scenes from 18th-century Philadelphia, including a marketplace and a residential alley.

### Farm for the City

1401 JFK Boulevard;  
[www.phsonline.org/programs/farm-for-the-city](http://www.phsonline.org/programs/farm-for-the-city)

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Farm for the City highlights the role community gardeners play in strengthening neighborhoods and gardens' positive impact on some of the most pressing issues facing our communities, such as food insecurity. This interactive exhibit and working farm invites the public to learn more about community gardening through free workshops, public forums and activities during the growing season.

In addition to learning about community gardens, visitors can engage with Farm Hosts to discuss various plantings and learn how to grow these varieties in their own home and community gardens. Farm for the City will produce about 1,000 pounds of fruit and vegetables this summer and will donate them to Broad Street Ministry's Hospitality Collaborative.



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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

BY MATT DEJULIO

2018 Membership Surges to Historic High

By early June, 1,159 Society Hill residents had either renewed their association membership or joined for the first time — seven percent ahead of the same time last year. We have already passed last year’s all-time high of 1,141, reached at the end of last year, and we still have a number of months to build upon.

So far, 133 new members have signed up — only one shy of where we stood at the end of last year. Unfortunately we still have 97 members whose dues are in arrears, but that is down significantly from last year at this time. If you have delayed sending in your renewal, or wish to join, please do so today. If you are not receiving our weekly email newsletter, please go to our website to sign up. You may also pay your dues conveniently by credit card there.

We welcome each of the over 3,600 households in our neighborhood to join SHCA. Your civic association helps protect your real estate investment by funding many of our improvement projects, as well as providing subsidies to neighbors who plant trees and fix their sidewalks. We help enhance your quality of life when we advocate on your behalf regarding zoning changes, real estate taxes, crime problems and traffic issues. All of this is accomplished through the hard work of our dedicated board of directors, committee members, block coordinators and, most importantly, your membership dues.

Without member dues, SHCA would cease to function. Protect your neighborhood and your real estate investment. **Sign up today!**

Email [Mattdejulio@aol.com](mailto:Mattdejulio@aol.com) with questions or comments, which will be shared with our board members representing every quadrant in our unique, historic neighborhood.

**Matt DeJulio** is a retired publishing executive. He has served SHCA as its administrator since 2001.

**A limited number of monthly parking spaces are still available at the renovated lot at 511 South Front Street, between South and Lombard Streets. If interested, contact Ed Sullivan with Park America at: 610-637-6832.**



*Society Hill*  
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- Clean-Up Day       Washington Square       Zoning & Historic Preservation
- Franklin Lights       Social Events       5th Street Development
- Dilworth House       Property Taxes       Local Crime Incidents
- Reporter       Fundraising      and Alerts

Please return completed application to:

**Society Hill Civic Association**, P.O. Box 63503, Philadelphia, PA 19147

## NIFTY NEIGHBORS IN MY OWN BACKYARD

BY JANE BIBERMAN

## Rabbi Gabbai is Grateful to Live in the Cradle of Liberty

“As a boy growing up in Egypt, I used to see pictures of Ben Franklin, Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell,” says the longtime religious leader of historic Congregation Mikveh Israel. As a man, Albert Gabbai was imprisoned for three years for the sin of being a Jew. “Nasser rounded up all the Jews and put us in concentration camps because Jews were considered evil,” he explains.

After immigrating to New York in 1971 by way of Paris, Rabbi Gabbai says the first thing he did when he got the money was to board a bus for Philadelphia, the cradle of liberty. “The reality and the dream fit 100 percent,” he recalls with a warm smile. “Everything was very green and beautiful.” He spent 17 years in New York before moving to Philadelphia: He studied at Columbia and Yeshiva University, was ordained by the Chief Rabbi of Israel, and for 14 years, headed Shearith Israel, the Sephardic Synagogue in New York, formed by Spanish and Portuguese Jews. But when he was asked to become the rabbi of Mikveh Israel, it was literally a dream come true.

For the past 30 years, Rabbi Gabbai has lived and worked in Society Hill. You may catch a glimpse of him as he rides his bike back and forth from his home to the synagogue. Sitting in his book-lined office, Rabbi Gabbai proclaims, “I’m a proud American citizen, and grateful to God for breathing freedom.” He points out that Mikveh Israel is called the Synagogue of the Revolution. “In 1740, Nathan Levy applied to Thomas Penn for a plot to bury his child in accordance with Jewish ritual,” recounts Rabbi Gabbai. “It became a Jewish communal cemetery, the first evidence of Jewish communal life in Philadelphia. Mikveh Israel (Hope of Israel) dates its beginning from the establishment of the cemetery located on Spruce between 8th and 9th Streets. It’s the oldest continuing congregation in the country.”

During the space of several hours, many tourists arrive to walk around



**Rabbi Gabbai at Mikveh Israel's memorial to Jonathan Netanyahu, who lost his life at Entebbe.**

the building. The congregation has had several locations, but the current synagogue on Independence Mall East was dedicated in 1976. Rabbi Gabbai relishes his role as tour guide. An inspiring teacher and an inspired speaker, he welcomes a class from a yeshiva in New York. He tells the children about the synagogue’s precious Torah scrolls, points out the history of the chandelier that came from Amsterdam and an armchair with a long and fascinating provenance.

Rabbi Gabbai himself has a venerable pedigree. “My father was a rabbi. He was born in Baghdad. All the way back we were rabbis. My mother was born in Italy, my grandmother in Salonika, and me in Egypt. In all the Muslim countries, Jews were considered evil and persecuted — in Iraq and Libya, Yemen,

Tunisia and Morocco. We were second-class citizens. Whenever there was a war, we were rounded up and put in prison camps.”

Like the colonists, Rabbi Gabbai came to the United States to be free. “Mikveh Israel was founded as an American and a Jewish institution,” he says. “The founding fathers and the colonists exchanged ideas and influenced one another. Chaym Solomon financed Washington’s army. Nathan Levy brought the Liberty Bell from England. This gave pride to the Jewish community. We had a direct part in the founding of the United States.”

In the lobby of Mikveh Israel, tourists come to see cases of historical colonial paintings, photographs, artifacts and letters, among them one from George Washington and another from Abraham Lincoln. “We get lots of tourists from Israel, Europe, Africa, Russia and all the states in this country,” notes Rabbi Gabbai, adding that for Sabbath services, Jews as well as non-Jews attend. “Our official membership is 200 families. This place is absolutely amazing because we are based on tradition and our tradition hasn’t changed. We have the same customs, melodies and prayers, except we no longer say a prayer for King George III!”

If there is one message that Rabbi Gabbai wants to impart to his congregation, as well as to all of the people he comes in contact with, it is to be tolerant and not to stereotype people. “I ride a bike and I happen not to dress like the typical Orthodox Jew,” he says. “I hope people learn not to accept stereotypes and not fall into the trap of categorizing people. The whole problem in life is hatred.”

To read more about the history of Mikveh Israel, visit [www.MikvehIsrael.org](http://www.MikvehIsrael.org).

**Jane Biberman**, freelance writer and former editor of *Inside Magazine*, has contributed to a variety of publications.



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