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Facing financial woes, Sedgwick looks to fall re-opening

by MICHAEL J. MISHAK

The Sedgwick Cultural Center, the nonprofit arts group credited with sparking neighborhood revitalization in Upper Mt. Airy, suspended its programming last month. A new board and executive director are restructuring the organization in the hopes of returning this fall.

Sedgwick officials sought the "breathing space" to stabilize a community institution saddled with debt, said Nina Ahmad, president of the board.

A new board and executive director are working to steer the nonprofit into fiscal health.

"The Sedgwick has gone hand to mouth from one crisis to another," Ahmad said. "We've come to a point where that's not going to sustain it."

The board plans to install safeguards to ensure the Sedgwick's legacy of "building community through the arts." Members are developing strategies to strengthen long-term funding, Ahmad said. The hiatus also allows time for the board members to set their priorities as a group.

The new slate of directors was appointed in the fall after the former board resigned last July for reasons that remain unclear. "There was some kind of logjam between the board and the executive director," said Ahmad, who was not a board member at the time. "Instead of trying to muddle through, I think they just decided the Sedgwick needed a new start," she said of the former board.

Betty Ann Fellner, founder of the Sedgwick, said she had announced her intentions to step down as executive director last March and retired that August. She said she worked with Greg Martino, the center's new executive director, throughout the summer to smooth the transition. "I'm a starter, not a maintainer," Fellner said. "It was time for someone else to take over." (Continued on page 15)

Senate race tops primary ballot

Voters will elect a new state senator next week in a special election that coincides with the municipal primary

by MICHAEL J. MISHAK

With less than a week until Election Day, two candidates are pouncing the pavement in bids to succeed Allyson Schwartz in the state Senate.

Democratic State Rep. LeAnna Washington and Republican Ron Holt are competing for votes in a special election set to coincide with the May 17 municipal primary.

Sandwiched between last year's presidential election and next year's gubernatorial election, the Senate race comes at a time in the four-year election cycle when voter interest is at an all-time low.

The contest gives Northwest voters a unique incentive to cast ballots next week. All registered voters in the district, regardless of party affiliation, are eligible to vote in the special election.

Neither candidate vying for the vacant 4th District seat is concerned about low turnout. Both claim large Election Day street operations.

In the final push to May 17, Washington and Holt are jockeying between city and suburbs. The district includes Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy and Germantown in Philadelphia and Abington, Cheltenham, Jenkintown and Rockledge in Montgomery County.



State Rep. LeAnna Washington, left, stands with a supporter at last week's Mt. Airy Day celebration on Germantown Avenue. (Photo by Jimmy J. Pack Jr.)

Both candidates pressed the flesh at last week's Mt. Airy Day celebration.

Washington, a six-time state representative, said she made the rounds with Jim Dean, brother of former presidential candidate and Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean.

She currently represents parts of Chestnut Hill and Mt. Airy.

For Holt, the former register of wills in Montgomery County, the event was an opportunity to raise his low profile in the Northwest.

The two candidates, both African-American, are running on platforms that prominently feature education and public transportation.

Washington is looking to transition to the Senate in the same way she was elected to the House: a special election. The switch is not uncommon, bringing more resources, less competition and greater political leverage.

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PITCHING IN. Steve Bonitatis of DCN Construction replaces stonework on the south wall of the Black Horse Inn in Hometown. A variety of local employees and businesses have been doing improvement work at the inn lately, including Ferguson Painting Contractors, which recently painted the building with materials donated by Sherwin Williams. Springfield Township staff pitched in to power-wash the inn from top to bottom a few weeks ago. DCN Construction is repairing the south wall that was inadvertently damaged last summer, working around a couple of new window frames that were custom built free-of-charge by local preservationist Dick Meyer.

Neighbors fight mansion's demolition

by CORE TRACEY

Last month at a meeting in Roxborough, the historic Dearnley Mansion was given a 30-day reprieve from being demolished by the Marathon Design and Construction Company. The sale and planned demolition to make way for new property has been a hot topic in the Dearnley Park area of Roxborough for the past several weeks.

"They actually gave the 30-day reprieve to the councilman, but we have nothing in writing," said Helene Rodgers, interim president of the Dearnley Park Civic Association, of the assurance given to Councilman Michael Nutter.

Rodgers had mixed emotions about the reprieve.

"I feel great about it, but what's going to happen in 30 days," she asked.

Rodgers worked with John Johnstone, former president of the Roxborough, Manayunk and Wissahickon Historical Society, on a proposal to the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) to get protective custody for the Dearnley Mansion.

On March 24, the pair faxed their proposal to the PHC, but had to wait until March 31 to find out the name of the buyer of the mansion and their plans for it. On April 4, Rodgers received a fax and Johnstone an e-mail of a standardized letter from the PHC's Laura Spina. Their stories of events slightly differ, but the end result of both is their impres-

sion that the PHC did not do enough.

According to Rodgers, they both read the letter and were under the impression that the mansion had been placed in protective custody.

According to Johnstone, Spina had not looked at their submission, and the April 4 letter was a form letter outlining the basic process of getting a building under protective custody. Johnstone said that previous to that date he had contacted Spina twice through e-mail without a response.

"If there's anything I need to do please let me know," Johnstone said he wrote to Spina.

According to Rodgers, Ronald (Continued on page 14)



The 1897 Dearnley Mansion, located on Flamingo Street in Upper Roxborough, is slated for demolition this month. (Photos by Scott R. Alloway)



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DEFYING THE ODDS:

Jan Wilson, 47, a lifelong Chestnut Hill resident, has been defying the odds for 13 years since she opened Cafette at 8136 Ardleigh St., the only business in a block of row houses. Cafette has prospered with solid food at reasonable prices and small-town friendliness. Read all about Cafette on page 25. (Photo by Jimmy J. Pack Jr.)



FORMER WOODMERE DIRECTOR:

Pat Hoffman, former Mt. Airy resident and highly regarded director of development at Woodmere Art Museum in Chestnut Hill, has taken a new position in New York state that will use Pat's many admirable qualities to the max. Read about Pat's fascinating position in Jim Weaver's article, page 28.

