Norrises Given 9/11 Award

Laura and Tony Norris, whose world famous Bertha’s bar and restaurant has watched over Broadway Square for four decades, were celebrated on that Square Sept. 11 as winners of the 9/11 Selfless Community Service Award. Assistant Towne Crier Michael Lisicky tolled his bell, read the declaration, and presented the couple with a plaque. This was the 11th presentation of the award, conceived by the Point’s senior town crier, the Rev. Jack Trautwein, to reassert community values following the 9/11/01 assault on them.

One of several nominating letters from past awardees said, “Tony and Laura Norris have given this community its most famous eatery and most accessible meeting venue: Bertha’s—which, like the Norrises, is on the Square. The Residents’ Association meets there monthly. Ever generous in their support of civic causes, the Norrises also provide guitar and mandolin impromptus upstairs during the annual inclusion of their classic Ann Street home in the Preservation Society Historic House Tours.

“The couple came to Fell’s Point from Washington 41 years ago in the midst of the Road Fight, established the restaurant and, with Tony’s steamed-up slogan, “Eat Bertha’s Mussels,” pulled the world to lower Broadway. It is the recurrent venue when the community needs to gather—witness the post-wave lifting of cups and mussels for Tony’s health (another honoree) three years ago. He has also served on the board of the Preservation Society and they both supported the revival of Thames Street Park. Through the Point’s repeated travails, the two have offered—when asked—the good counsel that accompanies a certain age, with or without mussels.”

Last year’s honoree was preservationist, bar chronicler and puppeteer Mark Walker.

For Point, Harrowing Night Before Dawn’s Early Light

The Town Criers, The Rev. Jack Trautwein and oboist Michael Lisicky, have offered News of the Day in the Square daily for the last month, corresponding to what arrived on those dates in 1814. Said “P.J.” Trautwein, the researcher and writer, “This of course was a critical time in the history of Baltimore, Fell’s Point, and the United States. Much of the news presented comes directly from the newspapers of the day. Although most of the local newspapers did not publish on Sept. 14, because of the British invasion, the following is the news which would have been circulating in Fell’s Point on that day.

Throughout yesterday, heavy rains and thunderstorms covered the region. During the afternoon, the enemy was constantly testing our line of defense along Hampstead Hill. Their troop movements were always countered by our forces along the entrenchments and redoubts. One observer told me that it looked like a chess match. It has been reported that the British sent troops as far north and west as Belair Road and the Herring Run just east of Major General Sam Smith’s estate, Montebello.

During the night many were able to observe the enemy campfires along the ridge less than two miles from here. With the rumor circulating that the British would make an assault with bayonets during the night, our citizens, spent a night full of fear.

Across the river the British bomb and rocket ships continued their assault on Fort McHenry. Between 9 and 1, the bombardment diminished. Rumors circulated that the enemy had (Continued)

Brighter Street Lights--Pt. II

By David Speer

Landscape architect and 4-year resident

One tool that urban designers commonly employ to strengthen the historic character of a neighborhood is to install quaint, historic-looking street lights. Fell’s Point has many such black coach lamps. Hundreds actually. But these lamps, at 12 to 16 feet, are too short to cast enough light for safe illumination in a high-use urban environment. They are energy wasting, expensive, and visually a mistake here. Standing at the foot of Broadway, I counted 34 such lights down the brick pier. I envisioned the scene without the massive clutter and we are positive this water vista would be cleaner and more dignified if only 3 or 4 taller, modern street lights replaced all these faux-historic coach lamps.

I suggest the street scene throughout Fell’s Point would be greatly improved by removing all these coach lamps, and the city would save significant money by installing fewer, taller, energy-efficient, modern street lights in their place.

Editor’s Note: The coach lamps also show a proclivity to collapse in a strong wind. One fragility--dog urine corrodes the anchor bolts.

Many years ago engineers installed much taller and brighter, brown square steel poles with shoebox-type street lights around Fell’s Point. These still exist and they sometimes alternate with the shorter black historic lamps, as on Thames St. These “modern” lights are 30-year-old models at the end of their life span, not energy-efficient like the new ones. I find the mix of short decorative coach lamps and taller modern shoeboxes a poor solution, probably installed in different decades. There are only a few examples of urban design where historic lamps work well, and are a part of the authentic street scene—the Gaslamp district of San Diego, or along narrow streets in Paris. But so often, limited municipal budgets will only allow inexpensive knock-off lamps, such as exist throughout Fell’s Point.

These are inefficient, because the reflectors do not cast light effectively. They are too short to illuminate large urban areas or wide streets, such as Thames, and engineers must install four times as many lamps to compensate. This over-supply crushes the city budget for procurement, and continues to cost into the future with high electricity bills. I believe someone must make a courageous decision, declare them a mistake and (Continued)
Benches Beset Main Street

About 70 Main Streeters and guests met at The Admiral Fell Inn July 30 for the business-oriented association's summer general meeting, focused on commercial code enforcement, vagrancy/homeless issues and policing. Councilman Jim Kraft lauded the group for adding clean-up crews to the historic district—paid through the merchants’ Gold Medalion fees. Drawing the most animated discussion, though, were calls from long-standing business- men on the Main Street Board of the benches.

The city code commissioner, Eric Booker, said his 120 inspectors are taking up proactive pursuit of commercial violations—from broken windows and shabby paint to prolonged vacancy and signage issues—rather than waiting for complaints as in recent years. He said the first round would result in warnings, but the second in fines. His deputy, Norris Turnipseed, said the Eastern Ave. corridor would be a prime focus, adding that in a recent survey he found it already “looking pretty good.” Kraft reported on a meeting the prior evening at the Polish Home to consider carving a second Main Street out of the current one, for the Broadway Pier corridor north of Fleet St. to Fayette St. Business out of the current one, for the Broadway Pier corridor north of Fleet St. to Fayette St. Busi-

masapust addressed two related liquor issues at an Aug. 13 meeting at EBLO: should FPCO pursue a cutoff of bar license transfers into this neighborhood, and should it oppose transfer of a dormant bar-package goods license at burned-out 1709 Fleet St.? Masapust said other Period in Time antique shop across the street? Debate among the 35 attendees was animated on the first count and passionate on the second.

Masapust came armed with a survey counting 76 liquor establishments, including 8 not currently operational, in the area bounded by Caroline, Eastern and Washington Sts. and by the harbor to the south. A majority opposed any new transfers here of licenses from elsewhere in this southeast 46th District, as currently permitted by state liquor laws. She said FPCO will press for revision of that authority through the Task Force of ‘Point community groups, chaired by Del. Pete Hammen.

The Fleet St. transfer debate opened with a presentation by the operator for seven years of One-Eyed Mike’s tavern, who offered elaborate plans for expanded new digs in two buildings he would buy across the street. Several residents denounced this a shabby opera-

Fort Babcock and Fort Covington of the Ferry Branch brought word that about 2 o'clock, 9 or 10 enemy attack boats making their way toward the harbor. In the morning hours an observer from around 4AM and called for removal of the benches. He was seconded by Mike Beckner of BOP’s Pizza. The woman who manages one of Main Street’s most acclaimed projects, the Saturday Farmers’ Market, said he is at risk to close because of early-hour vacant incursions. Main Street President Mike Maraziti of One-Eyed Mike’s tavern talked of an initiative with the police to reestablish a holding tank for drunks. He also defended an impeding city remake of the Square, which does not do away with benches. “The plan is solid,” he said, and work will begin when the construction will be least disruptive. That is still in debate.

FPCO Vs. Bar Proliferation

Community Organization President Joanne Harrowing Night - cont. from front

taken the fort. After 1 o’clock the barrage and fire became extremely intense. The canon blasts seemed to be from directly across the river, as well as down stream. The noise was horrifying. A dispatch during the night from Lazaretto Point brought news that through the rain they had spotted about 11 small attack boats making their way toward the harbor. Before any shots were fired they withdrew and disappeared in the rain and darkness.

In the morning hours an observer from around Fort Babcock and Fort Covington of the Ferry Branch brought word that about 2 o’clock, 9 or 10 enemy vessels, one being a rocket ship, evidently slipped by Fort McHenry on the Ferry Branch. They were finally sighted in the waters between Fort Babcock and Fort Covington. This observer said he had heard that Sailing Master John Webster of Fort Babcock made the discovery. Almost simultaneously the two batteries and the enemy boats began firing. This triggered a response from guns at Fort McHenry, Lazaretto Point and ships in the harbor. This was the frightening noise we experienced in the middle of the night.

The all-voluntary Fell’s Pointer thanks its four sustaining sponsors, One-Eyed Mike’s Tavern, 708 S. Bond St., 410.327.0445; Duda’s Tavern, Thames and Bond Sts., 410.375.9779; Howie B Properties, commercial and residential real estate in Fell’s Point and throughout Baltimore, 410.375.4200; and Jimmy’s Restaurant, 801 S. Broadway, 410.327.3273.

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