

Welcome to our first print edition!

You are holding the prototype edition of what will become a community newspaper for everyone who lives and works in South Baltimore, from Sharp-Leadenhall to Locust Point.

This is an amazingly vibrant and diverse part of the city, a collection of neighborhoods each with their own personality and history. The goal of the South Baltimore Peninsula Post is to forge connections between people across the peninsula and build a supportive community into the future.

I started the Peninsula Post online last year one week after Covid up-ended life in Baltimore to foster communication during the enforced isolation of the pandemic. The Peninsula Post has sponsored a series of community events tailored to social distancing: a sidewalk chalk art weekend, a scavenger hunt, a holiday lights walking tour.

The response to the Peninsula Post has been overwhelmingly positive. Readership of the blog has grown as have its Facebook and Instagram followers. But it's clear that to bring together a broad and varied community like ours, you need to use more than just online platforms. And so: this newspaper.

In my view, a high-impact print publication is uniquely suited to breaking down communications silos and bringing communities together. It's a medium that can be shared with literally anyone, that can grab someone's attention for more than a few seconds. And it's recyclable, biodegradable, and made from a renewable resource.

This prototype issue, like the Peninsula Post's online platforms, has been a self-funded enterprise by a decade-long resident of South Baltimore who is passionate about this city and wants to see it thrive. I've poured a career-worth of publishing and communications experience into this start-up full-time, courtesy of my recent retirement from NASA.

The next step for the Peninsula Post is to launch a regular free print edition to complement our online presence. We are targeting this fall to return with our next issue after we organize as a nonprofit and secure funding to cover printing costs.

I hope you enjoy this first issue and that you'll give us some feedback. And many thanks to everyone who has supported the Peninsula Post over the past year.

– Steve Cole, Peninsula post staff

South Baltimore Peninsula Post
P.O. Box 27129
Baltimore, MD 21230
bmorepeninsulapost@gmail.com
bmorepeninsulapost.com

FREE

THE SOUTH BALTIMORE

PENINSULA POST

MARCH 2021

Connecting the communities of South Baltimore, Md.

Heroes of Our Pandemic Year

On March 16, Baltimore reaches the one-year mark of living with Covid. Last year on that date, schools and restaurants in Baltimore city closed and large gatherings were banned.

As a community, we have been through a lot these last twelve months, from social isolation to jobs lost and homes transformed into combined workplaces and schools.

Now that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for the global pandemic, we can look back and acknowledge the people in our lives who helped get us through this difficult year with acts of kindness or sacrifice, large and small.

For this special issue of the South Baltimore Peninsula Post, we asked SoBo residents and business owners to send in shout-outs to those they knew who went above and beyond. The collection below is a tribute to each one of them and everything they did to keep spirits strong as normal life was turned upside down during this unprecedented time. – Peninsula Post staff

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Neighbor crafts children's masks

Celine Planchez figured out how to design masks for little ones and then made them for parents across the peninsula. – Lauren Stephens, E. Montgomery St.

Chalk artist spreads cheer

Jenn Perry runs a small craft business (Violet's Daughter) that relies on craft fairs. With no fairs in 2020, Jenn expressed her creativity with chalk art. She started doing witty, humorous designs and sayings outside her home on Beason St. I know many neighbors appreciated a bit of cheer during such an unusual time. – Ashley Vogelsang, E. Fort Ave.

Librarian brightens pandemic days

Melanie Jacobs has brightened many a patron's pandemic days with her big smile and positive attitude as she hands over sanitized books preordered for pickup outside of the Light Street branch. She also organized special virtual library events to help keep us entertained, including a show by the talented jazz harmonicist Frederic Yonnet. – Jane Seebold, E. Clement St.



Wearing a mask has been a common and heroic act by many in South Baltimore.

Parents create fun adventures

The "Parents Quaranteam" on the 100 block of West Street (Sarah, Kate, Mike, and Chad) have been awesome parents and neighbors this year. Despite school closures, challenges at work, and a worldwide pandemic, these parents have done everything they could day-in and day-out to provide a fun, exciting, and communal series of daily adventures (including turning the Holy Cross parking lot into a beach) for their kids and our block. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Resident combines fright and food

At Halloween, not only did Kim Acton have the most creatively decorated, scary house on Andre St., she encouraged donations for the Maryland Food Bank. With the help of friends and neighbors and others, she was able to make a large contribution. Kim is a good neighbor and a thoughtful member of the neighborhood. – Cheryl R. Duffey, Hull St.

Shop owner keeps bread rising

At the start of the pandemic, Sharon Johnson from Cheese Galore and More tacked on a large order of baker's yeast from her distributor for me. She kept my household stocked with fresh bread when the stores were running low and provided Federal Hill with staples throughout the pandemic. – Meg Murray, William St.

School leader makes learning safe

Thushari Wijesekera has been heroic in her leadership of the Baltimore Montessori School in Locust Point as

she has taken every precaution possible to provide a safe learning environment for the teachers, students, and their families at the school. It's great to see the kids and their families check in and out from our campus. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Tributes from SoBo residents and business owners to those that went above and beyond.

Mail carrier delivers hope

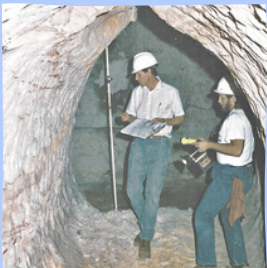
The dedication, perseverance, and upbeat disposition of Michelle Wakefield, our mail carrier, has been a touchstone for me throughout the pandemic. The example she set by delivering the mail every day with a smile (under her mask) was one of the few signs of normalcy that we could all look to for inspiration and hope. – Rich Schechinger, Riverside Ave.

Essential service carries on

When the pandemic started, my husband Stephen Tant (SJT Plumbing) and I had concerns about his livelihood. But a pandemic doesn't stop pipes from bursting or toilets from clogging. So he and his team carried on and took every precaution to keep everyone safe. He's also given away free work on his own time to those who cannot afford to pay full price for these essential resources. – Ashley Vogelsang, E. Fort Ave.

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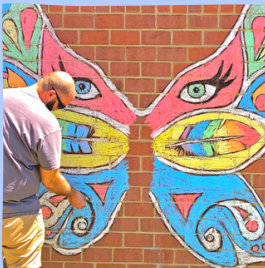
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Director fights for small businesses
Cathy Rosenbaum, Executive Director of Federal Hill Main Street, has worked around the clock to support our neighborhood small businesses during the pandemic. She facilitated the implementation of outdoor dining and positioned dozens of jersey walls herself to make sure the bars and restaurants could serve their patrons safely. She has been an invaluable resource for business owners navigating the complicated processes of securing government Covid assistance. – Eric Costello, City Hall, and Chris Riehl, E. Cross St.

Parents keep Saturdays special
Melanie and Kevin Nies decided back when all of this started that they would make Saturdays special for their two sons. Every Saturday they set out for a new adventure: to a state park, a trail, or a river. They shared these adventures with the whole community through Facebook posts, inspiring others with their creativity and commitment to having fun. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Designer succeeds outside the box
Designer Danielle Nekimken really went above and beyond to make our "Women of Steel" exhibition accessible during the pandemic. She had already designed an indoor exhibition when Covid struck and it became clear we needed to think outside the box. She completely reimagined her design to place the exhibition along the Key Highway fence so it is free and accessible to everyone. – Auni Gelles, Baltimore Museum of Industry

Barber is quick with a smile
From his Fort Avenue barbershop, Jay Crossney stays well in the loop of life here in South Baltimore. Just about every time I walk past his shop, he's quick to run out and greet me and my dog with a warm smile, some words of encouragement, and a standing offer to help whenever needed. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Recycling heroes clean up
Mr. Howard of Baltimore's Department of Public Works accepted our recycling Monday through Saturday for months at Digital Harbor High School with a great smile. Hard



The faithful Dalmatian outside the Peter J. O'Connor Fire Station in Locust Point has reminded everyone to mask up throughout the pandemic. Photo by Mary Braman.

working city employees came and cleaned up a mess left outside the recycling dumpster on the Labor Day holiday. And neighbor Dave Stock pitched in one Monday morning to help Mr. Howard put into the truck mountains of discarded recycling that was illegally abandoned on Sunday. – Julie Gilardi, E. Ostend St.

Restaurateur steps up to help
Every shop and restaurant owner is stretched thin these days. When asked to assist with a clothing and toy collection to provide much needed relief to a church on the east side of town, Billy Hughes of Barracudas jumped into action and provided a convenient collection site for our Knights of Columbus Council and South Baltimore Catholic Community. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Market organizer adapts flawlessly
Ann Fiocco, who runs the Saturday Farmers' Market at the Baltimore Museum of Industry, did a great job of organizing the market by moving it to

a new location at the start of the pandemic and maintaining social distance practices under challenging circumstances. She then moved the market back to its original location without missing a step. – Dave Stock, Sanders St.

Driver offers heavy lift and a smile
David from FedEx Ground is the hardest working man on the peninsula. Our now frequent interactions with him have made us both so happy. He has an infectious smile and is genuinely kind. I wanted to give him a shoutout for the risk he takes on, his heavy lifting skills, and most of all his smile and lovely personality. It's small things like this that have made such a difference this year. – Lauren Marks and Charlie Totten, E. Ostend St.

Owners grateful for neighbors
Our neighbors in Riverside and surrounding areas have kept us alive with their generous support and continued patronage of Park Bench Pub during this very difficult year. We

literally could not have done this without each and every one of you! – Janice Shih and Stephen Puzio, Belt St.

Volunteers making a difference
Collier and Teka Slade are very active at the Filbert Street Community Garden, a local co-op that provides a home for many different animals and a solid source of food for many in the Curtis Bay area. They also have been instrumental in driving our parish van which makes it possible for our senior parishioners to attend our weekend celebrations at church. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Librarians lend cheer, too
The librarians at Enoch Pratt Free Library's Light Street branch (Andrew, Caitlyn, Cris, Justin, Late-sha, and Melanie) not only pro-vide us with reading materials, music, and movies while wearing masks and remaining socially distant, they dressed up for the holidays and brought the same good cheer to their work as before the pandemic. – Julie Gilardi, E. Ostend St.

Restaurant owners make me smile
Despite the hardships inherent in restaurant ownership during the pandemic, Mara and Ivars Balodis of Captain Larry's have both stayed incredibly positive and continue to use Captain Larry's to bring a little bit of joy to the neighborhood. I can't help but smile whenever I see one of them walking around the neighborhood or when I stop by for a bit of conversation. – Arthur Swartwout, E. Randall St.

"Parents Quaranteam have been awesome providing adventures for their kids and our block."

Legendary friend-maker turned 95
Henry Miner is a living legend. In November he turned 95 which gave many members of our community a chance to gather outside of his Fort Avenue house and celebrate with him (at a distance). His service to our country and instant friend-making demeanor makes our neighborhood a happier place. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.





Listening for Miss Twist in your neighborhood is always a fun summer pastime on the peninsula, but it was especially welcomed during this long pandemic year. Here she is on a June evening on Williams St. at Gittings St.

Nurse inspires through resilience

As a labor and delivery nurse, my fiancée Anny Zhuo unwaveringly served those patients who needed her, embracing the uncertainty and fear during the early pandemic. She exemplifies a resilient devotion to her mission and passion, inspiring me, and others, to always stand up for what we believe. – Jonathan Chen, W. Barre St.

A superstar keeps people safe

Nathalie Nguyen of After Hour Nails & Spa and her family made hundreds of masks and donated them to places in desperate need early in the pandemic. She also donated gallons of alcohol to UMMS for sanitizer. Nathalie asked nothing in return; she just wanted to keep people safe. She is a superstar! – Beth Whitmer, E. Montgomery, and Mary Gorman, W. Lee St.

Local school rises to challenge

The teachers, administration, and staff of Thomas Johnson Elementary Middle School (TJEMS) took on the unbearably challenging conditions of distance learning this past year with determination. They rallied to the cause of supporting our children with empathy and grace both academically and emotionally. – TJEMS Parent-Teacher Organization board, E. Heath St.

Music director offers hope

Michael Angelucci is the music director at the Catholic Community of South Baltimore. This year as many of our neighbors have been unable to join us in person at church, Michael provided excellent musical opportunities for prayer in our livestream services. Our Easter celebration last spring and the Sounds of Hope evening of prayer and song were great examples of this. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Café owner kept us connected

Month after month when us humans were wearing masks and keeping safe distances from each other, Adama Fall

of Koba Café continued to serve the community with his positive spirit, friendly and inclusive nature, and incredible memory for hundreds of neighbors' coffee orders. He exudes compassion, joy and kindness and shares these attributes with the local young people that he hires and trains. At Koba's he makes people feel connected in a world of forced isolation. – Dan Strodel, Riverside Ave.

Teacher aids struggling students

My neighbor Laura Knapp, a teacher at Baltimore City College, has been going the extra mile to teach her students virtually during these challenging times. She provides personal support for kids struggling with online learning, spending countless

extra hours creating assignments tailored to individual experiences.

Online learning has been hugely challenging for so many families. Laura is one of the great teachers who has worked hard to continue educating our kids during this difficult time. – Luke Clippinger, Webster St.

Local business cares for grieving

Victor Doda II and his team at Charles Stevens Funeral Home have truly shepherded our community this past year by caring for families in their loss and grief. In addition, they went out of their way to make St. Francis Prayer Cards and medals to create a special day for the pet owners at the Blessing of Animals in October. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.

Thank you, music lovers!

To everyone who has supported The 8x10 either by coming to shows or contributing to the GoFundMe campaign: We couldn't do it without you. – Abigail Janssens, 10 E. Cross St.

Community mourns loss

We lost a stalwart participant in our community when Ken Rhoad passed away in October (not Covid-related). While suffering through poor health, he aggressively carried out his duties as the crime and safety chair for Federal Hill South Neighborhood Association and helped maintain Henry Street Park by cutting the grass during the city's suspension of services. – Rich Schechinger, Riverside Ave.

'Rock Picasso' spreads happiness

I do not know who to thank for the many, many painted "happy rocks" that sprouted like crocuses in our neighborhood's tree pits this past year. So, to the prolific, unknown, rock Picasso residing (I'm guessing) within the confines of William, Warren, Riverside, and Gittings – thank you and keep 'em coming! – Steve Cole, E. Clement St.

Fundraiser goes all out

Kris Ruhling quit his six-figure job to create a business that allowed him to help the community during the pandemic. His hands-on efforts include Save Baltimore 2021 to support city restaurants, providing masks to essential employees, sponsoring a Thanksgiving food drive, and much, much more. – Zach Hiller, Belt St.

Neighbor cares for green spaces

Mary Braman weeded and cleaned up the garden next to the St. Mary Star of the Sea church on Riverside and tended to green areas by Digital Harbor High School. We are all better off with a neighborhood that is cared for. – Vigdis Jacobsen, Covington St.

Wedding planner helps love grow

As the new wedding coordinator at the Catholic Community of South Baltimore, Sue Lear has helped engaged couples plan and replan their weddings during this challenging year, navigating around changing policies and restrictions. Her compassion has certainly come to the aid of many couples. – Father Josh Laws, E. West St.



On Saturday, Nov. 21, the latest "SoBo Green" campaign added 14 new trees to the central part of the peninsula, bringing the total planted to nearly 200 since the all-volunteer effort started in 2004. Want to help this year? Email mysobogreen@gmail.com.

Born to Roast Coffee



This is the first in a series of features about local products and the people who make them on the South Baltimore peninsula. Our part of the city has long been a manufacturing and production hub. Although much of that work vanished years ago, that creative and industrious spirit endures here in firms large and small. (This story was originally published online Feb. 6, 2021)

Pfefferkorn's has been roasting and blending coffee in Baltimore since 1900

If there is anybody in South Baltimore who has coffee literally running through their veins, it is Patti Pfefferkorn-Griffin and her nephew Chris Pfefferkorn. Coffee is probably in their DNA, too.

Patti and Chris and three previous generations of Pfefferkorns have been roasting, blending, packaging, and selling coffee in Baltimore since 1900. That's right, for over 120 years.

Patti – master roaster, blender, and principal coffee buyer – has been working in the family business for 40 years. Chris – sales manager and roaster – has spent nearly half of his 35 years in the business.

From their unassuming warehouse at 1200 E. Fort Avenue in Locust Point, Pfefferkorn's Coffee Inc. produces 9 house blends, 12 “country of origin” specialty coffees from Brazil to Ethiopia, over a dozen flavored coffees, and 5 decafs. You can walk right into their front office weekdays and pick up a pound or two, ground to suit your personal coffee-making style.

Pfefferkorn's Coffee may be, as Chris quipped, “Baltimore's best kept secret” in part because its customer base was until recently 90 percent

restaurants and the food service industry, not consumers. But when Covid shut down restaurants far and wide last year, Pfefferkorn's had to pivot to retail big time.

“Things have really changed a lot for us,” said Chris. “Our retail has gone through the roof. We are in a couple of grocery stores, including the Graul's Market chain of independent Maryland groceries, and several farmers markets. And we sell from here, cash and carry.”

Right now, customers can order by phone or email or by walking in the door. An online ordering system at pfefferkornscoffee.com is currently in development and expected soon, according to Chris. And the Pfefferkorns are in the planning stage of converting some of their office space into an outlet-store-type experience once Covid restrictions ease.

“Like wineries and breweries, we're seeing the consumer market change,” Chris adds. “People want to buy local and have a more direct relationship with their roaster. We've adapted to that, and we're still here.”

As a fifth-generation coffee roaster, Chris knows his coffee and is ready to sing the praises of his blends, note for note, like a sommelier critiquing a favorite wine.

“Our Mason-Dixon blend has been a big grower. It incorporates dark-roasted coffees and medium-roasted coffees that are blended after the roasting process, which gives you all those beautiful dark toasty notes that you look for in a dark roast, but all the smooth, sweet breakfasty notes you look for in a medium roast. Sometimes a dark roast can be a little harsh on the back end, and this blend is not a bitter coffee.”

Pfefferkorn's has been roasting coffee at its current Locust Point location since 1995. They've been on the South Baltimore peninsula since 1969, when the operation moved from downtown Baltimore across the harbor to the 400 block of Grindall Street near Federal Hill Park. The large garage that housed the roasting room still stands, converted into residential units.

Their Fort Avenue building is divided into a warehouse holding the imported green, or unroasted, coffee in large burlap sacks and a roasting room where the beans are roasted,



Top: Pfefferkorn's Coffee has operated out of an unassuming warehouse in Locust Point since 1995. Middle: Chris Pfefferkorn starts up the factory's largest roaster, which can roast 500 pounds of coffee in 20 minutes. Above: “Green” coffee beans (left) as they arrive at the factory, and beans straight out of the roaster (right).



Patti Pfefferkorn-Griffin and nephew Chris Pfefferkorn in their roasting room on E. Fort Avenue.

ground, and packaged in a series of hulking machines.

On my tour of Pfefferkorn's Coffee in January, Chris had preloaded their large roaster with 500 pounds of coffee beans to make their best-selling Breakfast Blend. A smaller roaster nearby, affectionately called “Baby Bear,” handles smaller batches of up to 26 pounds.

With the flick of a switch, Chris turns on the massive roaster. The temperature gradually rises to 400 degrees as the coffee tumbles round and round inside for 20 minutes. It's a

one-person operation, but Chris is fully engaged: eyes, nose, and ears. He periodically scoops beans out of the roaster and holds them to his nose to judge how the roasting is progressing. Near the end of the process, he listens for a distinctive cracking sound as the beans expand in the heat.

When the roasting is complete, Chris turns off the roaster and opens a small door to let the beans slide down a chute into the “cooling bin.” Here the machinery stirs the dark mass and air is forced through it to lower the temperature. This step halts the roasting process in the hot beans, Chris explains.

An air pump lifts the roasted coffee beans out of the cooling bin and up a chute in the next step. On high-production days with as many as three employees on the roasting room floor, the beans would go straight to the 10-foot-tall grinder. But today Chris directs the beans into a holding bin to be ground later.

You can grab a cup of Pfefferkorn's Coffee at several peninsula restaurants, including Locust Point mainstays like Hull Street Blues, LP Steamers, and Barracuda's.

The cash-and-carry store is open Monday-Thursday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can order curbside pickup or shipping by phone (410-727-3354) and email (order@pfefferkornscoffee.com).

– Peninsula Post staff

SOBO EVENTS CALENDAR

- TUESDAY, MARCH 23**
Federal Hill South Neighborhood Association, monthly membership meeting via Zoom. 7pm.
- SATURDAY, MARCH 27**
‘Clean Up Green Up’ event, sponsored by the Federal Hill South Neighborhood Association.
- MONDAY, MARCH 29**
Riverside Neighborhood Association meeting via Zoom. 7pm.
- TUESDAY, MARCH 30**
Sparrows Point's Women of Steel, online discussion hosted by the Baltimore Museum of Industry. 7pm.

- TUESDAY, APRIL 13**
South Baltimore Neighborhood Association monthly membership online meeting. 7pm.
- THURSDAY, APRIL 22**
‘Homerun for Recovery’ virtual fundraiser for Baltimore Station. Livestream concert, appetizers, and custom cocktails. baltimorestation.org. \$
- SATURDAY, MAY 1**
‘Honey, I Shrunk the Kinetic Sculpture Race,’ American Visionary Art Museum. The big annual race pivots to an online event where you can watch as miniature model artful sculptures compete. 11am.

For the latest updates: bmorepeninsulapost.com/events-calendar

Random Acts of Book Kindness Abound

You’ve probably come across a Little Free Library in your travels, mounted like an oversized mailbox on a pole at some random corner, its clear front door revealing a tumble of volumes inside. “Take a book, leave a book” is its communal slogan, kindly offering you a good read, no strings attached.

You may not have noticed, but there has been something of a building boom of these diminutive structures across the peninsula over the past year. Fueled by the pandemic and our community’s evident altruism, these individual initiatives by residents are inspired by the mission of the decade-old Little Free Library phenomenon to “build community, inspire readers, and expand book access for all.”

In true Baltimore fashion, each little free library is funded, constructed, installed, and stocked in its own unique way.

According to the official Little Free Library website (littlefreelibrary.org), Baltimore hosts about 60 libraries, with just two on the South Baltimore peninsula. But a recent survey conducted by the Peninsula Post reveals there are actually nine libraries here, with a tenth slated to open soon. At least four of these were installed after the start of the pandemic.

In true Baltimore fashion, each building is unique: funded, constructed, installed, and stocked in its own way. Few are affiliated with the Little Free Library organization or used the group’s construction kits.

Pandemic stay-at-home restrictions last spring spurred peninsula-native Lauren Marks of E. Ostend St. to act on her fascination with the little libraries. With the help of her husband Charlie Totten, they built one from scratch with a green roof of seasonal plants that opened in April on the southwest corner of Patapsco St.

Lauren initially stocked the library’s shelf with her own books, but now the community keeps it full. “I don’t really know where they come from, but there are always new ones,” Lauren reports.

Her library has had a steady stream of visitors, from families with children to those experiencing homelessness. Lauren has been pleased to hear the same kind of excitement in the voices of kids exploring her library that she remembers feeling as a child leaving the Light Street branch of the Enoch Pratt Library with an armload of books.

Another new little library that opened in November in Locust Point has also been getting a lot of use, according to Hap Duffey of Hull St. “Within 15 minutes of my mounting it around Thanksgiving, people were opening the door to see what’s there. There’s probably a complete turnover



Top: The newest peninsula library, set to open this spring in Solo Gibbs Park, was painted by (left to right) Camden O’Brien, Lily Randolph, and Tapsir Kane as part of the SHARPKids after-school program. Photo courtesy Lil Gurney.

Above: Pandemic stay-at-home restrictions last spring spurred Charlie Totten and Lauren Marks to build a library alongside their rowhouse on E. Ostend St.

of titles every two weeks.”

Hap and his wife Cheryl initiated this library last summer after seeing that another one near their house was consistently full over the years. More little libraries were clearly needed, they thought, so they applied for a community grant from the Locust Point Civic Association and purchased a premade structure online. The library now stands in front of the Locust Point Recreation Center (1627 E. Fort Ave.) in Latrobe Park.

Rich Schechinger of Riverside Ave. had never heard of Little Free Libraries two years ago, but he has

now built one from scratch with his neighbors. This library opened in Henry Street Park (1240 Henry St.) last summer and is getting steady traffic, Rich reports.

He first heard of little libraries from his fellow Riverside Ave. resident Cathy Strodel in 2019 as a possible project for the Federal Hill South Neighborhood Association, which Rich leads as president. When his neighbor Bridget Morris also mentioned them last year, he knew it was time to act.

Planning began in earnest with several other neighbors involved in

Henry Street Park. A design for a large library with plants on the roof was settled on. With funds from the neighborhood association, Rich started construction in April and the library opened in June.

A different group effort, this one by middle-school students, led to the little library on the west side of Riverside Park just inside the entrance at E. Heath and Johnson streets. Students at nearby Thomas Johnson Elementary Middle School took on every aspect of the project, from planning to fundraising, as part of their community service project for the National Junior Honor Society. It opened in June 2019.

“It’s been great to see parents and the community get invested in this project,” says Katie Scotti, the Thomas Johnson teacher who supervises the honor society. Community members installed the library, painted the school’s lion mascot on it, and have repaired occasional vandalism.

Another little library a few blocks away that opened in 2017 continues to see regular use with a new public service added recently by passersby. Matt Hall maintains this library on the 100 block of E. Randall that he inherited when neighbors left the neighborhood.

Matt noted an uptick of use during the pandemic with libraries closed and kids at home 24/7. “Now sometimes people put in pantry items too, not a lot, but they get taken. So the library serves that purpose too.”

That dual use – reading and feeding – is being designed into the peninsula’s newest library, set to open this spring at Solo Gibbs Park in Sharp-Leadenhall. Crystal Thomas of Otterbein spearheaded this library with the help of friends, neighbors, and Lil Gurney of the SHARPKids after-school program sponsored by Grace City Church.

Crystal launched the project during last summer’s pandemic-induced downtime. Inspired by one in Canton Square, she raised the funds with a GoFundMe campaign and purchased an unpainted library on Etsy. The SHARPKids picked the color scheme and painted the structure.

“Our library is pretty large. One shelf will be for books, the other for nonperishable goods,” Crystal explains. “We decided to call it the Baltimore Community Cabinet. It’s ready to go. We’re just waiting for good weather to get it in the ground.”

Four additional peninsula libraries discovered in our survey can be found at these locations:

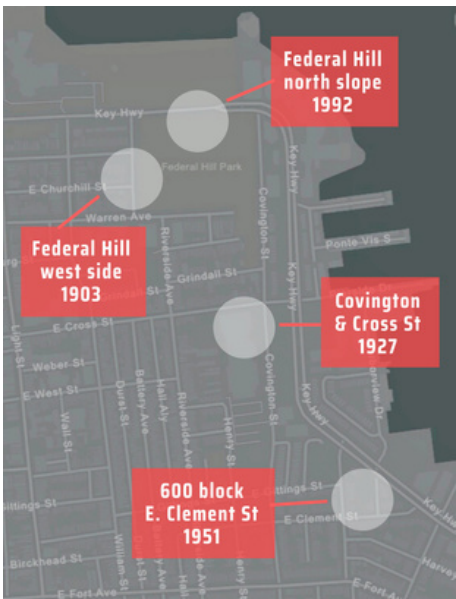
(1) Locust Point at the southwest corner of E. Clement and Hull streets, (2) McHenry Row at the northwest corner of Porter and Ross streets, (3) West side of Stack St. near E. Fort Ave., (4) Northwest corner of E. Randall St. and Battery Ave. across from Riverside Park.

– Peninsula Post staff

The Little Free Libraries of South Baltimore (So Far)



Deep Dive into the Tunnels of Federal Hill



Above: Four tunnel networks and when they were explored. Left: Federal Hill and its eastern waterfront in 1858. Source: Johns Hopkins Sheridan Libraries.

As you see this place today, Federal Hill sits serenely overlooking downtown Baltimore, a broad, terraced grandstand with sweeping views of the harbor below. When the city was young, however, this was a very different place. It was a rough and rutted bluff, worked by industrious men intent on turning a profit from the promontory and its neighboring hills. Tunnels and mines were cut into its flanks, incursions that were eventually abandoned, covered over, forgotten.

But the subterranean voids in and around Federal Hill have refused to stay buried silently in the past. For generations up to the present, their mouths have opened regularly to threaten, startle, and fascinate the living.

‘Mysterious’ urban refuge

Mid-nineteenth century paintings of the hill and adjacent slopes that stretch south along the harbor show extensive gullies and mouths of caves at the crowded waterfront. A “mysterious cave on Federal Hill” was already the stuff of urban lore as far back as 1838, according to a deep dive into the *Baltimore Sun* archives.

Abandoned caves at the foot of the hill provided refuge for the city’s destitute, including one Ann Carey who was found lying in one of the caves in 1852, apparently “with the determination to end her days there.”

The caves and their tunnels that honeycombed the hill and the slopes stretching south from it along the waterfront were dug to extract fine

sand and clay used in pottery and glass making. The tunnels also served as cold storage for a Baltimore brewery. Other origin stories have surfaced over the years, but commerce of one sort or another remains the most likely underlying motivation for the widespread excavations.

What follows is a tour of four different areas of Federal Hill and its adjacent slopes that have actively burst from the past to the present over the centuries.

Tunnels were cut into the hill and the slopes to the south, all eventually abandoned and forgotten.

Federal Hill was falling down

The steep north flank of Federal Hill facing the harbor, which threatened collapse since at least the Civil War, hid an elaborate tunnel network in its upper reaches that was not discovered until the 1990s. A landslide in 1859 after a heavy rain almost completely buried the street below. Continued collapse of the northern flank threatened the Union fort atop Federal Hill in 1864.

The stability of the hill became the city’s headache after Baltimore took it over in 1880 to create Federal Hill Park. Workers at that time had supposedly filled in all the caves, but apparently, they missed a few. The north flank continued to pose a threat with collapses reported in the early 1900s. In 1915, a 12-foot-wide hole opened on this side, which neighborhood boys clambered into until police drove them out.

The east side of the hill that now faces the American Visionary Art Museum also posed problems with a landslide in 1972. (A similar but smaller slump of this part of the hill in December 2018 was not tied to tunnels.) Tunnels some 40 feet below the surface of this part of the park were explored in 1952 after a gaping hole suddenly appeared near a walkway at the top of the hill.

Continuing concerns about the safety of the hill led the city to close Federal Hill Park in the spring of 1992 for a three-year, \$1.9 million reconstruction and facelift.

That June, workers uncovered an extensive, intact network of underground chambers and corridors which they entered from the north side along the mid-slope walkway. The labyrinth, including a white-walled central chamber 12 feet high, was thoroughly documented by the city before being sealed again, never to be seen by the public or explored by neighborhood boys.

Another, separate tunnel network below the western edge of the hill along Battery Avenue was uncovered in 1903. This “artificial cave” allegedly stretched many blocks south and east underneath Federal Hill Park to the vicinity of Cross and Covington streets. According to news reports of the day, “there are a number of small boys in South Baltimore who have made this trip several times in recent years.” The entrance to this cave near the corner of Battery and Churchill (then Church) Street was also sealed by the property owner.

Tunnels surface, west and south

The buried tunnels in this area continued to vex and amuse residents, however. In 1911 a cave-in near the original entrance left a 15-foot-wide hole in the pavement. Two local men said to have played hide-and-seek in the tunnel network some 40 years before, climbed into the void down a ladder and reported the tunnels just as they remembered them as boys.

The rumored network of tunnels south of Federal Hill near the terminus of Cross Street finally surfaced in 1927 during excavation work for a new building by the United States Printing and Lithographing Company at the intersection of Cross and Covington (current home of Digital Harbor High School). A “labyrinth of tunnels which radiate in every direction from a central stone-vaulted cavern” was mapped, including a tunnel leading north from the property toward Federal Hill.

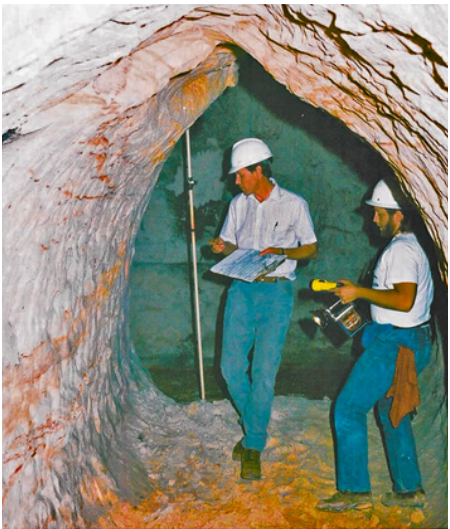
‘Great Clement Street Caverns’

The most dangerous resurfacing of the area’s subterranean past occurred in 1951 a few blocks south of the high school. The scars of that event are still in plain view today.

The 600 block of E. Clement sits just above Key Highway as the street slowly climbs toward Riverside Avenue. On Sunday, June 10, 1951, residents of several rowhouses on the north side of the block found gaping holes in their cellar floors and nothing but blackness below. Other homes had cracked ceilings and broken walls.

Residents of six adjacent rowhouses abandoned their homes as 100

Continued on next page



In 1992, workers renovating Federal Hill Park discovered a network of underground tunnels that were quickly sealed from public view. RK&K photo.



Cave-ins on and around Federal Hill have attracted public interest for generations. In 1911 this hole in a Battery Avenue sidewalk near Warren St. revealed a tunnel network last visited by local boys 40 years before. Credit: *Baltimore Evening Sun*

New Dessert Bakers Deliver the Goodies

It all started when Sumayyah (Mya) Bilal offered Chris Burgess a piece of her eggnog cheesecake. “I gave some to Chris the year we met,” Mya recalls. “He said, ‘This is amazing! We need to sell it, and I’m going to help you.’”

Just a few short years later, Mya and Chris are co-owners of Codetta Bake Shop, a bakery that produces a growing list of desserts from a shared commercial kitchen on E. Fort Avenue. And business is booming for the start-up, which has quickly expanded citywide and even regionally from its fan base in the peninsula’s Riverside neighborhood.

One year ago, Codetta’s was producing a dozen or so cheesecakes a month, selling mainly to the partners’ friends and family. Now they are also producing whole buttercream cakes, cupcakes, lemon squares, brownies, Tres Leches cakes, and ice cream. They are now averaging over 75 orders a week. “We even had customers coming down from Pennsylvania for Thanksgiving,” Mya says.

Codetta Bake Shop is turning out a growing list of desserts from a shared kitchen on Fort Avenue.

The list of offerings is still growing. During a visit to their kitchen in late February, they were working on a new product – banana pudding – added in response to customers’ suggestions. That flexibility and willingness to experiment appear to be a key ingredient in the young company’s growth.

But it all started with cheesecake: Mya’s passion. “Cheesecake has been my favorite dessert since I was a kid. I’ve been making them and tinkering with the recipe for years. For all our family celebrations, I bring dessert.”

Chris’ passions are business and entrepreneurship. A long-time resident of the Riverside neighborhood – he attended Thomas Johnson Elementary Middle School – Chris holds down the business/marketing side of the operation while Mya is the kitchen creative.

Codetta Bake Shop started in the spring of 2018 on a very small scale in the very small kitchen of Mya’s studio apartment in Bolton Hill. Both partners held down full-time jobs – Mya teaching band at a Howard County

middle school, Chris working for the federal government – while baking cheesecakes for family and friends in their spare time.

“We continued this as a side hustle for a few years until early 2020,” Chris recalled via email. “We moved the bakery to my rowhouse under a cottage license. Soon after the lockdown in the spring, we decided to start making cupcakes. We began selling three ‘experimental’ cupcake flavors a week, available for pick-up and delivery anywhere in the city. Each subsequent week, through persistent social media marketing, an incredible amount of word-of-mouth, and many hours of really hard work, the business exploded.”

Codetta Bake Shop’s social media following on Facebook and Instagram has grown from 300 a year ago to 5,000 in February, says Mya.

As orders grew to about 50 a week, Mya left her teaching job and became the first full-time Codetta employee. In November 2020 the partners took another big leap by moving their baking operation into the Mindgrub commercial kitchen at 554 E. Fort Ave, space that they share with a caterer.

Yet another growth spurt took the partners by surprise soon after the move. While the business had been built on cakes ordered in advance and cupcake deliveries, the new customers had something else in mind.

“Soon after we got a Google business listing, I was getting calls every day, people asking ‘Hey, can I pick up a whole cake? Can I get some cupcakes right now?’ I’d have to tell them you know that’s not how we work. We need a two-week lead time,” Mya remembers.

But Mya and Chris made a quick pivot to meet the new demand and Codetta’s “Dessert On Demand” program was born in January. “We said, let’s try it out and see what happens if we make a bunch of stuff and make it available for pickup. And now we can’t stop. We’ve sold out these items every week,” says Mya.

The rapid growth has been a welcome challenge for the partners. “It’s kind of mind-boggling for us,” says Mya. “It’s been crazy these last few months. But it’s such a blessing to be in this position, especially during this time that has been so difficult for restaurants and small business owners in general.”



Founded on cheesecake, Codetta Bake Shop has expanded into a wide range of desserts. Top: Mya prepares banana pudding, a new addition. Right: Their current location offers a window for preordered pickup on Jackson St.



Mya and Chris have now brought on a part-time employee to tackle the flood of orders. Their staff also includes family members who work in the kitchen and make deliveries. Chris now works with a wholesaler to supply them with regular deliveries of eggs, milk, cream cheese, and butter.

There’s something happening most every day in the kitchen, Mya says.

And the growth continues. In mid-February, Codetta announced their first wholesale customer. They are now making weekly deliveries of their Tres Leches cake slices to Cocina Luchadoras, a Mexican restaurant in Fells Point (253 S. Broadway St).

What’s next for Codetta Bake Shop? For the near term it sounds like the focus will be a lot more hard work to meet current demand for their goodies. Further down the road, Mya envisions a brick-and-mortar shop somewhere in Baltimore.

“We’d love to open up our own space that would be a hub for the community, a place where people can hang out. We’d serve brunch on the weekend. I love making brunch. And I make a killer Quiche Lorraine, if I do say so myself.”

No matter what the future holds for Codetta Bake Shop, Mya is enjoying the intangible rewards that cooking brings.

“I really use the business as a way to connect with people. The reason I love baking is I love the feeling of someone enjoying something I’ve cooked with love. That’s one of the quickest and strongest ways to foster a connection with someone.”

Codetta operates two ordering websites, one for custom advance orders (two-week minimum) and one for Dessert On Demand in-stock items (same-day orders):

Custom orders:
codettabakeshop.com/

Dessert On Demand:
getcodettabakeshop.com/

Dessert On Demand is available Thursday-Sunday only. Pre-orders can be picked up between 2-5pm at the window on Jackson St. (the building with the “Mindpub” sign); deliveries are made between 5:30-8:30pm.

– Peninsula Post staff



Sumayyah (Mya) Bilal and Chris Burgess launched Codetta Bake Shop in 2018 from her studio apartment. The business now rents a commercial kitchen from Mindgrub.

TUNNELS continued from p. 6

spectators gathered to watch city workers excavate down into the street to find the cause of the near catastrophe. The state geologist reassured the public that “South Baltimore is steady and firm and is in no danger of disappearing.”

A few days of digging revealed two large caverns beneath the doomed homes and the street. One had “small finger-like tunnels running off it.” Test borings were drilled around the caverns to search for other undiscovered voids, but none were found. The city dumped over 500 tons of fill material into the holes. Six adjacent rowhouses (606-618) were razed. Those lots remain uninhabited today, covered by green space and parking spaces. – Peninsula Post staff

Pandemic Pastimes: SoBo 'Chalk Fest' 2020

Not long after pandemic “stay at home” restrictions took effect last spring, South Baltimore residents, chalk in hand, took to the sidewalks and exterior walls of their neighborhoods for an outburst of artistic energy. It seemed the entire peninsula turned out for the “ChalkItUpSoBo” chalk art extravaganza the weekend of May 1-3, 2020. With an assist of free chalk from the Key Group of Cummings & Co. Realtors and perfect weather, over 80 people gave their creativity free reign.

One participant said of the weekend: “It was so lightening during this strange time to see people making art and enjoying each other’s creations.”



SAVE THE DATE: APRIL 23-25

CHALK IT UP SOBO 2

RETURNING TO A SIDEWALK NEAR YOU!

