

SHERATON
RESTON, VA.

By Invitation Only

by Ginnie Gross

To be a Restonian in 1967 was to enter a pact with a blueprint. It also was to be on the cutting edge of Bigtime. As scratches from the drafting board became live roadways and paths on the local landscape, a larger world continued to turn. A Sleeping Giant of the Sixties stretched and yawned and shook loose ideologies that had been sacred for centuries. Reston was not immune to fallout.

The late Ben Muse, former Virginia State Senator and author of the book, *The Twentieth Century As I Saw It*, felt the need during these days to sharpen his wits against a whetstone of collective thinking. He invited several cronies to join him for dinner and discussion. The Reston Philosophers Club was born.

It's hard to imagine such spontaneity flourishing within the tight-ribbed boundaries of a planned community; but there it was like a hardy wildplant, poking through the foundations, telling the town that for all its preclusions and layouts, something unplanned was happening.

Perhaps its spontaneous beginning was the reason the club never assumed a formal status on the community roster. It could easily have adopted the stance of a Rotary or a Kiwanis. But it did not.

Whatever the reason, the Philosophers have remained to this day more of a gathering than a club. There are no by-laws or

charters, although there is a small printed journal recording nutshell information for each meeting. As Jim Grady—retired Foreign Service officer and management professor, one of the original members and current president of the group—says, it's an opportunity for “good food and good conversation.”

Enjoying a web of informality does not mean that the group bonds are any less tight. Membership is small—following a practical guideline—how many can fit comfortably around a dining room table? If someone moves or can no longer participate, a replacement is suggested by another “philosopher.” General agreement among the membership results in an invitation.

Ed Sharp, Hunters Woods resident, President of Centel Information Systems Inc., and long-standing Club person, says laughingly, “Its membership has no responsibilities and no honors.

So far, it's been a system that has worked. The fact that no women have been invited to join is well known to Reston's pioneer distaffs. Jim Grady, however, was one of the first twenty men to petition the well-known Cosmos Club to welcome women as members. This gives the lie to any anti-feminism reputation the “men only” membership might imply.

Sharp indicates that in the past the presence of women might not have fit

“within the life view” of certain members, “and other members respected that.” If unity of purpose has been the cohesive factor in keeping the Philosophers together, diversity, both among members and among discussion topics, has been the nurturing juice keeping them vital.

Over the years, on the second Friday of the month, various dining tables have seated an eclectic crew: historians, clergymen, specialists in foreign affairs, government attorneys, a retired admiral, a Washington Post editor, a Mideast specialist, and others—each bringing the richness of his separate calling as the dressing for discussion.

According to Grady, the meetings perk with fellowship and energy. Outside speakers have included Bob Simon, Sarah Booth Conroy, environmentalist Cass Peterson, Stansfield Turner, and the Chargé d'Affaires of the Viet Nam Embassy.

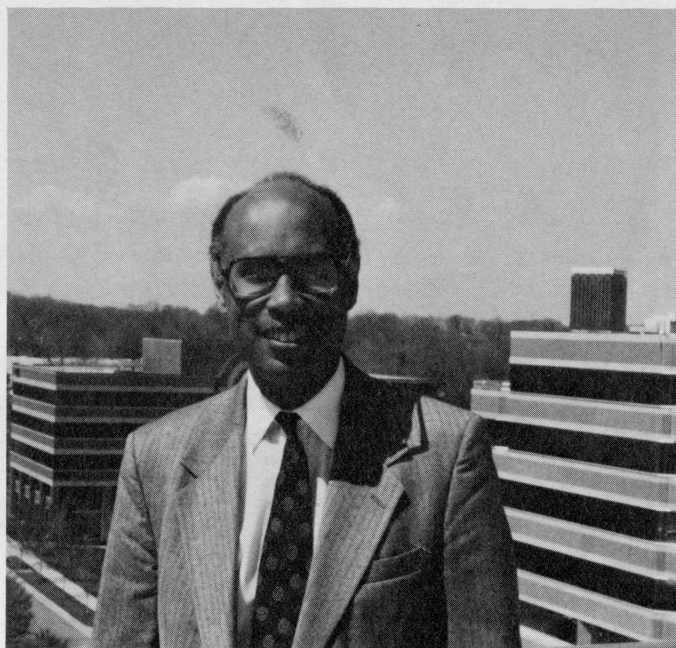
How is it that Jim and Ed could carry on for over twenty years with this monthly mind jabbing? Speaking with Jim on the phone conjures up an afternoon on a veranda sipping mint juleps, except for the hint of a Nor'easter in his accent. Could it be the richness of the memories that keeps him in touch? He has many, not necessarily relating to the Philosophers.

Jim remembers that the population of early Reston was largely made up of artists and authors, “creative people.” He recalls the art supply store at Lake Anne and Bob Simon's designation of the plaza level of the Heron House as an art gallery.

Grady tells about the time a little later on when a group of thirty residents—led by Wayne Hughes and Bill Nicoson—saved



Jim Grady on the Thoreau Place roof garden



Ed Sharp outside his Centel Information Systems office

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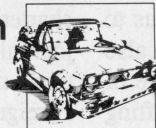
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New Town Publications: A Mirror of Community

by Walter Knorr

The *Reston Directory* made its debut in 1966—the product of a partnership between Carolyn Lindberg and Janet Hays—both residents of Hunters Woods. It was just too hard for everyone to keep a manual list of all the people in all the groups and committees and activities that were forming, almost daily. Lindberg and Hays went to Reston Foundation Director Jane Wilhelm with the idea that Reston, Virginia, Inc. put out a directory to solve the problem, but Wilhelm suggested that the two might just want to do it as a business. The first directory was 40 pages long and was composed on a rented Selectric typewriter.

In October of 1976, Nancy Larson—Reston resident since 1967—surprised Lindberg and Hayes with an offer to buy the Directory for cash. They accepted and the recordkeeping system was transferred to Larson in shoe boxes full of note cards. Early deliveries were done with the help of children's red flyer wagons.

It's clear from talking to Larson—current Reston Community Association President—that “this place called Reston” has always been different things to different people. It represents a mosaic of interests that inevitably resists any attempt at polarization and politicization. Reston is difficult to define because so many of the county ordinances (residential planned community district) started here, and so much of what has become commonplace in suburban clustered living originated in Reston. (Before 1964, townhouses in the sticks were unheard-of.)

But Reston is still unique in that more people work and live in the same place than in—by far—any other community in the area, possibly in the country. Perhaps that diversity—in seeming contradiction



Nancy Larson and Baba Freeman

to the planned nature of the community—is what people defend when they react against radical attempts to redefine covenants, design criteria, and Reston Association rules and regulations.

This notion of diversified, interconnected community—this “acceptable kind of incest,” is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in New Town Publications itself—which by now puts out the *Reston Directory*, the *Fairfax West Directory*, the *Reston Street Map*, the *Reston Business Map*, and other invaluable items of community lore. New Town is about as incestuous and communal as you can get. Under the leadership of Nancy Larson, New Town's small, determined staff covers the whole Reston waterfront (and then some).

A Lakeside Cluster resident, Larson has served the Reston Community Association in a number of capacities over the years. She is a founding member of the Reston Board of Commerce and has been a Board member of the Greater Reston Arts Center and the Herndon High School PTA—to name just a few of her activities.

Jackie Shipp, Senior Advertising Representative and a resident of Jonathan's Keepe, has been in Reston even longer than Larson. Shipp has chaired the RCA Reston Festival, served as RCA education advisor and membership committee member, has been active in the Lake Anne School PTA and edited its newsletter. Her other activities include Reston Music Center Cub Scouts, League of Women Voters, RBC, Reston Swim Team, RCC, and GRACE.

Bonney Capobianco, Vice President of Marketing and a resident of Waterview Cluster, has lived in Reston for over ten years, but her baby is the *Fairfax West Directory*. Capobianco is relentless in her Herndon boosterism and is a good source of enthusiasm for Reston-Herndon cooperation. Her other involvements have included GRACE, Wainwright Cluster, Reston Festival, and RBC.

And so it goes as you run down the list of New Town employees. Receptionist Lynn Erickson, for example, is the President of the Oakton High School Band Booster. Baba Freeman, resident of Lakeside Cluster and Larson's chief researcher (who likes to refer to New Town—in typically enigmatic fashion—as a capitalistic commune), is Vice President of Interfaith, a committee chair in the League of Women Voters, an active member of RCA and RBC, and a former Board member of the Reston Community Center. Phil Hostetter manages to get the directory out to the homes in record time with the paid help of the SLITS Band and other groups. He also serves on the Board of the Child Care Consortium. Betsy Embury, a graphics part-timer, was a co-op student through NOVA in Loudoun; Nella Ostrovsky, the firm's bookkeeper and a resident of Polo Club Village, is a Russian emigrée who volunteers at Langston

the Greater Reston Arts Center (GRACE) from eviction by purchasing \$1000 shares in a partnership (the Friends of GRACE) that bought the condominium space and then rented it back to the arts center at a below-market rate.

Grady doesn't go so far as to suggest that all Reston pioneers were party animals, but the story is still told about artist Brooks Scurlock and the case of the borrowed "booze-barge." The intent was to float a few intimates around the lake while treating them to drinks and delicacies. But Scurlock had more intimates than she realized, because as the group assembled, the barge began to disassemble and sink. Fortunately, the craft was still docked, but there was a mighty scurrying as the party moved ashore. No bodies or spirits were dampened, and the party continued elsewhere.

Perhaps the vitality of Reston's early days was nourished by the crisis factor. It was apparent to everyone who "bought in" that the young town might never reach majority. It was an untried concept. As Jim reflects, "Everyone watched the bulletin board at the Roundhouse sales office as new residents logged in. There was great rejoicing when the board indicated that businesses had jumped from six to eight."


Fran Grady, Jim's wife, recalls the bag of groceries handed out to each new resident—a family-sized steak and two-weeks worth of staples. It was a nice touch—when there were only two hundred families.

Sharp and wife Bev—each a licensed pilot—together own a plane. From Leesburg it's only a skip and a jump to, say, the Outer Banks or to a chateau in West Virginia. And if he's not off flying, he's probably playing tennis. When pressed, Sharp recalls the "Reston ghost," the fog that descended over all of Reston south of the Access Road, making it virtually impossible to see.

Both Jim Grady and Ed Sharp remember when Reston was a place that attracted "only the adventurers, in the early days." Ed says, "They (early settlers) bought into the concept, the future. It didn't matter—age or race—you had to build the infrastructure. Everybody was involved."

The Reston Philosophers Club—perhaps a throwback to an earlier time—remains a part of that infrastructure, an informal, private group of men—not unlike numerous unpublicized friendship circles all over town—who continue to keep their minds in drive and to shine on life. □

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