Detective Zachary Perchinski of the Howard County Police Department carries the “Flame of Hope” down Centennial Lane June 6 in Ellicott City in the Torch Run, an annual event that raises money and supports Special Olympics. The Torch Run is a year-round fundraising effort organized by law enforcement officers.

Photo by Seth Hoffman

Howard police run for Special Olympics

Wecker wins state honor

By Susan Kim
Staff Writer

Steve Wecker is Maryland Restaurateur of the Year

An owner of The Iron Bridge Wine Co., Cured, 18th & 21st, and two locations of the Mutiny Pirate Bar and Island Grille, Wecker and his partners have received many awards over the years, including Corporate Philanthropist of the Year from the Community Foundation of Howard County, Entrepreneur of the Year from the Howard Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Partner of the Year and Wine & Beverage Program of the Year from the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

The association is the state’s largest source of restaurant advocacy, regulatory compliance information, foodservice employee training and restaurant-focused vendors. The Restaurateur of the Year Award is given annually to a restaurant owner who “shows originality, offers quality customer service, demonstrates success in the eyes of his/her fellow operators, and demonstrates leadership on behalf of the food service industry,” according to the association.

“When they called me and said I was one of five finalists, I realized I don’t see myself that way. I’m really humbled.”

But receiving Restaurateur of the Year from the Restaurant Association of Maryland in May was a big surprise, Wecker said.

As he spoke with The Business Monthly about his evolution as a restaurateur, Wecker sported his daily style choice for summer – an Hawaiian shirt, with pineapples, a symbol of hospitality.

He exudes a sense of hospitality with his staff, friends and customers – even though he says, that satisfying the thousands of customers that he sees every day.

Continued on page A12
The veggie fix

CSAs bring key revenue to farms

By Susan Kim
Staff Writer

Local farms and residents are collaborating in arrangements called “community-supported agriculture.”

The arrangement brings early-season revenue to local farms and consumers benefit from healthy diet options while getting a taste of agri-tourism.

At Clark’s Elioak Farm in Ellicott City, farmer Nora Crist grows vegetables for her summer community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, which is fully subscribed with about 40 families.

Though the petting zoo at the farm is currently the biggest source of its income, CSA revenue, which is paid in advance, greatly helps with cash flow. Since CSA members pay in late winter or early spring, Crist can buy seeds, plants and equipment and hire labor before the farm starts producing food.

The cost of a CSA full share is $375 and a medium share is $250.

“Farmers are now more aware than ever that they need to diversify their income sources,” said Crist.

She has offered a vegetable CSA since 2013, at one point expanding to about 60 families but settling into the current 40, which for Crist brings the right balance of sales versus labor.

In addition, Clark’s Farm also hosts a beef and pork CSA. During each 3-month season, consumers pick up meat once a month, with a large share selling for $600 and a small share for $250 for the season.

The vegetable CSA is always filled, said Crist, who offers it to returning members first, then to new families. As far as competition from meal kit delivery companies such as Blue Apron, Crist believes for there is room enough for both.

“The CSA model lets me focus on growing food,” said Crist. “I don’t want to be a delivery person.”

She also wants people to know the unique advantages of buying directly from the farm. At Clark’s Farm, with its bucolic beauty and baby goats cavorting around, a CSA pickup gives consumers a break from the rush of daily suburbia. It’s a little dose of agri-tourism that keeps people in touch with their food.

“And as far as value,” said Crist, “compare the prices to the grocery store.” She never wants her CSA to come across as an aloof operation only for kale-centric, wealthy people.

“You wouldn’t believe the number of people who say they can’t join my CSA because they don’t like kale,” Crist says with a smile. “No, no, no! We can work this out.” (Although for kale-lovers, Crist’s is top-of-the-line.)

The dish on CSAs

There are about a dozen CSAs operating in Howard County each season, with some fading in and out depending on a particular farm’s focus, expenses or ability to cope with the weather. CSAs peaked in Howard County about three years ago and then decreased, said James Zoller, agricultural coordinator for the Howard County Office of Community Sustainability.

“If you talk to any farm running a CSA currently that had one five years ago, they would tell you that the number of participants in their CSA has decreased,” said Zoller. “Initially, this decrease was due to new CSAs being created, then later more consumers opting for meal kit programs and buying clubs.”

Yet CSAs have steadily remained an important source of farm revenue. “CSAs allow farms to have income to help with planting costs and also allows them to better plan, having a committed customer base,” he said.

And the resident-to-farm connection is also very important, Zoller reflected. “When someone joins a CSA, they have direct contact with that farm for several weeks. They see the different crops coming in depending on the season, and see the farmer each week when they receive their share.”

CSAs continue to evolve in other ways as well. Some offer volunteering options and work-share programs which let people experience life on a farm firsthand. “Now farms are offering choices of what you get in your share and also offering home delivery. CSAs are a great example of the ingenuity of our local farms to meet the communities’ needs and generate income. This ability to adapt to current markets is necessary for our local farms to survive.”

If you grow it they will come

David Liker has so much faith in the CSA model that the entire income of Gorman Farms depends on its 600 CSA participants.

Liker’s 2019 summer CSA offers 20 weeks of vegetables for $830 for a full share and $635 for a medium share.

Over the decade since he started the farm, Liker has added an early winter option as well as special strawberry picking and local honey to CSA members.

The amount of rainfall in 2018 – nearly 72 inches as opposed to the average 40 – was by far the biggest challenge Liker has ever seen. “I’m proud of the fact that we survived 2018, that we pulled that off,” he said.

Though Gorman Farms has, from its beginning, identified as a CSA-based operation, for a few years Liker operated a farm stand. “The farm stand was really popular, but we had to make some difficult business decisions. We asked, what’s going to produce the best results for us? Bottom line is, we exist because of the community.”

CSAs allow farms to have income to help with planting costs and also allows them to better plan.
Anne Arundel budget invests and takes action

The Anne Arundel County Council adopted a Fiscal Year 2020 budget that closely mirrors the budget proposed by County Executive Steuart Pittman. The FY20 budget includes increased funding to invest in education, public safety, infrastructure, and environmental enforcement.

The Council also passed an income and property tax revenue package that keeps Anne Arundel taxes at much lower rates than other suburban counties.

“This budget is a much needed correction to years of kicking the can down the road … I am proud to have worked with our budget office and the County Council to make investments that will help our county now and in the future,” said County Executive Pittman.

The County Council passed 48 amendments to the budget and resulted in a $1,291,400 reduction to the general fund.

The Council added eight behavioral health positions to the Board of Education budget, and with support of County Executive Pittman, also added 15 new firefighter positions, a new planner position in Office of Planning and Zoning and a new deputy sheriff for courtroom security.

The FY20 budget provides a boost to public safety agencies. Fifty new firefighter positions will be added. The budget also fills 29 police vacancies and adds 10 new sworn officers. Thirteen new detention officers will be added to the new Central Booking facilities.

Total funding for the Board of Education increased $87.2 million compared with last year, which includes funding from the state Blueprint for Education (Kirwan Commission) legislation. The FY20 budget supports compensation packages for educators and new positions, including more than 140 new classroom teachers, 50 special education positions, and 35 mental health positions.

Other investments include:
- Four new environmental inspectors to protect our environment
- Six new planners to support better environmental planning and the General Development Plan
- Creating a county-stat program to increase efficiency and accountability
- Additional support for community development housing programs and rental assistance
- One new park ranger and $1 million in additional funding for maintenance and renovations at county parks
- Making the library branch at the Annapolis Mall permanent and adding to the libraries’ materials budget
- The proposed income tax rate is 2.81% and the proposed property tax rate is 93.5 cents. These new rates place Anne Arundel County as the fourth lowest local income tax rate in Maryland and the fifth lowest property tax rate.

AMBITON, REVERED

When Revere is your business bank, you are Revered.
Strengthened by a partner who is always committed.
Supported by our belief in the ambition that drives you.
You have a great plan. You should have a great bank.
Let’s see your vision. Let’s make it happen.

reverebank.com

The Business Monthly
www.bizmonthly.com

July 2019

Community Foundation celebrates 50 years

Hundreds gathered at the annual Community Foundation of Howard County spring party, celebrating its 50th year of serving the community, May 30 on the Howard Community College campus. The Foundation promotes local philanthropy and provides critical grant funding for nonprofits serving Howard County.

Above, Liz Johnson, Liz Johnson Design Studio; Community Foundation of Howard County Board Member Mireille Grangenois; Community Foundation of Howard County President Beverly White-Seals and Toba Barth. Below, Community Foundation of Howard County Board Member Kimberly Prescott of Prescott HR Consulting with Sue Ann Shafley, Camp Attaway.
Digital Harmonic making inroads
Defense, medicine benefitting from guitar algorithms

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

Paul Reed Smith made Maryland-based PRS Guitars a success. His craftsmanship was displayed by famed artists Carlos Santana, Alex Lifeson of Rush, Journey’s Neal Schon and eventually John Mayer, among many others.

But one day, while out fishing with his mathematician father, a thought struck him.

Can the same algorithmic equations used in building guitars be used in enhancing images and signals in other fields, such as medicine and defense?

The answer, they discovered, was yes, which eventually led to the founding of Ellicott City-based Digital Harmonic in 2015.

The company, which operates in the signal and image processing space, has not only made inroads into medicine and defense, but CEO Scott Haiges said it is now poised to venture into new markets en route to what he called “explosive growth.”

Beginnings
Digital Harmonic was incubated at PRS, the third largest electric guitar manufacturer in the United States, by Smith and an engineer until 2016. Haiges has been with the company since July of that year.

The company’s early steps forward, music fans will be interested to note, stemmed from Smith incorporating an FM radio staple into his early research. “He had a way to rip apart signals that was based on [the Led Zeppelin classic] ”Stairway to Heaven,” Haiges said. “When a representative from a government contractor came to see it, he said it had national security implications. That’s when we realized that this technology had commercial implications, too.”

As for any funding, “I felt the company wasn’t far enough along at that point from a venture capital perspective,” Haiges said, “but I was still able to introduce Paul to a ‘family office’ (high net worth families) that helped boost him to the first threshold and start the company.”

For Smith, who still runs PRS and mainly operates as an adviser to Digital Harmonic, those efforts to acquire capital are ongoing. “We had an initial investment goal of several million dollars that we were seeking and we’re closing in on that milestone,” said Haiges, who declined to disclose company revenues.

More Interest
The company’s imaging technology also has applications in other disciplines such as in health care. “We have a board of advisers who are department heads from Johns Hopkins Hospital,” said Haiges, “and in that case, we have demoed proof on concept of being able to enhance images, while lessening doses of radiation for patients.”

At this juncture, that application “is all investigative,” he said, “because it has to go through Food & Drug Administration approval. We have not yet applied because we’re a small company and have opted to focus on building resources and revenue.”

That said, “The amount of promising test results is very high and some of the results are extraordinary,” Smith said, who added that the company is “actively working with the government on contracts.”

Indeed, Haiges said that “more and more contractors are contacting us to learn about the technology” when they have images that are unrefined, foggy due to weather.

He said, “We’re able to define, with certainty, what’s in that image” with Digital Harmonic’s patented technologies that are used to analyze images in videos, Pure Pixel and Precision Measuring Matrix, which are used to analyze radio frequency and acoustic signals – and can be used with radar or sonar.

While Haiges said the company “can give a significant competitive edge to any entity that is looking to process any image or signal,” he also pointed out that the company does not market itself as experts in radar or sonar. However, he added, “Our technology gives us the ability to extract highly relevant and valuable information from their images and signals.

“And those tools,” he said, “makes us really, really smart about acquiring intelligence.”

We’ve been operating in stealth mode and only late last year have we talked much about what we’ve been doing. We're ready for explosive growth.

A Bigger Bang
Smith reiterated Haiges’ thoughts about the versatility of the technology. “I see new uses for it every day,” he said. “Recently, we had a group from the aviation industry share with us an issue they deal with regularly where our technology can be applied. The applications are almost unlimited, because each industry is measuring some form of images and waveforms, and we’re a mathematical measurement company that reveals data in images and waveforms with a high degree of accuracy.”

All told, Haiges thinks those various applications of the technology has Digital Harmonic, which employs 12 workers and eight contractors, well set to continue growing.

Today, the plan is to “continue to gain contracts in the commercial and government markets,” he said. “We’ve generally been operating in stealth mode and only late last year have we talked much about what we’ve been doing.

“But now, we’re positioned to move forward,” Haiges said. “We’re ready for explosive growth.”
BWI Partnership honors members

The BWI Business Partnership held its annual meeting at the International Art Gallery in BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport and welcomed new board members and presented special awards.

New board members included: Senator Pam Beidle, District 32; Jerry Walker, CEO of Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation; Sam Sidh, chief of staff for Howard County Executive Calvin Ball; and Greg Slater, administrator for MDOT State Highway Administration. Karen Cook, dean of the School of Business for Anne Arundel Community College, was elected as secretary and executive committee member.

Maryland State Treasurer Nancy Kopp and MDOT Deputy Secretary of Transportation Jim Ports provided keynote remarks.

The Partnership also presented the following awards:

- Rising Star of the Year to Tipton Airport, represented by Michael Wassel, general manager, and Eric Flamino, chair of the board.
- Volunteer Award of the Year to Denise Nooe, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Ambassador of the Year Award to Lori Ratzburg, MD Department of Commerce.
- Small Business of the Year to HR Strategy Group, represented by Amy Polefrone, president/CEO, and Donna Miracle-Canuel.
- Large Business of the Year to Live! Casino & Hotel, represented by Anthony Faranca, executive vice president and general manager.
- Sam Heffner Legacy Award to Lou Zagarino, president/CEO, Whitehall Management Group.
- Named after the BWI Business Partnership’s founder and longtime chairman, Sam Heffner, the Legacy award recognizes individuals whose dedication represents a legacy, an indelible impression, moving the community forward in numerous ways. The award recognizes a lifetime of commitment to region, and organization.

The Zagarino’s tenure includes serving as the manager of the International Hotel at BWI, later renamed the Sheraton, prior to purchasing the Comfort Inn, Rose Restaurant, and later, the Sleep Inn. He has chaired and supported numerous causes, all characterized by his passion for helping people and strengthening organizations, such as BWI Marshall Airport, Ft. Meade, Baltimore/Washington Medical Center, the Chesapeake Arts Center, Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County and the BWI Business Partnership, where he was the first membership-elected and non-founding Chair. Following his Chairmanship, he continued to step up with his time and energy as a member of the Executive Committee, and as the first President of the BWI Community Development Foundation.

Plan your off-site meeting with us!

State of the Art Meeting Spaces
| Hotel-style Lodging | Chef-Prepared Meals |

Located 30 minutes from Baltimore & 60 minutes from D.C. in Marriottsville, MD.

Bon Secours Retreat & Conference Center
410-442-3120 | RCCBonSecours.com

Leadership Essentials celebrates the Class of 2019

The 2019 Leadership Essentials class successfully completed its six month leadership development program at a June 6 Closing Ceremony at Loyola University Maryland.

The Leadership Essentials program fosters skill and personal development that allow our participants to stretch their leadership potential and contribute significantly to their organizations.

The LE Class of 2019 members were also recognized at the Leadership Howard County Annual Dinner on June 11.

The 21 young professionals who comprised the Leadership Essentials Class of 2019 include:

- Christian Ahalt, Dembo Jones
- Terrence Benn, Howard County Police Department/Police Foundation
- Joshua Bennett, Columbia Association
- Sydonia Garrott, Howard County Government
- Natasha Gray, Howard Community College
- Sonya Hargress, Howard County General Hospital - member of Johns Hopkins Medicine
- Steve Hayes, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory
- Monica Herber, Columbia Association
- Peter Hill, CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield
- Lindsey Linton, Harkins Builders
- Samantha Logan, Harry H. Witzke Family Funeral Home
- Michael McLellan, Howard County Public School System
- Colleen Monagan, The Columbia Bank
- Nelli Mosavi JHU Applied Physics Lab
- Ben Scrivener, Stategic Wealth Management
- Serena Shapero, Girls on the Run
- Shannon Sipes, Humanim
- Patricia Walsh, JHU Applied Physics Lab
- Christina Willis, Enterprise Community Investment
- James Zammillo, Howard County Police Department/Police Foundation
- Christine Zimmerman, Enterprise Community Loan Fund

Applications are now available on the Leadership Essentials webpage. The deadline for application is Oct. 4.
Space research turns 50

By George Berkheimer
Senior Writer

As NASA prepares to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing later this month, the Universities Space Research Association (USRA) in Columbia is marking its own half-century of accomplishments.

Arising from the need to provide NASA and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) with access to talent in universities and colleges, USRA was founded in 1969 as a private non-profit corporation.

The organization’s milestone celebration event took place in May at NAS headquarters in Washington, DC, featuring a symposium highlighting past achievements and ambitions for the future.

Unsung Contributions

Since the USRA’s first task as operator of the Lunar Science Institute (LSI) in Houston, its institutional members have grown from 48 U.S. colleges and universities to a current list of 111, comprising 98 members in 40 states and 13 non-US members hailing from eight other nations.

“Our purpose ... has been to provide a means by which universities, government organizations and other research organizations may cooperate to further the development and application of space-related science technology and engineering,” said Bill Ballhaus, chair of USRA’s Board of Trustees.

Along the way “We created the Institute for Computer Applications in Science and Engineering at NASAs Langley Research Center,” noted Jeffry Isaacson, USRA’s president and CEO.

“We also established the Division of Space Life Sciences in the 1980s,” he added, which has contributed significantly to knowledge about problems such as bone density loss in space, effects of intracranial pressure on visual acuity in microgravity and space radiation effects on human tissue.

USRA’s role includes the promotion of space and aeronautics policy, the development and operation of facilities and programs, and the engagement of universities and the private sector to help benefit humanity right here on Earth.

As noted on USRA’s website, examples include the development of optimization decision support tools for en route air traffic controllers. These tools automatically generate improved routing around bad weather, providing significantly shorter routes that save time and fuel and enhance passenger safety.

USRA also led the deployment of flight hardware, sensors, and instrumentation used on orbital and sub-orbital missions, deep-space systems, and aircraft and high-altitude platforms.

Aside from astronomy, astrophysics and lunar study, USRA also collaborates with NASA and other space agencies around the world to focus on earth sciences, study of the sun, and information technology innovations such as autonomous systems and quantum computer advancements that could revolutionize the ways in which scientists explore our solar system, the Milky Way Galaxy and the universe.

“We [continued to evolve and have filled a mission space that reflects the broad mission space of NASA and other federal agencies],” Isaacson said.

Incredible Discoveries

One of USRA’s most prolific areas of scientific inquiry comes from its involvement in developing SOFIA, the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy that NASA operates in collaboration with the German Aerospace Center.

Essentially an airborne laboratory packed into a 747 aircraft, SOFIA carries an 8.2-foot reflecting telescope above the majority of water vapor in Earth’s atmosphere where it can make infrared observations not possible on Earth. “SOFIA is also engaged in astrochemistry, looking at pre-biotic molecules that exist in space and how they become incorporated into comets and ultimately arrive on planet surfaces.”

“SOFIA allows us to look at very earliest phases of star formation and planetary formation, things that can ultimately lead to the possibility of the formation of life on these [forming] planets, Yorke said.”

Adapting to the Future

As NASA prepares to return humans to the moon and potentially use a Lunar Gateway as a stepping-stone for human exploration of Mars, USRA will continue to adapt its role in space enterprise, adding to the business opportunities it brings to the private sector.

“There are specific R&D opportunities for developing and advancing technologies, said Vince DeFrancisci, USRA’s vice president of Corporate Strategy and Development. ‘Once that research matures up the bench, there are opportunities for commercial entities to design and build prototypes and conduct tests and analysis for potential commercialization.”
Beth Eltzroth remembers what the landscape looked like early in her career in the church audio/video/lighting (AVL) production market.

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”

A Cool Mill

A system valued at nearly $1 million was recently installed at Mosaic Christian Church, which recently moved from Fulton to the new place 85 percent of the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In this age of digital, this is all scalable because the technology is more affordable,” said Williamson. “Churches can do high-quality productions on a somewhat limited budget. For instance, a church can buy a digital audio platform for $500-600 seat auditorium for about $80,000.”

“None of the equipment or integration companies wanted to call on us,” said the technical director of Grace Community Church, in Fulton. “They thought that churches didn’t have enough money to create a substantial system.”

Looking back, that mindset seems crazy. Not only are publications dedicated to only that sector of the market now, but representatives from the very companies that didn’t want to give churches the time of day are knocking on the door.

“In more recent years, churches have commonly bought AVL installations that cost $1 million or more, we constantly hear from them,” she said. “Those companies came to realize how big the church market would become.”
Growing a Maryland research business

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

What’s it like having two high-profile jobs at once? Ask Brian Darmody, who’s been serving the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) since 1982 and long ago ascended to the position of associate vice president. Darmody recently accepted a new position as CEO with the Association of University Research Park (AURP), which will keep him in the local focus as he works toward retiring from UMCP at the end of 2019 – while continuing to work out of the Discovery District at UMCP and pursue new challenges.

What instigated your career shift?
I joined AURP many years ago, when the College Park/UMD Metro station opened. At that point, I helped recruit the American Center of Physics to the site and UMCP built a research park adjacent to the station. Later, I was elected to the AURP board and served as president for a year. The AURP CEO position came open last year around the time I had organized AURP’s Annual International Conference at the UMD Discovery District and applied for the position.

What is AURP?
AURP is a nonprofit that represents research parks worldwide. The world’s first research park debuted in 1951 with the Stanford Industry Park, at Stanford University in partnership with the city of Palo Alto. That model was copied by other states, like North Carolina when it founded the Research Triangle, then countries around the world.

What’s a key difference compared to your former job?
This new position is like building a startup. We’re a membership association that doesn’t receive money from the government. I have to build it by offering a service people find beneficial or we’ll be out of business.

Will AURP accentuate its East Coast presence at what’s called its “HQ2”?
While we have our administrative headquarters at the University of Arizona Research Park, we’ve opened the new office in the UMCP Innovation District. The new office is important to our growth because many national organizations are in Washington, D.C., and international delegations often come to town that want the synergy of a major university. We aim to become a port of entry for other countries that want to do business here and along the Eastern Seaboard.

Are research parks changing?
The model is evolving, since they are no longer stand-alone properties. They’re being integrated into research parks and communities of innovation. For example, in the Research Triangle, there’s an area called Centennial Park at North Carolina State University. It was unpopular at first, since the faculty at the engineering school didn’t want to move from its old home. However, since other amenities grew around it, they now love it; it’s part of why the Research Triangle area has the great reputation it has.

To some extent, that’s what we’re trying to do in College Park. It’s all about building synergies. For instance, a housing project at UMD, called the Aloft, just opened near the Discovery District, on Baltimore Avenue. The apartments are geared for young professionals, as opposed to students. Know that we’re trying to get people employed where they work, which is the best thing you can do from an environmental standpoint. It helps reduce commuting and builds a sense of community. Housing is becoming an important element of research parks. UMD also opened a public charter school in its Discovery District that is headed by the UMD president.

Do we need more research parks in Maryland?
Maryland has a uniquely high amount of research development that places us in the nation’s Top 3. But can we always use more? Why not? We need to make sure that our universities and federal labs are accessible by the private sector and research parks are a tool to make that happen.

What is the role of incubators?
They are vitally important to the success of research parks. The short answer is they’re a big part of those facilities and communities, starting with students who are able to gain support for their ideas to faculty that want to develop their intellectual property to corporations that want to set up shop near the universities.

A new federal tax tool called opportunity zones are a way to defer capital gains to provide tax incentives. Many research parks are in the opportunity zones and the amount available to invest in real estate and companies could reach $100 billion nationwide during the next several years.

What are your thoughts about startups acquiring capital in Maryland?
I helped write the legislation when I was a lobbyist at UMD to found the Maryland Technology Development Corp. (TEDCO) about 20 years ago as a way to attract more capital to the state. The knock on Maryland is that you won’t get venture capital (VC) funding here because venture capitalists don’t find enough opportunities. So, we need to ensure that our research is presented in a way that the opportunities are known to them and that we have gap funding to facilitate it. That’s why the programs that TEDCO runs and the university runs, such as UM Ventures, are critical to help secure technology (that’s) investable by the time they reach that stage by angels, gap funders, VC investors, and so on.

What instigated your career shift?
I joined AURP many years ago, when the College Park/UMD Metro station opened. At that point, I helped recruit the American Center of Physics to the site and UMCP built a research park adjacent to the station. Later, I was elected to the AURP board and served as president for a year. The AURP CEO position came open last year around the time I had organized AURP’s Annual International Conference at the UMD Discovery District and applied for the position.

What is AURP?
AURP is a nonprofit that represents research parks worldwide. The world’s first research park debuted in 1951 with the Stanford Industry Park, at Stanford University in partnership with the city of Palo Alto. That model was copied by other states, like North Carolina when it founded the Research Triangle, then countries around the world.

What’s a key difference compared to your former job?
This new position is like building a startup. We’re a membership association that doesn’t receive money from the government. I have to build it by offering a service people find beneficial or we’ll be out of business.

Will AURP accentuate its East Coast presence at what’s called its “HQ2”?
While we have our administrative headquarters at the University of Arizona Research Park, we’ve opened the new office in the UMCP Innovation District. The new office is important to our growth because many national organizations are in Washington, D.C., and international delegations often come to town that want the synergy of a major university. We aim to become a port of entry for other countries that want to do business here and along the Eastern Seaboard.

Are research parks changing?
The model is evolving, since they are no longer stand-alone properties. They’re being integrated into research parks and communities of innovation. For example, in the Research Triangle, there’s an area called Centennial Park at North Carolina State University. It was unpopular at first, since the faculty at the engineering school didn’t want to move from its old home. However, since other amenities grew around it, they now love it; it’s part of why the Research Triangle area has the great reputation it has.

To some extent, that’s what we’re trying to do in College Park. It’s all about building synergies. For instance, a housing project at UMD, called the Aloft, just opened near the Discovery District, on Baltimore Avenue. The apartments are geared for young professionals, as opposed to students. Know that we’re trying to get people employed where they work, which is the best thing you can do from an environmental standpoint. It helps reduce commuting and builds a sense of community. Housing is becoming an important element of research parks. UMD also opened a public charter school in its Discovery District that is headed by the UMD president.

Do we need more research parks in Maryland?
Maryland has a uniquely high amount of research development that places us in the nation’s Top 3. But can we always use more? Why not? We need to make sure that our universities and federal labs are accessible by the private sector and research parks are a tool to make that happen.

What is the role of incubators?
They are vitally important to the success of research parks. The short answer is they’re a big part of those facilities and communities, starting with students who are able to gain support for their ideas to faculty that want to develop their intellectual property to corporations that want to set up shop near the universities.

A new federal tax tool called opportunity zones are a way to defer capital gains to provide tax incentives. Many research parks are in the opportunity zones and the amount available to invest in real estate and companies could reach $100 billion nationwide during the next several years.

What are your thoughts about startups acquiring capital in Maryland?
I helped write the legislation when I was a lobbyist at UMD to found the Maryland Technology Development Corp. (TEDCO) about 20 years ago as a way to attract more capital to the state. The knock on Maryland is that you won’t get venture capital (VC) funding here because venture capitalists don’t find enough opportunities. So, we need to ensure that our research is presented in a way that the opportunities are known to them and that we have gap funding to facilitate it. That’s why the programs that TEDCO runs and the university runs, such as UM Ventures, are critical to help secure technology (that’s) investable by the time they reach that stage by angels, gap funders, VC investors, and so on.

Do you plan to add new programs?
Yes. We created the BioHealth Caucus for a segment of our members who are related to the biohealth and health science campuses, like UMB. It takes a very long time to develop new drugs, roughly about 10-15 years, and there are many regulatory challenges, so we need a group within AURP that can focus on that market.

We are working with BioHealth Innovation, in Rockville, to roll out a set of new programs for that segment of the research park community.

What do you feel were your high points of your long career at the University of Maryland?
I was fortunate to have worked with a series of presidents and vice presidents that gave me a lot of autonomy to develop new projects, which is unusual in a public setting. Helping start Maryland Day, which is the nation’s largest university open house that takes place the last Saturday in April; coming up and drafting the legislation that created TEDCO; organizing the university’s first tech transfer office; and working on the $62 million E-novate program, which matches state dollars with private endowment funds to bring smart professors in areas of economic growth to Maryland, are among the highlights.
The Enclave still a no-go in Crofton

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

Many Crofton citizens were fearful that the saga of The Enclave, a community that would feature 66 two-over-two condominiums proposed by The Hogan Companies on the south side of Crofton’s front gates, might finally fall into the category of lost battles.

However, that’s not the case. The latest dust-up occurred in mid-May after the Anne Arundel County Department of Planning & Zoning asked the consultant hired by Hogan to resubmit a plan it deemed “not acceptable” after its latest review.

Many locals have been fighting the controversial project for three years, with numerous objections including a lack of communication between the developer and the community; poor access off of Route 3 at Crawford Boulevard, which would also require frequent U-turns to facilitate exits on its eastern end at Crofton Parkway; poor access for emergency vehicles; a lack of free space and amenities; and concerns about a wetland that parallels the highway.

Blunt Tone

There are three decades of history with this story. It began when the Crofton Civic Association gained approval rights in a 1988 agreement with William Berkshire, a Crofton resident who owns the property where various projects have been slated to rise over the years.

In 1988, Berkshire gave up 23 acres of land he owned in the suburban exchange for development rights to the seven acres in question that front to Route 3. Eventually, a zoning variance permitted him to pursue a residential project on the site.

But the plan is still up in the air. In a letter to Jeff Smith, principal with Bowman Consulting, Phil Hager, Anne Arundel County Department of Planning & Zoning officer, wrote that the department “is very concerned about the quality of the plans that were submitted for review.

“The comments are extensive for a project that is in the Final Plan stage that has already been reviewed multiple times” and that while new comments may be generated on a revised layout, Hager wrote that it was “not acceptable” to submit an update that did not address previous comments or meet code requirements.

He also added that is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that the plans are “correct, readable and meet all applicable code requirements,” and pointed out that it is not the responsibility of his office “to act as your [quality assurance/quality control] staff.”

The final paragraph started with Hager stating, “Dramatic improvement is expected with your next submittal. Additionally, we require that you provide a project submittal that satisfies all code requirements and is capable of being approved.”

Signs of Relief

When the letter made the rounds to the citizens of Crofton – many of whom were nervous about the result of the most recent plan submission and had been writing letters of their own to Hager, County Executive Steuart Pittman and others – there was a collective sigh of relief that the plan, while not permanently denied at this juncture, was still not approved.

Among those exhaling was Winnifred Overton, a four-decade-plus Crofton resident who was promptly in touch with Hager after his letter was sent to Bowman. “The Enclave is an inappropriate use of the site for which it is planned,” she said. “Despite the multiple submissions, the developer has never really ‘got it’ that code requirements and quality standards in Anne Arundel County must be met. “Responsibility for actions requested is always up to the entity requesting the actions,” Overton said. “It is a sign of the times that this tenet is not how many companies choose to conduct business. Anne Arundel County residents, current and future, appreciate that [the office of planning and zoning] continues to hold the companies involved to the established standards.”

Marsha Perry, former delegate from District 33 and long-time Crofton community activist, offered similar, if not more emotional, observations.

“I had, of course, hoped that it would be a permanent ‘do not bother to submit any more such inappropriate, codebreaking, environmentally destructive and visually offensive site plans which still do not properly address structural, public safety, traffic, recreational, public street and walkway problems. This ‘final plan’ is denied for the enumerated many reasons.

“Clearly, planning and zoning is to be thanked for the time spent on this abomination of a submission,” Perry said. “Why would Hogan want his name on such a plan?”

Latest Twist

Yet another twist to the story occurred at press time for this issue of The Business Monthly, when Pittman called a press conference at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Annapolis to announce two new policies to improve the site development process and better protect wetlands and other natural areas.

And while the recent denial has not ended the saga, some of the locals are becoming more optimistic than they were a month ago that it may finally come to an end in favor of the opposition.

Count Perry among those who share that optimism about what they see as the positive result.

“The new, active young Croftonites joined with many long-time retired residents to write e-mails and letters, attend meetings, voice their opinion on social media and ask the correct questions of those candidates running for public office,” she said.

“The involvement on this issue,” she said, “mirrors the enthusiasm of the early years of Crofton, during which the residents strove to protect and preserve [founder Hamilton] Crawford’s dream of perfection in what was the county’s first planned-unit development.”
Howard County faces budget dilemmas

By George Berkheimer
Senior Writer

Howard County Executive Calvin Ball inherited two mammoth budget dilemmas: a school system beset with growing pains and more than $500 million in deferred maintenance costs, and a dire need for flood mitigation projects to protect Ellicott City.

It will take a deft fiscal balancing act to address both problems simultaneously. The biggest questions: how will the county pay its way out of these dilemmas; are the strategies and plans worth the cost; and are they likely to actually happen?

A few months into office, Ball’s Safe and Sound plan signaled his intentions to invest heavily in aggressive solutions for Ellicott City.

Under the plan, Ball committed the county to a strategy that includes the construction of a 15-foot diameter tunnel to divert Hudson Branch overflow. Beginning at Lot F, the North Tunnel will run 1,600 feet to the Patapsco River following a course north of Main Street.

Big Money

Ball’s 2020 capital budget includes $15.3 million for storm drain improvement and stormwater retention facility projects in the Tiber-Hudson watershed, but the investment comes at the expense of delaying or scaling back some other planned or requested projects.

“We’ve heard in Capital Budget hearings that [Department of Public Works] resources are depleted and Route 1 Redevelopment isn’t going forward because all those resources are dedicated to Ellicott City,” noted Councilwoman Liz Walsh, whose district includes Ellicott City, during the council’s monthly meeting in May.

Meanwhile, continuing reductions in county revenues and growing debt service payments prompted the Spending Affordability Commission to recommend a General Obligation bond authorization of $70 million this year, $5 million below last year’s recommendation.

The estimated cost of Ball’s flood mitigation plan ranges from $113.5 to $140.5 million, compared to an estimated $56.5 million for the previous administration’s plan.

Aside from the tunnel, the primary difference is that Ball’s plan removes four historic buildings as opposed to 10, adds the NC-3 ($5 million) and H-4 ($4 million) retention ponds, and does not expand the Hudson Bend channel ($20 million).

The county estimates a cost of $50 to $77 million to build the North Tunnel.

Contacted for their opinions on those figures, two Maryland-based consultants with expertise in tunnel construction indicated that the estimated costs appeared excessive.

Speaking on background, they each speculated that details such as bedrock fractures, pump stations and grouting to prevent groundwater inundation could partially explain an estimate they considered to be two to three times the normal cost of tunneling through bedrock, even with design-build considerations.

With a request for proposal pending, Mark DeLuca, the county’s Deputy Director of Public Works, declined to discuss the factors that influenced the county’s estimate. He also declined to discuss what safeguards the county would consider to keep people and debris out of the tunnel.

Added Expenses

To date, Howard County has spent $6.795 million to acquire seven of 10 properties on Main Street Ellicott City. The expenditure is part of the flood mitigation plan strategy to improve public safety that was initiated by former Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman. An additional property, Tiber Park, was already owned by the county. The Main Street properties and the purchase prices or status of purchase are as follows:

- 8049 Main Street (Phoenix Emporium), to be demolished: price under negotiation. Owner: George C. Goeller, Catonsville
- 8055 Main Street (Discoveries), to be demolished: price under negotiation. Owner: Sally Tennant, Ellicott City
- 8059 Main Street (Bean Hollow), to be demolished: under negotiation. Owner: American Toursesorts Inc., Catonsville, Agent: Robert M. Ercole
- 8069 Main Street (Great Panes), to be demolished: purchased on Feb. 13, 2019, for $985,000 from 8069 LLC, Ellicott City, Agent: Len Berkwitz
- 8081 Main Street (Tea on the Tiber): purchased on March 15, 2019, for $600,000 from Master’s Ridge LLC, Agent: Don Rewers
- 8085 Main Street (Portall’s): Purchased on April 12, 2019, for $1.4 million from Blueings Building Inc., Gambrills, Agent: Michael Baldwin
- 8095 and 8101 Main Street (Shoemaker Country): purchased on April 10, 2019, for $1.55 million from Historic Ellicott Properties LLC, Agent: Bruce T. Taylor
- 8109-8113 Main Street: purchased Feb. 25, 2019, for $1.05 million from Charles E. Wehland
- 8125 Main Street (Caplan’s): purchased April 10, 2019, for $1.21 million from Ellen L. Taylor

Source: Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation Database

Ellicott City buildings purchased by Howard County

Ball acknowledged that the county would also begin the process of acquiring an unspecified number of properties in Ellicott City’s West End within the next year, and said the county would begin completing individual flood mitigation projects starting in 2020.

Creative Financing

Completing the flood mitigation plan within five years is “an ambitious best-case scenario, and it won’t happen unless we ... get to work with everyone’s support,” Ball said.

Payiong for it will require consideration of innovative funding models that include additional state and federal funding, public-private partnerships, and new revenue sources. “We will invest in this plan like all government spending: one year at a time, one step at a time, and largely with capital funding,” he said.

One new revenue option on the table is the creation of a Special Benefit District to finance stormwater or drainage infrastructure.

Based on existing Watershed Protection Fees, an equivalent assessment fee for residences and commercial properties in the affected watersheds “would generate almost $300,000 annually in the Plumtree and $256,000 annually in the Tiber-Hudson watersheds,” said Pete Conrad, deputy director of the county’s Department of Planning and Zoning.

When it comes to confidence that Ball’s plan will actually get off the ground, “Most of the constituents I’ve talked to have a can-do attitude, but others are a bit more pessimistic,” Christina Rigby, chair of the county council, said. “I think the biggest concern is that we’ll have another catastrophic flood before we can complete these projects, and that will set us back even further.”

Looking ahead, the Howard County School Board recently adopted a 2020 operating budget that includes $607.2 million in county funding, $82.1 million short of its $689.3 million request.

The shortfall is roughly half of what the county expects to pay for Ellicott City’s flood mitigation projects, and the deferred maintenance figure is nearly as high as the county’s budgetary outlay for the school system in a single year.

With enrollment growing, is there any way to break the cycle of robbing Peter to pay Paul? 

Part 2 of the series will be published in the August issue.
Anne Arundel 2040: How will it look?

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

During a late May meeting at Arundel High School, in Gambrills, a group of county employees greeted members of the business and residential communities who gathered to read, to observe and to discuss the state of hyper local affairs.

Billed as a Small Area Visioning Forum, the event served as a precursor to completing the draft for Anne Arundel County’s General Development Plan (GDP), known as Anne Arundel 2040.

Many topics were discussed that evening, with the subjects ranging from development to transportation to the environment. One point several of the attendees noticed — or if they didn’t, were informed of — was that a significant number of projects included in the 2009 GDP have not come to pass.

During the last hour, members of the crowd pontificated about how to control development, alleviate traffic and discard refuse properly, among suggestions; the final draft of Anne Arundel 2040 is due to County Executive Steuart Pittman in early 2020 and will be sent to the County Council in March, with public hearings to follow.

Old SAPs

James Kitchin, community engagement and constituent services officer for Anne Arundel county, said his favorite part of the forums “is the first two hours of the open houses, when people see how much of the various plans from the early ’00s have not occurred. When [Pittman] ran [for office], he kept all of the SAPs in his car’s trunk to show people how many have not been completed.

“But the frustrating part” of that exercise, said Kitchin, “is to see that parts of the old plan now can’t be done, like [at routes 424 and 450] in Crofton, where building a traffic circle would have alleviated congestion. The land isn’t available now because of the new High’s convenience store and gas station.

Kitchin also expressed doubt about the viability of an overpass that had been discussed to connect Crofton to the Waugh Chapel shopping area.

“That people are still interested in some of these projects and recommendations shows that when the communities are involved in planning, they come up with ideas that maintain their relevance,” Kitchin said. “That’s a testament into how much community input went into the initial plans, and I’m glad that Steuart values community-driven planning.”

Be Responsible

While the more casual information sessions are valued, “The GDP is the big picture and that comes first,” said Raj Kudchadkar, CEO of the Central Maryland Chamber. “This is a marathon, not a sprint.

We, as a chamber, need to share our information with the county executive’s office and make decisions" based on that collaboration.

This GDP is crucial for Odenton, since during the past decade it has experienced more growth than any other area of the county, he said. “So at the CMC, we’re focused on density and development, so we can maintain that growth in the most responsible way possible. Numerous developers are members with projects in the pipeline and we want to see them through to fruition.”

Kudchadkar pointed out that the Odenton Town Center Master Plan is only three years old, “but it notifies the need to have a town center and projects in the pipeline,” he said. “We want to make sure [various] projects move forward,” including Elm Street Development’s townhomes at the MARC station, the mixed-used project at Academy Yards Phase 2 and the parking garages in the transit-oriented development (TOD).

The county agenda also includes negotiations for the use of the former U.S. Naval Academy Dairy Farm and the Enhanced-Use Lease at Fort Meade, “which looks like it’s moving forward,” he said. “What happens in those two cases will impact what happens in Odenton.”

County Councilman Andrew Pruski (D-4), like Kudchadkar, is also concerned about responsible development and would like to see more TOD projects “to prevent sprawl.”

But on Pruski’s mind today is building an aquatic center, which has community support.

“We hoped to get a conference center, and that hope was realized with the opening of the Live! Hotel Event Center,” said Pruski. “Now, we’re hopeful of the county building an aquatic center by Fort Meade.”

But with traffic on virtually everyone’s mind, Pruski is also taking a closer look at construction and other issues concerning routes 3, 175 and 198. “We need to think outside the box,” he said. “Traffic is not getting any better, so we’re certainly looking at a longer-term plan for commuters.”

Getting Moving

As for the transportation plan, that section of the GDP is called Move Anne Arundel, which was endorsed after the 2009 GDP. It provides framework for the new GDP and “is being featured first because we have a culmination of plans from the last five years,” said Ramond Robinson, county transportation officer. “It has many different parts.”

It has five parts, to be exact: contained within is the Corridor Growth Management Plan, Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan, Complete Streets Guidance, the Major Intersection & Important Facility Plan and the Transit Development Plan. “It’s truly comprehensive,” he said.

Robinson said his department plans to have Move Anne Arundel ready for the county council this fall, which is six months sooner than the GDP is due. It’s now in draft form “and we’re getting comments from the public.”

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Move Anne Arundel is its reliance on analytics. “This marks the first time the county has gone this route,” he said. “It’s already helped us establish goals and objectives, based on performance.”

Market Dictates

Stuart Title, vice president of brokerage and development with Odenton-based A.J. Properties, said the timing of this new GDP is noteworthy because “a new administration is trying to figure out [the appropriate direction].” With A.J. Properties heavily involved in the building of Odenton Town Center, Title weighed in on a project he, Kudchadkar and many others would like to see built.

“Building the garages is very important to Odenton Town Center and I hope the state works with the county to get that done. I think we’re struggling to find a purpose for the town center,” he said, while seconding Pruski’s enthusiasm to build the aquatic center. “That would help give it a sense of place.”

Speaking of place, Title has concerns about the place of developers in this mix.

“We’re called the problem in some quarters, though I think most people don’t think of us that way,” he said. “The county’s budget is built on the backs of developers, he said. “We don’t need more fees, since they just get passed on to the homeowner or the renter.”

Title said traffic is the No. 1 local issue, adding that “it’s not the developers’ fault. It’s up to the county to use developer’s fees to take care of that issue, which it doesn’t always do.”

Still, he’s “not up in arms about this. All we’ve done was follow the county’s parameters. Part of this is just the life of a developer,” Title said. “The market ultimately decides what works and what doesn’t.”
Wecker wins state restaurant award

Continued from page 1

month is the most challenging part of the business. An owner’s job is to do whatever is needed, a fact he never seems to forget as he pitches in busing tables if the crowd gets too big at any one of his establishments.

Before a recent show at Merriweather, he said, “from 5 to 7:30 p.m. I’m busing tables, running food, seating people, everything I can do to help.”

Humble beginnings

When Wecker was 19, he started washing dishes at the Magic Pan in Columbia. “I came in and told them I’d like to wait tables. But they said I was too young, so I ended up washing dishes.”

His dish washing skills were noticed by the restaurateur manager, who said he was the second-fastest dishwasher he’d ever seen. “There was a guy in Florida he knew who was faster than me. He called him The Man With the Electric Hands. I thought that was pretty good, being second to The Man With the Electric Hands.”

From there, Wecker became a host, then a busboy, then a waiter at Magic Pan.

He realized he was a “people” person. His very first restaurant ownership was the Elkridge Furnace Inn, which realized his dream of owning a small inn and restaurant. Though he is no longer associated with the establishment, Wecker said it taught him the ropes of restaurant ownership – and relating to customers. Happily, 99.9 percent of the customers he serves are an absolute joy. Over the years, he has gotten to know a great many of them on a personal level and they are more than customers ... they are friends.

When The Iron Bridge Wine Co. became a success, it also meant that key members of that restaurateur’s staff had topped out of their careers. Wecker observed some of them leaving for other challenges. “My brother Rob noticed people leaving, and he said: ‘How about we open a pirate bar?’”

Steve and Rob opened Mutiny in Glen Burnie in 2011.

And the list goes on: after 25 years of being a restaurateur, Wecker now has 240 employees between the five restaurants. And he considers each employee an important part of his success.

“When I put my dinners down at the dish stand, I say ‘thank you.’ Because I appreciate what the folks who wash the dishes contribute to our success,” he said. “Operating a restaurant is about every individual contributing to the whole. It continues to be about putting together a team that makes you look better than you are,” he said.

Wecker said he and his brothers were taught by their parents to give back to the community and through his restaurants he has provided an incalculable amount of support to charities and non-profits.

He often urges people to quit arguing about politics and social beliefs and go help their neighbors. “I’m done with the Democrats and done with the Republicans,” he said. “If everybody took better care of each other, instead of arguing we’d be further ahead as a country.”

On Monday nights at 18th and 21st, the speakeasy often becomes a fundraising arm for the community. Through “Gil & Jazz” nights, the restaurant helps raise money for local nonprofits ranging from Camp Attaway to Bridges for Housing Stability. The venue lends itself to regular charity nights, Wecker said, and Iron Bridge has continued its track record of donating wine and dinners to many local fundraising efforts and causes.

Wecker aims for the experiences at his restaurants to be totally different from one another. “Some nights I want a burger and a lager at Cured. Some nights I want oysters and a mojito at Mutiny, sometimes I want seafood at Iron Bridge with a buttery oaky Chardonnay, and some nights a 28-ounce porterhouse, a cabernet, and some music at 18th & 21st.”

But is he having fun? “If you think owning a restaurant will be fun, it can be. It’s spectacularly hard work but if you love it, there’s nothing better,” he said.

In the meantime, Wecker continues to appreciate his employees, his customers and even his accolades, though they surprise him.

He remarked, “OpenTable named Iron Bridge one of the top 10 restaurants in America for wine lovers. How on earth?! That little place on Route 108.”
It’s summer in our community and it’s time to enjoy some of our favorite things.

Riding a wave or a roller coaster.

Visiting an historic site or hiking a new trail.

Going to a concert or an outdoor play.

Finding a new restaurant or a picnic in a park.

Many great options are close to home.

So, enjoy and GO!
IN TOWN or OUTTA TOWN

Fun things to do

By Susan Kim
Staff Writer

Stay in town or take a day trip?
Take small kids or get a sitter?
Spend a lot or go for free?
Sometimes summer fun involves too many decisions. To help narrow it down, we’ve chosen five activities that come in both local and not-so-local versions. Enjoy!

Craft breweries.
In town. The Howard on Tap Craft Brew Trail (find it at visithowardcounty.com) is a great guide to local breweries. On the horizon: The Hops and Harvest Festival in Columbia on Sept. 29 will feature more than 50 Maryland breweries and artisans.

Just outta town. A little over an hour’s drive, the craft brewers in Southern Maryland have an emerging scene of their own. Check out Mully’s (www.mullysbrewery.com) Scorpion (www.scorpionbrewing.com) and the Ruddy Duck (www.ruddyduck.com). Combine your stops with a kayak trip available from one of many outfitters in the region.

Festivals.
In town. On July 13, experience the “Nextival” at the Anne Arundel County fairgrounds. Created for music lovers and foodies, the Nextival also offers vendors with art, clothes, craft beer, and even helicopter rides. All the proceeds go to charities, and military and kids under 12 are admitted for free. For details, see www.nextival.com.

Just outta town. On Aug. 2-4, take a trip to the Triple Creek Winery to attend the Chesapeake Bay Balloon & Wine Festival. With more than 15 hot air balloons (some for rides and some for viewing) the festival also offers live entertainment, a kid’s zone, boutique vendors, food trucks and, of course, wine. Visit triplecreekwinery.com.

Hiking.
In town: Appreciate the local gift of Patapsco Valley State Park, which extends 32 miles along the Patapsco River south and west of Baltimore. For a map of hikes, which vary in intensity and length, see www.alltrails.com.

Another local option: the Patuxent Valley Research Refuge, with 25 miles of hiking trails and a kid-friendly visitors center. Visit https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Patuxent/ for the most up-to-date information.

Just outta town: Head to Jarrettsville, a one-hour drive from Columbia, to Rocks State Park, where picnic areas are not overcrowded and easy to access. The state park is one of Maryland’s best-kept secrets. For a rigorous hike, try climbing to the King and Queen Seat, which rises 190 feet above Deer Creek for a breathtaking view. Call 410-557-7994 to reserve a pavilion, where you can cook out for the whole family.

Outdoor movie nights.
In town. On Friday nights throughout the summer, at Granville Gude Park in Laurel, families can enjoy outdoor movies with the “Friday Night Flicks” series. Bring a blanket or a chair, pack a picnic or grab something at the concession stand. On the schedule for July: Incredibles 2, Christopher Robin, and How to Train Your Dragon 3. For a complete calendar, visit cityoflaurel.org.

Just outta town: In downtown Frederick, Movie Night on the Creek is held each third Friday through October at the Carroll Creek Amphitheater. Admission is free and beer, wine and snacks are available for purchase before and during the show. Gates open an hour before dusk. Pets are welcome. Upcoming: Jumanji in July, 50 First Dates in August. See downtownfrederick.org for full schedule.

Pedal boats.
In town: Head to Centennial Park, where you can rent 2- or 4-seat pedal boats by the half hour. While you’re there, check out the Adventure Shack for snack bar items, ice, live bait and rentable fishing rods. Call the Adventure Shack and rentals status line at 410-313-7303 before heading to the park.

Just outta town: Drive 45 minutes to National Harbor, where the kids will dig the pedal boats shaped like dragons and swans. Other rentals offered by the outfitter “Boating in DC” include kayaking and standup paddle boards. Call 202-337-9642, or rent a craft on first-come, first-served basis.
EXPLORE
Farms, Food & Fun in Howard County

www.visithowardcounty.com
1-800-288-TRIP (8747)

Howard County
RESTAURANT WEEKS

July 22 - August 5, 2019

Mix up your culinary experience with diverse specialty chef menus in restaurants across Howard County. Participating restaurants will be offering unique, multi-course cuisine for every taste and budget.

www.HowardCountyRestaurantWeeks.com
1-800-288-TRIP (8747)
Team building at Patapsco Heritage Greenway

Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG) is offering a new program designed for local businesses and organizations looking for a unique staff bonding and service opportunity in their community.

PHG’s Team Building Opportunity (TBO) program creates a custom program for each group to engage in environmental stewardship as a team.

These events will focus on several areas of environmental stewardship, including tree plantings, stream clean ups, and invasive plant removals. Groups may request a specific type of event if desired and will be matched with a site in the Patapsco Valley.

PHG staff will provide TBO participants with appropriate safety and work materials, as well as encourage team building or friendly competition throughout the day.

Event costs begin at $500 but vary with size of the event and activity.

Due to weather concerns, Fall and Spring are the most common targets for scheduling, although exceptions can be made if necessary.

Stream Cleanup events offer an opportunity for groups to work together removing trash and litter from our local water ways.

This engaging outing for staff is an important piece of cleaning up the Patapsco watershed. This event can be as physically demanding as desired, and often requires team work and problem solving to complete tasks.

Invasive plant removal events help combat a growing problem in our local ecosystems created by introducing foreign species to a new environment. Removing invasive plants can vary from an easy pulling of plants, to a test of endurance cutting vines off trees as requested.

Tree plantings offer a simple way to create visible and lasting change in our local community. With some physical labor required, tree planting is a simple process to learn as your staff is guided by our event leaders.

For more information, visit www.patapsco.org/environment/team-building-opportunities/
Laurel Manor House

Authentic B&B
Ideal for Business travelers!
**Ensuite bathrooms**
**High-speed wi-fi**
**Off-street parking**
**Hearty breakfast**
**Guest refrigerator**
**TV with Chromecast**

Laurel Manor House
19th Century Charm; 21st Century Comfort

301.725.1094
LaurelManorHouse.com

The Little Chickadee

643 Main Street
Laurel, MD 20707
Phone: 301.725.3848

Fresh Plant Forward Food
Event/Meeting Space

Social Media: @lconmain
www.lconmain.com

Rainbow Florist & Delectables

www.rainbowfloristandmore.com

370 Main St.
Laurel, MD 20707
301-725-4454

CIGARS GLOBAL

604 Main Street
Laurel, MD 20707
Phone: 301-776-1517
@thomasupplytrade@cigars

MORE THAN JAVA CAFE

358 Main St.
Laurel, MD 20707
301.498.3200
10411 Motor City Dr., Suite 105
Bethesda, MD 20817
301.272.4906

301.725.1094
LaurelManorHouse.com

THE LAUREL BOARD OF TRADE

SMALL BUSINESS. BIG IDEAS.
Promoting & Supporting Local Business
Become a member today!
(301) 489-0838
www.laurelboardoftrade.net

DEISED THEATRE CAMP
AUGUST 5 - 9, 2019
A 5 day Camp for students ages 5-18. Campers will learn general tools of acting, apply their growing knowledge of story structure, and engage their imaginations to devise their own work of theatre.
For information deb@venustheatre.org
VENUS theatre
21 C Street Laurel // venustheatre.org

TURNKEY BUSINESS FOR SALE
Sweets & Treats Creamery Ice Cream Shop strategically located on 502 Main Street, Laurel MD sells Hershey’s hand dipped ice cream with over 30 delicious flavors! This shop is equipped with commercial oven and salad topping rail, bakery display case etc. All you need is just MOVE IN!! Serious buyers please email me at annesegal@live.com

Laurel Mill Playhouse
508 Main St. Laurel MD 20707
Musicals! Comedy! Drama!
www.laurelmillplayhouse.org

The Crystal Fox

311 Main Street • Laurel
301-317-1980
E-Mail: Sterling@thecrystalfox.com
www.thecrystalfox.com
WE CARRY:
• Incense • Crystals
• Tarot • Jewelry
• Essential Oils
• Fantasy Artworks

VENUS theatre
21 C Street Laurel // venustheatre.org

Rise Up Nutrition
344 Main Street
Laurel, MD 20707
Healthy Shakes | Energizing Teas
1 on 1 Coaching | Positive Community
Rise Up Nutrition
344 Main St
Laurel, MD 20707
Fueled By Herbalife Nutrition
Hunting still a tourism driver in Maryland

By George Berkheimer
Senior Writer

Hunting may not rank high on everyone’s list of tourist activities that attract people to Howard and Anne Arundel Counties, it is an important option.

Hunting does bring revenue to the state and counties and provides a local economic impact.

Last November, business leaders from across the state who support hunting gathered in Annapolis to announce the formation of Hunting Works For Maryland, a non-profit local grassroots partnership organization focused on explaining the role that hunting and shooting sports play in Maryland’s heritage and economic health.

“Hunting generates $32 million in state and local taxes, which obviously benefits everyone who lives in Maryland,” said former Maryland State Sen. John Astle, one of the organization’s co-chairs, who represented Anne Arundel County's District 30 for four terms before retiring last fall.

“Hunters also pay an 11 percent excise tax on equipment, under the Pittman- Robert Act, and those funds are reallocated for the express purpose of conserving wildlife habitat,” he added.

That benefits non-game animal species too, and it benefits everyone who enjoys the outdoors. These are the kinds of facts we want to make common knowledge.”

Last year, Maryland received $8 million in Pittman- Robertson funds for state conservation efforts.

Big Impact

More than 88,000 people hunt in Maryland each year, including 19,000 from out-of-state, said Deb Carter, executive director of the Maryland Tourism Coalition, said hunters spend $128 million for equipment each year in Maryland, and more than $50 million on trip related expenses, including food, lodging, transportation, and other trip costs.

“That statistic is important to those who own hotels, campgrounds, lodges and restaurants,” she said.

Hunter spending supports 4,500 Maryland jobs paying $128 million in salaries and wages, she added, with jobs, taxes and sales resulting in a $401 million ripple effect on the state economy.

Conservation Efforts

The Hunting Works for America program launched as a pilot program in 2010 in Arizona, Minnesota and North Dakota, and has now expanded to 19 states with the addition of Maryland.

According to Tony Reiss, a spokesman for the national program, the goal of Hunting Works is to help policy makers, the media and the general public understand hunting’s benefits, which aren’t limited to the economy.

“You see it a lot with game or wildlife populations that are on the decline,” he said. “Hunters will step up and take it upon everybody’s best interest to do a lot of the conservation [work] to help these species come back. It’s hunters who are out in the field observing wildlife, who know what to look for and are participating in testing programs to help keep things like Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) under control and manage it to stop the spread.”

CWD, a neurological disease, affects deer, elk and moose, causing brain deterioration resulting in emaciation, abnormal behavior, loss of bodily functions and death. It is widespread in Pennsylvania, and has been detected in 27 Maryland deer since 2010, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website.

Maryland’s canvasback duck population has also benefitted from hunter intervention, said Carter.

Hunting generates $32 million in state and local taxes. Hunters pay an 11 percent excise tax on equipment and those funds are reallocated for conserving wildlife habitat. Last year, Maryland received $8 million for state conservation efforts.

Influenced by unregulated market hunting in the early years of the 1900s, waves of drought that resulted in the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, and drainage of small wetlands in the Midwest during the 1960s and 1970s, their population collapsed.

“My dad told me I’d never see one alive and free,” Carter said, but efforts by hunters to preserve and re-establish habitat made a difference.

“Today you can see canvasbacks everywhere again, and there are even special permits for hunting them in Maryland,” she said. “That wouldn’t have happened if hunters didn’t care.”

Managed Hunts

Opportunities for waterfowl, large and small game hunting in Howard County are limited, confined mainly to private property and DNR Wildlife Management Areas within Patuxent Valley State Park and Patuxent River State Park.

Since 1998, Howard County has also used managed hunts to help maintain a stable, balanced white-tailed deer population in its parks, where heavy deer browsing has been shown to reduce biodiversity. Anne Arundel County operates a similar program in its parks.

Howard County’s Deer Management Task Force Report from 1998 found that increases in residential and commercial development coupled with better land use and development practices contributed to rising deer populations by creating more of the grazing borders they need. With a decrease in the number of hunters over the years, the unchecked deer population has become problematic, causing crop and vegetation damage and increased highway accidents.

According to the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks website, there has been an observable improvement in habitat quality and vegetation abundance in parks where managed deer hunts take place.

“We perform an extensive background check on applicants, who also interview before a panel to answer ethics-based questions,” said Howard County Deer Management Program Manager Sam Richardson.

“We’ve had a good response, but are getting some turnover now as hunters get older and fewer young people are getting into the sport,” he said.

Over the past five years, a total of 727 deer have been harvested through Howard County’s managed hunts.

The Maryland Office of Tourism and Development’s www.fishandhuntmaryland.com website, created by a steering committee Astel served on in 2013, is a helpful resource for anyone looking for information about where to hunt in the state.

“It tells you what’s available in the way of species in each county, where to go, license requirements, season dates, lodging, everything you need to know, particularly if you’re coming from outside the state,” Astel said. “It’s going to help us promote Maryland and its hunting industry.”
A sweet day trip
Visiting the land of Hershey's chocolate

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

Much of the year, the town is known for its amusement park, one of professional sport’s greatest minor league franchises and big-deal concerts. And chocolate, chocolate and more chocolate.

Enjoying the charms of Chocolate Town, with the streetlamps on Chocolate Avenue shaped like Hershey Kisses, can be a day trip into a chocolate dream or expand to other adventures.

**Main Attractions**

Envisioned by business icon Milton Hershey, the town’s attractions blossomed from his belief that employee production and retention stemmed from a well-rounded life. That was the idea behind building Hersheypark, which dates back to 1906.

Open from May through September, a ticket allows visitors three experiences that encompass 70 attractions – including a variety of themed rides, a water park and The Boardwalk. New this year is Reese’s Cupfusion, an all-new interactive gaming ride that “creates a sweet sensory adventure.”

Admission to Hersheypark also includes access to ZooAmerica North American Wildlife Park, an adjacent world of howling wolves and swimming otters, as well as roaring bears and hooting owls. Open year round, visitors can attend a special VIP tour or plan a personal “meet ’n greet” with group and outreach programs.

Just opposite Hersheypark’s east side is Chocolate World, where guests can not only see how candy is produced, but can create confectionary delights of all their own.

Further east, across the vast parking lot from Hersheypark Stadium and Chocolate World, lies the Giant Center, home of the Hershey Bears. Founded in 1938, the franchise was recently the subject of the documentary, “B’ars to Bears,” the most expansive narrative of the team’s history to date.

As is the case in most areas, the craft beer craze has descended upon the Hershey-Harrisburg region and it is home to a cluster of craft brewers – so try a beer flight, grab a snack and get on to the next stop; or, if you can, pack your growler and a cooler, which would be a good approach to take at the Dauphin County Brewfest, Harrisburg’s premier craft beer festival. It’s set for July 20, at the Giant Center.

**Wet Ones**

As is the case in most areas, the craft beer craze has descended upon the Hershey-Harrisburg region and it is home to a cluster of craft brewers – so try a beer flight, grab a snack and get on to the next stop; or, if you can, pack your growler and a cooler, which would be a good approach to take at the Dauphin County Brewfest, Harrisburg’s premier craft beer festival. It’s set for July 20, at the Giant Center.

**More, More, More**

On the way out of town, be sure to hang a right off of Hersheypark Drive on to Walton Avenue and visit the quaint village of Hummelstown for a walk and some easy browsing through the gift shops and art galleries, and cap it off with a visit to the Warwick Hotel, which is actually a restaurant. The spot on the map could easily pass for the backlot of Mayberry.

Need accommodations? Every major hotel brand has a location in the Hershey-Harrisburg area, as well as other independently-owned accommodations. The most notable are the Hershey Lodge, a full-service resort that’s popular with the convention crowd; as well as the upscale Hotel Hershey, a 1930s-era masterpiece that’s offers great views that has received the Forbes Four-Star Award and the AAA Four-Diamond Award.

Situated next to the Hotel Hershey is the Hershey Gardens, 23-acre botanical garden and arboretum that features seasonal displays and theme gardens, including the indoor, tropical Butterfly Atrium.

The possibilities go on, with plenty of outdoor activities, including golf at the Spring Creek Golf Course and Hershey Country Club; Cocoa Kayak; and even mountain biking along the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center Trail System.

So, while Hershey and the surrounding area may not require a week-long trip, it’s surely great for a night. Or three.
Fast, good and inexpensive, too
By John Powers

So, you are hungry. Do you want to eat in the office or go out?
Or, maybe your entire office is hungry and they want to order in.
Or, you are planning for an upcoming event and looking to cater in food.
Jimmy John’s is an excellent option when you want food that’s fast, good and inexpensive. And with several convenient locations – many that deliver – Jimmy John’s is a superb choice for workplace dining.

To begin, consider the Jimmy John’s website. It is user friendly with menu options and prompts to help you complete an order. I especially appreciated that each order can be assigned a name, which avoids the awkward unwrapping when the bag of goodies gets back to a hungry gang of office mates. Also, the website updates you on the status of your order so you know how long it will be before lunch break.

To watch the Jimmy John’s team preparing food is a model of efficiency that would make Henry Ford proud. Along a countered assembly line, gloved staff members build sandwiches pouring requested ingredients on to one of several bread choices. The chopping, the slapping and the slathering of ingredients happens in rapid fire, which is a great relief for those on a limited lunch break or who are stepping up to bring back a group lunch that the boss didn’t tell you about!

Sandwiches are quickly moved down counter until a staff member wielding a knife and wrapping paper neatly cuts and tucks your sandwich into a protective package. It’s fun to watch.

Jimmy John’s has a wide selection of meats, vegetables and breads that should accommodate even the pickiest of office eaters. Also, for those who counting calories the “unwich” wrapped in lettuce is a delectable options. Gluten free choices are available, too.

But, hey, it’s a Jimmy John’s lunch. So, pick out a fun bread to perk up your chicken, turkey, beef, tuna or cheese. Also, their specialty chips add to the meal.

Now, the really good parts. The pickles, which can be sliced to your liking, are juicy, tangy and crisp. Make sure they are part of your order.

And, the cookies, well, let’s just say, you don’t have to wait to eat them at the end of lunch.
Study aims for tick management strategy

Tracking mice may reveal ways to reduce Lyme’s

By George Berkheimer
Senior Writer

A team of researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Research Service (ARS) and the University of Maryland (UM) descended on Columbia’s Cedar Lane Park on an early morning in May.

Armed with VHF (very high frequency) antennas and plastic boxes filled with laboratory equipment, they quickly found their quarry: white-footed mice that they previously outfitted with tracking collars.

Tracking the mice is part of a new phase in the Area-Wide Tick Control research study in Howard County, launched by the USDA in 2017.

By collecting mouse tissue samples and any ticks found on the mice for study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the scientists are breaking new ground in understanding nuances behind the transmission of Lyme disease and its continuing geographic expansion.

“This is novel, because the most recent literature on mouse movement and foraging behavior is 15 or 20 years old,” said Andrew Li, an ARS research entomologist and the study’s principal investigator.

Explained Grace Hummell, a graduate student in UM’s Environmental Science and Technology (ENST) program, “The hope is to reduce the tick load on the mice and the number of ticks in the area.”

Lyme Ecology

Residential communities that border open space are a hallmark of Howard County’s quality of life. Unfortunately, they are perfect for tick-borne disease.

“We know the neighborhoods where it’s at, and it’s staggering,” said Jennifer Mullinax, an assistant professor of Wildlife Ecology in UM’s ENST department. “On some streets, people in six out of 10 homes have had Lyme disease.”

Three tick species – the deer tick, dog tick and lone star tick – act as Lyme disease carriers. About the size of a poppy seed, deer tick nymphs are the most problematic, often going unnoticed until after they have fed on and infected a human.

Both uninfected tick larvae and the parasitic Borrelia burgdorferi bacteria that cause Lyme disease live in forest leaf litter where mice nest and forage, explained Matt Millholland, an ARS researcher and UM liaison.

“Tick nymphs and adults acquire the bacteria by feeding on infected mice,” he said. The current study indicates that roughly 50 percent of Howard County’s mice are infected.

The current study indicates that roughly 50 percent of Howard County’s mice are infected.

In Maryland, the incidence of Lyme disease is found in areas of high population density, not in rural areas. According to CDC data, there were 4,410 confirmed cases of Lyme disease in Baltimore City from 2000 through 2016, 3,169 in Montgomery County, and 2,691 in Howard County, but only 25 in Garrett County, 431 in St. Mary’s County and 149 in Worcester County.

The Right Combo

Matching up mouse movement with deer tracking data should unmask correlations and provide researchers with a clearer picture of the disease’s ecology, Li said.

The USDA is conducting its studies in Blandair Regional Park North, Cedar Lane Park, David Force Natural Resource Area, Middle Patuxent Environmental Area, Rockburn Branch Park and Wincopin Trails. Centennial Park serves as an untreated control area.

Using four-poster feeding stations that use rollers to apply tick-killing pesticide to the necks of deer, Fipronil-laced rodent bait boxes to treat mice and Met52 EC natural fungal pesticide spray in park areas bordering residences, researchers are comparing the effectiveness of different treatments.

The five-year study’s overall goal is to identify the most effective way to control ticks in residential areas and to reduce the overall tick population in suburbs.

For Mullinax, the biggest questions are how treatment options influence animals’ behavior, whether enough animals can be treated to make a difference, and how many units are required to treat animals’ home ranges.

“This is information we’ll be able to take to the county and homeowners’ associations,” she said. “We’ll be able to develop the next set of questions, but we’re also starting to build a solution. It’s not perfect, but it’s something that’s effective for us to start to do to help people better protect themselves.”

Human Clinical Research

The Johns Hopkins Lyme Disease Research Center focuses on patient-based research in all manifestations of Lyme disease. Patients are seen by physician referral. For more information on the center and its research, or to make a private donation, visit www.hopkinslyme.org.
Will raising developer fees help fix the county budget?

Howard County has a budget crisis. How do we fix it? Do developers need to pay higher fees? The County Council will soon take on the issue of increasing residential development school fees.

Get ready for the same scenario we always see unfold when faced with development concerns. The County is polarized. The civic advocates end up in opposition to the enjoined business community. Those viewed as NIMBY (not in my back yard) people are pitted against fiscal business interests.

But is that right? Are Howard County commercial interests really well-served by defending all density increases? The long County history of granting virtually every residential development project has created a low supply of commercial retail space and rising rents.

Partly due to the County’s long-term woefully low housing development fees, business customers across the County are now facing a large property tax increase, which will decrease spending.

Why do we need a property tax increase? If development is profitable, and given our massive growth, why isn’t our current tax base covering our costs? The answer is simple: It is a fallacy that residential development is a profit center for the County.

Public services are greatly overwhelmed and development should be slowed down. Expenses saved via student enrollment and reduced costs from traffic, health services, and public safety needs, far outweigh the taxes produced by new homes.

For too long, Howard County has collected incredibly low home development fees compared to our neighboring counties. Average new home building fees for 2019 are $5,400 for Howard County. Compare that to $13,390 in Anne Arundel, $12,950 in Calvert, $17,385 in Charles, $45,159 in Montgomery, and $24,094 in Prince George’s!

It is time for residential development to pay more of its share of the impact that it has on public services such as schools, roads and public safety. Development will continue but let’s have it add to the county coffers rather than subtract.

This July, the Howard County Council will have the legal right to change the fees that developers pay per new residential unit. The Council and County Executive need to work together to increase these developer fees as soon as possible, and not allow unfounded concerns about lost tax revenues add to the County’s fiscal hole any longer.

Some other wedge issues that get thrown into development arguments need debunking.

Average new home building fees are $5,400 in Howard County and $13,390 in Anne Arundel.

For example, some say that increasing developer fees will raise housing costs and lower the affordable housing supply. It is a little-known fact, though, that the school fees don’t apply to lower-priced homes.

Also, the amount of affordable housing required in development is very low – none for low income, and only a small percentage for moderate income. And, while affordable housing should be spread across the County, it is currently segregated because higher market projects pay a fee-in-lieu of providing it.

Currently, almost 250 fees for construction permitting, and development are up for annual review. Notably, these fees have not been increased for almost 20 years! The County doesn’t need a change in the law to increase these fees.

The Council has not acted on these potential increases yet, but let’s make sure the school charge fees are increased as soon as possible. Residents and the business sector are in dire need of these new revenues.

Lisa Markovitz is president of the Maryland civic/political group, The People’s Voice.
Governor, surprisingly, goes on the attack

Larry Hogan ran for reelection as a bipartisan consensus builder. But in a speech to hundreds of business executives at the Live! Casino last month, the governor took a more contentious tone. He said he was ready to fight the Democrats on increasing funding for education – and the huge tax hikes it would require – on tough crime legislation, and on fixing traffic congestion.

The speech sounded more like a red-meat campaign rouser rather than the Fifth Annual State of Business address at the Maryland Business for Responsive Government lunch. He urged more than 600 people to join him in the “fight for Maryland’s future” and to keep lawmakers from turning back to the “failed policies” of the O’Malley years.

It is a fight that MBRG – now rebranding itself as the Maryland Free Enterprise Foundation – has been waging for 36 years. It’s also a battle it’s been losing, even by its own careful score card.

The front and back covers of the new Maryland Free Roll Call, its annual rating of legislators, highlighted the biggest legislative loss for pro-business forces this year – the Fight for $15 to raise the minimum wage. They quoted from Hogan’s veto message that the sharp hike “could cost us jobs” – 99,000 in one study – “negatively impact our economic competitiveness and devastate our state’s economy.”

The fight to raise Maryland’s wage to $15 had been going on for several years. Mike O’Halloran, state director of the National Federation of Independent Business, told me that the small business owners NFIB represents had turned out in force this past session to oppose it, especially since the state minimum wage had just gone up to $10.10 last year.

As often happens, business owners, like many people testifying in Annapolis, waited hours to deliver a few minutes of testimony.

The legislators were unpersuaded by the small business people and the governor. The majority Democrats easily overrode his veto in straight party line votes.

Constituents were unpersuaded

The business owners not only failed to persuade the legislators.

More importantly, they were not able to persuade the constituents they represent.

Multiple statewide polls this year, including Gonzales Research and Goucher College polls, found overwhelming support of the $15 minimum among Democratic voters and majority support among independents. Only a majority of Republican voters were opposed, but even there, a third or more of Republicans supported the idea.

Support went down when pollsters told voters of the potential negative consequences. But those negative outcomes never got communicated to voters, or they didn’t believe them. Legislative leaders scoffed at the job losses. And some businesses who already pay their workers well supported the hike.

Impact

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy, a left-leaning think-tank, estimated that by the time the $15 is phased in 573,000 workers will get raises averaging $4,000 a year for a total increase in income – and business expenses -- of $2.6 billion.

In some concessions to small business, the wage hikes are spread out to 2025 for employers with over 15 people and to 2026 for smaller firms. The biggest percentage jump of almost 9 percent comes this January to $11.

Overall, it’s a nearly 50 percent increase over seven years, after a 39 percent increase since 2014. The hidden employer-paid taxes for Social Security, Medicare and unemployment add another dollar to employer costs.

Hogan may talk about engaging the business community in the fight against more spending and higher taxes. In a similar vein at a MBRG lunch 13 years, Republican Gov. Bob Ehrlich had urged businesses to stop donating to Democrats who voted against their interests. But the Democrats have moved even further left.

Polarized legislature

“The gap between the highest and lowest scoring legislators has never been higher, and never has the ‘middle ground been so empty,” says the latest Maryland Free's Roll Call, which has been tracking scores since 1983.

Just 57 of the 188 legislators scored over 70 percent – all Republicans – and 128 lawmakers scored under 35 percent -- all but three of the Democrats, who occupied the middle ground. Senate President Pro-Tem Kathy Klausmeier had the best score among all Democrats with 59 percent, representing one of the few evenly split districts left.

Western Howard County’s newest senator, Katie Fry Hester, a Democrat representing an area that had been represented by Republicans for seven terms, expressed misgivings about the minimum wage hike and has convened a bipartisan work group to mitigate its impact on small business. But while she tries to do “the purple thing,” as one political observer put it, her overall score from Maryland Free Enterprise Foundation was just 23 percent.

Many Democratic legislators question the votes MBRG-Maryland Free chooses to score. But there is no question that the scores reflect the increasing polarization of Maryland politics and the leftist drift of the legislators.

There are few moderates on either side and any compromise must happen in committee where there is often more bipartisan negotiation in the less visible committee voting sessions.

It is there that the scores of professional lobbyists work around the edges, working to kill bills or promote narrow business interests. Businesses spent over $44 million last year to lobby the legislature, and they are often able to succeed on narrow issues.

But in areas where the public has largely made up its mind, such as paying people more or granting every employee paid sick leave, as the legislature did two years ago, business interests fall flat.
Join a Business Connections Network

The Central Maryland Chamber (CMC) Business Connections Networks (BCNs) are premier networking leads groups focused on connecting business professionals throughout Central Maryland.

Here’s what makes the BCNs so unique:
CMC offers an open format that invites each group member to contribute to the conversation. In addition, members are encouraged to meet with each other outside of the monthly meetings.

These one-on-one or small group meetings have been instrumental in developing meaningful business relationships that have led to warm referrals, synergistic marketing, creative support and engaging partnerships.

While members are encouraged to support each other and provide referrals, there is no pressure to give leads for the sake of meeting a quota. Emphasis is on giving quality leads that produce results.

In addition, all the BCNs set aside time for business development sessions on technology, sales and marketing as well as educational topics presented by group participants.

There is an exclusivity rule of one member per business sector, which eliminates unfair competition among members of the group and allows each member to openly represent their business.

Participation in a group is a free benefit for members of the CMC!

We invite guests (not yet a CMC member) looking for a dynamic, energizing networking experience to come to one meeting to decide firsthand if a BCN is the right fit.

If interested in learning more about any of the groups or visiting a meeting, please contact any group leader directly or call Karen Russell, CMC director of membership, at 410-672-3422.

All the BCNs are near their caps and could be closing-out real soon (i.e. BCNs will soon stop taking new members), so act fast!

Business Connections Network Millersville

1st Wednesday of each month; 8 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. in Millersville; led by Tim Carey, Chesapeake Telephone, 443-577-2208 or tcarey@ctsmd.us

Business Connections Network Linthicum Heights

3rd Tuesday of each month; 8 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. at the Maritime Conference Center; led by Alex McKeague, Sunrise Solutions, 410-216-3227 or amck-eague@getsomesun.net

Business Connections Network Clarksville

4th Thursday of each month; 9:30 a.m. - 11 a.m. in Clarksville; led by Amy Lazas, Law Offices of Kirk Halpin & Associates, 410-531-1700 and amy@halpinlawfirm.com and Chris Riismandel, Epoch Inc. 410-465-3955 or chris@theepochteam.com

Raj Kudchadkar is president and CEO of the Central Maryland Chamber.

Moving beyond networking

Throughout the course of this year, the Howard County Chamber has been celebrating 50 years of doing business.

This past May, the Chamber hosted its 50th Annual Meeting. Always a time of reflection and celebration, this luncheon did that and more as the Chamber welcomed the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executive’s (ACCE) President/CEO, Sheree Anne Kelley who keynoted the event. Kelley’s presentation focused on recent ACCE research titled, “The Horizon Infinitive,” which studied nine influences impacting Chambers over the next 25 years.

The association executive highlighted the fact that flourishing Chambers have moved beyond solely focusing on events, networking, and festivals and instead are focusing on community impact initiatives like education, community, workforce and economic development.

Growing Chambers are also moving from the fair share membership model to tiered dues and creating Foundations to generate revenue that can’t be obtained by memberships alone.

They are also focused on the professional growth of its members and issues that Chambers might not have considered business oriented.

All of this is relevant as Chamber’s have historically been economic and community advocates representing the interest of small businesses and major employers. Chambers were often at the forefront of business recruitment, retention efforts, and major community infrastructure initiatives.

I can vividly recall seeing the 1948 dinner program from my previous Chamber when they welcomed executives from General Motors when they opened their Doraville, GA plant.

In the late 70’s, early 80’s, a significant transformation took place. It was the famed networking mixer or after hours event.

This new phenomenon led to unprecedented growth for local chambers as small businesses flocked to these events all so they could network with community movers and shakers. These events created one kumbaya festival as members and host businesses were all ecstatic.

Chambers were even happier as money was plentiful due to ticket sales and sponsorships. So much so that Chamber’s lost sight of their mission and everything became centered on the next event.

Fast forward 30 plus years and Chambers have reached a crossroads as they no longer have a monopoly on networking. Groups like BNI, Linked In, meet ups, and other gatherings bring people together.

What does this all mean for the Howard County Chamber? It means balancing programs and events with community impact initiatives. It means that one should not be surprised if you see programs focused less on gathering and more on the development of people and community.

Leonardo McClarty is president and CEO of the Howard Chamber of Commerce.

Lighting the Way to Business Security

Commercial Insurance Managers has provided comprehensive coverage and competitive rates in commercial insurance and employee benefits since 1989. As a VOSB, we can provide our services to the Federal Government and other small business contractors who need insurance, a partner or a prime contractor.

We also specialize in insurance for nonprofit and social service organizations. Get a quote, apply online, and purchase your coverage.

Go to www.businsure.com or Call us at 410-799-2142

Voted 2017 Small Business of the Year by the Howard County Chamber

Awards the SBA Veteran Owned Small Business of 2018

Jeff 2017 Small Business of the Year by the Howard County Chamber

Get a quote, apply online, and purchase your coverage.

Go to www.businsure.com or Call us at 410-799-2142

Awards the SBA Veteran Owned Small Business of 2018

Voted 2017 Small Business of the Year by the Howard County Chamber

Get a quote, apply online, and purchase your coverage.

Go to www.businsure.com or Call us at 410-799-2142

Awards the SBA Veteran Owned Small Business of 2018
New law hits transparency

BBB’s Standards for Trust include eight principles that enable a business to create and maintain trust. One of them requires an organization to “Be Transparent.”

Unfortunately, this standard was often lacking when it came to the payment processing industry. The problem? It starts with the way contracts are executed. A typical merchant services agreement is three to five pages long. As far as contracts go, that’s not so bad. But scroll to the signature page and there’s usually a tiny little clause that says something to the effect of “by signing this agreement you’re agreeing to our terms of service listed here” with a link to a url.

Are you ready for this? The terms of service document is usually 75 pages or longer! On top of that, oftentimes when you try to follow the link, you’re stopped in your tracks by a login screen. Since you’re not an account holder, you can’t even read the terms. Do you sign it anyway? In fact, a lot of businesses do.

Unfortunately, buried deep inside the terms of service lies the length of the contract, information on cancellation fees, and even liquidated damages. Basically, everything the company can charge you for early termination is hidden in a link you probably never opened.

A standard merchant services agreement is a three year contract with a $495 cancellation fee. Liquidated damages can be $100 or more for every month left on the contract. If you’re halfway through the term of your contract, and you find a better deal elsewhere, it might be cost prohibitive to switch.

Let’s say you decide to ride out the contract. Most agreements give you a very narrow window, just 30 days, to provide written notice you intend to cancel. Miss the window and the fees reset, holding you hostage for another full term.

Maryland House Bill 777 changes all of that. Starting October 1, the signature page of the merchant services agreement must spell out the length of the agreement, cancellation fees, liquidated damages, and the renewal date. Each item must be listed in 12 point, bold font, and each one must be initiated by the merchant.

And, there’s more good news for Maryland. Business owners. Altogether, termination fees, damages, etc. are capped at $500. That window of cancellation? Now, merchant services providers will be required to notify you at least 60 days prior to your renewal. If the agreement automatically renews, providers prohibited from charging any type of fee, fine, or penalty should you decide to terminate their service.

The law applies to merchant services providers with fewer than 50 employees, or that process less than $2 million in credit card sales per year. Providers must abide by the law whether they’re based in-state or not. Only month-to-month agreements, offered by providers that do not charge fees, penalties, and/or liquidated damages upon termination, are exempt. House Bill 777 will be enforced by the Commissioner of Financial Regulation with fines up $10,000 for a first violation and up to $25,000 per offense for subsequent violations.

Once it takes effect, Maryland retailers, and businesses accepting credit cards, will no longer be bound by unfair credit card processing contracts, or forced to tolerate substandard customer service for an extended period.

Much of the credit for this article – but not the pun – goes to Jaron Rice, ETA, founder and CEO of Magothy Payments, an Anne Arundel County merchant services provider. Rice worked tirelessly over the last session to push the legislation and address an inherent problem that had plagued the industry for years.

If you’re looking to renegotiate your payment processing, check BBB.org and consider a local, BBB Accredited Business you can trust.

Angie Barnett is president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau of Greater Maryland.
Jane Dembner, Columbia Association’s director of planning and community affairs and a well-known community activist, passed away June 11 after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Dembner was a 20-year resident of Columbia and she had a great impact on the community.

Dembner guided Columbia and CA into the future, studying ways to improve CA’s sport and recreational facilities, Columbia’s village centers, open spaces, and other key amenities and infrastructure.

According to Milton Matthews, president and CEO of the Columbia Association, “Jane was incredibly knowledgeable, quick thinking, engaging, and committed to making Columbia not just a place with a treasured past, but also a promising future.”

Dembner received a master’s degree in city and urban planning from the University of Pennsylvania. She then went on to a career that included serving as Principal at LDR International, a landscape architecture and urban planning firm, and later served as Associate Vice President at HNTB, an engineering and architecture firm.

An avid bicyclist, Dembner led the development and implementation of “Connecting Columbia: An Active Transportation Agenda,” which outlined improvements for Columbia’s pathway system.

Dembner was also responsible for creating the Community Building Speakers series.

She and her husband, Michael launched “Breathe Deep Columbia,” an annual 5K walk, fun run, and lung cancer awareness fair.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by her son, Daniel.

Warren Litchfield

Laurel Mayor Craig A. Moe announced the passing of Rev. Warren H. Litchfield on June 6.

Rev. Litchfield was born and raised in Laurel, graduated from Laurel High School, served in the Korean War, and worked at Fort Meade for 31 years.

Since 1950, he lived in the house his father built on Nichols Drive. He was married to Mabel Litchfield for 34 years before her passing in 2014. They had one son, David Litchfield.

“Hulbert,” as he was familiarly known to many, was a past president and life member of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department. He was named LVFD Firefighter of the Year in 1972. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame for the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association on September 11, 1986.

He was appointed chaplain of the Prince George’s County Fire and Rescue Association in September 1998.

In July 1997 Mayor Frank Casula appointed him City Coordinating Chaplain and was appointed City of Laurel Chaplain by Mayor Moe on April 8, 2002.

He officiated the funerals of many Laurel elected officials, city employees and their family members and countless city residents.

Rev. Litchfield was well known for his talent in poetry writing. He would write a tribute poem for close friends and local dignitaries to provide special recognition for recent awards and achievements.

For many years, Litchfield delivered the invocation at meetings of the Mayor and City Council and numerous city events.

He was a devoted source of comfort to many as they mourned the loss of their loved ones, and warmly guided others through personal difficulties.

Rev. Litchfield was very proud of his father’s service to Laurel as its first Building Inspector. He always enjoyed sharing stories about his father’s city employment and of him being one of the city’s first retirees.

“I am heartbroken over the news of the passing of my great personal friend, who has dedicated his life to the service of others, both in his career and as a Chaplain for City Service Organizations,” Mayor Moe said.

Howard student crowned spelling champion

Saketh Sundar, an eighth grade student from Clarksville Middle School, was the 2019 Scripps National Spelling Bee Champion.

The Howard County Library System hosted a celebration for Saketh on June 12 at the HCLS Miller Branch that included community leaders, family and friends.

Saketh is the first student from Howard County and Maryland to be crowned National Spelling Champion. Saketh had won the HCLS Spelling Bee in 2016, 2017, 2018 as well as 2019.

He is the first student to win the HCLS Spelling Bee four consecutive years.

The HCLS Spelling Bee is part of the Library’s signature A+ Partners in Education initiative designed to improve the overall academic success of Howard County students.
Frank S. Turner has been appointed to a six-year term on the Howard Community College (HCC) Board of Trustees.

President of Columbia, Turner was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1994 and served until 2019.

In the legislature, Turner proposed legislation that established the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship to provide tuition for students entering community colleges within two years of receiving their high school diploma. Funding for the scholarship was initially appropriated at $15 million.

Scholarship to provide tuition for students entering community colleges within two years of receiving their high school diploma. Funding for the scholarship was initially appropriated at $15 million.

Turner started his professional career as an administrative aide to North Carolina Governor Dan Moore from 1968 to 1969, before turning to real estate and business. He held positions as a realtor and president of a real estate investment company.

For 40 years, Turner taught courses in business law, real estate, and income tax accounting to students at Morgan State University’s School of Business and Management.

Turner holds a bachelor’s degree from North Carolina Central University and a J.D. from the University of North Carolina School of Law and North Carolina Central University.

Sofive Soccer opens in Columbia

Sofive Soccer Centers opened a 50,000 square-foot indoor soccer facility at 7125 Columbia Gateway Drive.

Offering eight small-sided turf soccer fields designed for games with five players per side, plus a bar/ café and locker rooms, Sofive provides a soccer experience for adults and youth all year long.

“We are thrilled to be opening Sofive in Howard County,” said Sofive CEO and Co-founder Charles Lagayette. “Since opening our first Sofive location in 2015, the business has really taken off. There are lots of soccer players in the U.S. but very few high-quality indoor soccer fields. In the first year of operations, the New Jersey location received more than 200,000 visitors, and we’re hoping to match that success in Columbia.”

Sofive opened the indoor soccer facility adjacent to the 42,000 square foot EarthTreks climbing gym and fitness facility. Like EarthTreks, Sofive adds a unique recreational amenity to Columbia Gateway and the surrounding community.

Sofive’s Columbia location is its fifth in the nation and second in Maryland.

Open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 1 a.m. and weekends from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m., Sofive’s indoor soccer fields are available to rent for pick-up games, training space, soccer leagues, corporate events and birthday parties.

Columbia Rotary awards $2,000 to Neighbor Ride

The Rotary Club of Columbia Patuxent awarded Neighbor Ride a $2,000 Charitable Trust Grant in support of the nonprofit’s efforts to help those in need in the Howard County community.

Funds donated to Neighbor Ride were raised by the members of the club through a variety of volunteer activities, fundraisers and donations.

Neighbor Ride is a volunteer-driven nonprofit dedicated to enhancing the health and quality of life for Howard County’s older residents by providing transportation for health care appointments, social outings, fitness and educational activities, shopping, faith services and other personal needs.

Since the organization was launched in November 2004, Neighbor Ride’s volunteers have provided over 170,000 trips for local seniors.

Chartered in 1986, the Rotary members of Columbia Patuxent are a diverse group of business and professional leaders from the Columbia and Howard County area who take an active role in their communities while enriching their personal and professional lives. The Club meets Friday mornings at 7:30 a.m. at the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center. Visit www.columbiarotary.com to learn more.

Biz Kidz Academy sponsored its annual Market Day/Shark Tank Competition/Award Ceremony May 18. Congratulations to Makayla Martin, Teenpreneur, CEO & founder of Golden Hands Jewelry (All Handmade) for winning the $500 Frances Barber Educational Scholarship. Makayla won the scholarship for composing an outstanding 500-word essay that detailed how Golden Hands Jewelry helps the community. Biz Kidz Academy is a non-profit 501(c) organization, founded by Dr. Marlene Jackson and her daughter, Ashley Jackson, to inspire students (ages 5-18), to become successful kidpreneurs.
Fort Meade's Fourth of July celebration attracts 5,000 people annually.

**Keeping us safe and stirring the economy**

Fort George G. Meade, named for the U.S. Army general and civil engineer who served as commander of the Union Army of the Potomac during the Civil War, is the largest employer in the state of Maryland. It's also the U.S. Army's second largest installation in terms of employees.

Fort Meade's first priority is readiness – ensuring that service members have the tools, infrastructure, support while on duty, at home and in the community, to do the critical work they perform to carry out their national security mission. Take a look at how the Fort Meade's numbers impact us locally...

**55,000**

The number of employees is larger than the population of Annapolis (39,000). Forty percent of Fort Meade’s employees reside in Anne Arundel County, with an additional 24 percent in Howard County. It’s also important to remember that Fort Meade is a “forward-operating base,” or a frontline fort, said Tim O’Ferrall, general manager of the Fort Meade Alliance, an independent community organization that supports the work and people of Fort Meade and helps Fort Meade drive economic growth in Maryland.

“People deploy to Fort Meade just like they deploy to any forward-operating base. Service members are there, sometimes away from their families, and they are immersed in real-world challenges,” said O’Ferrall.

**$9 billion**

Total wages paid at Fort Meade, which is home not only to Army personnel but also to Navy, Air Force, Marine and Coast Guard personnel. Income earned by Fort Meade employees amounts to 8.5 percent of Maryland’s annual revenues.

**$98,444**

Average salary of personnel at Fort Meade.

**11.1 million square feet**

Amount of office space in Fort Meade’s 1,600 buildings. More than half of all Department of Defense-related salaries are earned in the five square miles that comprise Fort Meade.

**6,000+**

Staff and students from Anne Arundel County Schools on Fort Meade. Fort Meade also operates three child development centers, with a fourth center under renovation, and planning for a fifth center underway.

Fort Meade operates three child development centers.