

New leaders inducted at SNA Annual Meeting

More than 80 people attended the SNA annual meeting May 1 to elect a new board of directors and hear an analysis of the changes in America's neighborhoods.

Organization members and invited guests gathered in the Highlands on the East Side, for wine, beer, soda and pizza as well as an opportunity to meet new friends and greet old ones.

The meeting began with a review by President Dean Weinberg of the Summit Neighborhood Association's achievements over the past year culminating in the opening of the community gardens in the Summit Avenue park. He also mentioned the neighborhood's major event – the recall of Ward 3 City Councilman Kevin Jackson – pointing out that the SNA had not taken sides as it is nonpartisan.

SNA Secretary Thomas Schmeling, as head of the board's nominating committee, presented a change in the organization's bylaws to allow votes by the board of directors via electronic media. There was some discussion from the floor about the possibility of that violating state law, but with an amendment that the change would be "consistent with state law," it was passed.

Schmeling then gave the floor to Mayor Jorge Elorza, who outlined his priorities for the city's budget. The mayor cited his attempts to balance the budget to include a "rainy day" fund. He emphasized investments in the infrastructure of the public schools with pre-school and summer learning programs with technology in classrooms including computers and three-dimensional printers. Elorza also pointed to a drop in gang-related crime, support for recreation and summer jobs for youth and a push for six weeks of paid parental leave. He noted the lack of transportation for the elderly and said the city has its own buses to address that problem. The mayor also cited a work and rehabilitation program for the homeless.

Schmeling presented the slate of board

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Summit News

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Ward 3 City Council Election set for Wednesday, August 16



Nirva LaFortune



David Lallier



Christopher Reynolds

After the Democratic primary July 12, the race to fill the City Council seat for Ward Three is now down to just three candidates.

Nirva LaFortune, who won the primary with 1,160 votes, or 67.3 per cent, will face Republican David Lallier and independent Christopher Reynolds in a general election called for Aug. 16 to replace Kevin Jackson, who was recalled over his indictment in campaign finance law violations.

Little is known about Reynolds' stands on the issues facing Ward Three since he did not respond to invitations to attend two out of three public forums called to explore them. LaFortune and Lallier participated in all three.

LaFortune, a programming coordinator at Brown University, has said that she sees a divide within neighborhoods of the ward as a top challenge. "That's why I'm running – to bridge that division," she said at a forum sponsored by SNA.

Lallier, who grew up in the special education system in Providence and works as a driver in the warehouse industry,

said the biggest single issue facing the ward is "education itself, because students are falling behind" and that leads to crime in adult life.

Reynolds, at the one forum he did attend, said corruption in City Hall was a major issue. He also cited statistics about the demographics of blacks and whites in the ward, until LaFortune suggested that's "very offensive and it's important for us to recognize that it's all people who are impacted by several of these issues."

LaFortune's web site says she and her parents emigrated from Haiti to Rhode Island when she was three, attended St. Mary's School, then Pleasant View Elementary and Mount Pleasant High School. She earned a B.A. in communications from Temple University while working full time and became a U.S. citizen.

She moved to Mount Hope with her children, Messiah, now at Classical, and Nyree-Simone, who attends the Hope Academy at Meeting Street School. She has been active in the Nathan Bishop and Martin Luther King PTOs, the High

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Lippitt Park fountain is not safe for people

City Parks Department Superintendent Wendy Nilsson says she strongly reminded residents that the fountain in Lippitt Park is strictly off limits because of the danger of playing in it.

“Parents were putting their kids into the water” and ignoring warnings by workers that they had just “shocked” the fountain with a toxic chemical – chlorine – to clean it, she said. In addition, the structure is made of granite, which is extremely slippery when wet, she added.



Parks Superintendent Wendy Nilsson cites the danger of the Henry Bowen Anthony fountain while crew chief Joseph Wojtanowski, right, SNA President Ethan Gyles, left, and residents listen.

replacing it with a splash feature.

The parks superintendent and her crew chief, Joseph Wojtanowski, explained that fountains in parks citywide accumulated all kinds of natural and human waste – including soiled diapers – and had to be cleaned every few days. He said the Lippitt fountain was monitored by park personnel but asked for park users to alert his department if they noticed anything wrong. The chemicals used dissipate in a few hours, Wojtanowski said, but the fountain is not designed for people and is still not safe to climb into.

Nilsson said the cost of installing a splash feature in the park would be about \$250,000 and there is no budget for that, especially since there are water facilities in the Billy Taylor Park just a few minutes away. She said residents near other parks had been innovative in using inflatable kiddie pools to “get kids wet” during hot days.

She said her department is developing an online tool that describes the features of all the city’s parks and is working on redesigning them using more natural materials while maintaining safety. The resource is available at <https://pvdgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html...> and a parks locator is available at <http://demo4.geotg.net/providenceparks/ParkLocator/>.

One resident at the meeting asked Nilsson for a redesign of the signs explaining why the Lippitt fountain is dangerous and she responded that she would work on that and asked for citizen input. She stressed that the Parks Department welcomes interaction with the neighborhood because “we want to do parks that are meaningful to the community, not for the ease of the Parks Department.”

What’s on your mind, neighbors?

SNA invites residents to take our 5-minute, anonymous neighborhood survey.

Answer just a few questions about your local shopping and dining, use of local parks, transportation choices and involvement with SNA.

The results will help us better understand and serve the Summit community. The survey can be found online at:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SummitPVD>

Annual Meeting (continued from p. 1)

candidates, including one who had stepped forward at the meeting, and they were elected by acclamation. President Weinberg had decided to not seek reelection and was presented with a family membership in the Boston Science Museum as a token of gratitude for his service.

The new board consists of: Ethan Gyles, president; Kerry Kohring, vice president; Eric Christiansen, secretary (conditional on board approval since he was absent); Britt Page, treasurer; and returning members Kim Clark, Lee Clasper-Torch, Anneliese Greener, Schmeling, Emily Spitzman, Sharon Lee Waldman and Weinberg. New members are Anne Holland, Sandra Lee, John Pettinelli and Laura Ramsey.

The final item on the agenda was the discussion of the nation’s changing neighborhoods led by Marc J. Dunkelman, author of *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community* and a Taubman Fellow at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

He said his research shows that ordinary citizens have lost faith in traditional institutions. He described a social model of three concentric rings of interaction, with an inner circle of in-

tensity, an outer ring of single common interests and a middle ring composed of casual meetings of neighbors sharing common problems and solutions.

His premise is that this middle ring is deteriorating because of narcissistic emphasis on inner-ring relations and the capitalization of outer-ring opportunities. He said that most American problem-solving institutions are based on middle-ring interactions, and as these diminish, so does the faith in traditional methods. He said U.S. social architecture “was based on common solutions by people who knew each other,” but that has changed and middle-ring “relationships are collapsing,” perhaps as a result of technology.

He said that “if foundations of social interactions change, the institutions based on them crumble and we have to address whether to shore them up or construct new institutions.” He pointed out that new ideas come from “braiding together” different approaches, but that millennials are choosing not to interact with diverse opportunities.

His solution, he told the audience, is to promote interaction by inviting strangers to share viewpoints. This prompted lively discussion until the time allotted for the annual meeting ran out.



At the SNA annual meeting, author Marc Dunkelman discusses the decline of community interaction.

Safety and fun improvements at Summit Ave. park

Now that the community gardens are in place at the Summit Avenue park, the city is prepared to move ahead with Phase Two of the renovations.

That’s the message that Parks Department Superintendent Wendy Nilsson and landscape architect Megan Gardner brought to a public meeting sponsored by SNA June 12 in the park.

Speaking with about 20 people gathered in the playground area, the two described the specific changes included in the city’s plan, focusing on safety and accessibility for all ages, as well as the procedures needed to implement them.

The renovations include:

- Replacement of all guardrails of play structure with pipe barriers, replacement of clatter bridge with new clatter bridge and pipe barriers, and repainting of all vertical posts and landings with metal paint;
- Installation of 16-inch high hardwood log retaining and seating wall plus lining of play booster side with filter fabric offset 8 feet from end of slide;



- Installation of “smart play nook” for children up to two years old, including a little house made of safe, bright-colored plastic with a ramp into it, open door/archways and surrounded by artificial grass;
- Installation of 6-foot long wood play bridge with dry-stream boulders;
- Installation of a little lending library;
- Planting of a flowering tree;
- Building bench surrounding tree;
- Repainting posts and beam for existing two-bay swing set;
- Removal and repurposing of sand for new sand play area;
- Removal of wood chips and replacement with fiber mulch to 12-inch depth;
- Addition of play area signage.

There was much discussion among the meeting participants about the artificial turf with the consensus that the parks people would determine the best option with the possibility of later replacement if it proves ineffective.

Nilsson and Gardner reiterated that the plastic structures and toys that accumulate in the park no longer meet safety requirements and will be removed, but that signs will be posted to explain why.

The cost of the new renovations was put at about \$30,000 and will be met by about \$12,000 in grant money from Miriam Hospital that SNA is holding plus city funds augmented by local fund raising. Some of the improvements in the original renovation plan proved to be too expensive, Nilsson said.

A new sign will be installed with the name of the park and Parks Department contact information, plus a new bulletin board may be constructed.

The project is designed to be completed by the end of summer, but the park will not be closed during the work, with just certain areas temporarily cordoned off.

Nilsson encouraged residents to contact the Parks Department with suggestions or questions.

A sunbeam on a winter's day

By Mike Fink, Summit resident

One winter day, I got the idea to light a log along with a few broken branches as kindling to while away the solstice doldrums. But how would I find a book or box of matches within our few blocks off Summit Avenue, between Hope and North Main?

I tried several shops and stores. "I haven't seen those matchbooks in years!" said the clerk/cashier with an entire wall of cigarettes behind him.

I roamed the roads and the hills and headed for a supermarket, where they sold the boxes but not the little booklets. I bought a package of the wooden ones, but left disappointed but still determined to find the lost treasure.

There's a former gas station transformed into a mini variety-emporium with a large parking lot. I pulled in, waited in line politely and then, shyly, asked the lady in charge if she happened to have what I sought.

And voila! From behind the counter, quickly and with a kindly gesture, she handed me a clean white folder with its wee collection of little red caps neatly inside. Whee! I thanked her profusely and pocketed my pack.

Then it was time for me to bring the

fireplace hearth to life with these simple tiny tools and to think about them while staring into the flames.

No, there were no commercial or poetical messages written or illustrated on the cover. In Paris, they say "Repas sans vin, journee sans soleil" which means, "A meal without wine is a day without sunshine." They push the Beaujolais at you with every Gitane cigarette, or used to in my Sorbonne student days.

The single matchbook I now held proudly in my hands, while making believe our Rochambeau Avenue and Rochambeau plaque at Memorial Road along the allee of sycamores that yokes Paris and Providence together and evokes my era, was almost too bare and spare. The few words warn, "Strike gently" and "Keep away from children." A far cry from the devil-may-care mood of yore.

Still, for me, it was a victory and a triumph. I would add the little blank booklet to the collection beside the fireplace, souvenirs of intimate suppers or cocktails, but all used up by now.

I had found what I had sought, and it was a small but poetic celebration, as is said in Scripture about life itself - "a sunbeam on a winter's day."

Council Candidates

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School Design Team for the Providence Public Schools, and on a committee advising the RI Department of Education on implementing federal law.

She is on an East Side YMCA advisory committee and co-chairs the East Side Community Alliance youth and education committee, which is bringing neighborhoods together.

Lallier's web site cites his special-education background and says he knows how hard it is to learn and understand, even as an adult. He currently lives paycheck to paycheck, and knows how hard it is to live on less than \$300 a week. He is on Medicaid because of his income and doesn't have a college education.

He was a member of Boy Scout Troop 28 Pawtucket and was involved in cleaning up neighborhoods as well as helping members of the community.

He attended Central High and after school would clean the grounds in places that were neglected. He was a member of the student body government and of the Gay and Straight Alliance.

For the major-party candidates' full answers to questions about issues, go to:

<http://www.sna.providence.ri.us/nirva-rebecca-lafortune-d-un-debate-qa/>

<http://www.sna.providence.ri.us/david-lallier-jr-r-un-debate-qa/>

Alzheimer's and African-American families

Butler Hospital, as part of its Memory and Aging Program, is cosponsoring an award-winning play that addresses how Alzheimer's disease affects a multigenerational African American family. Titled "Forget Me Not" the free presentation will offer new insights into Alzheimer's. It will be held at 1 p.m. Aug 26 at McVinney Auditorium, 43 Dave Gavitt Way, Providence. For more information call 202-349-3803 or AfricanAmericansAgainstAlzheimers.org and advance registration is required.

Yes, I'm joining Summit Neighborhood Association today!

Enclosed is my member contribution of: \$15 \$25 \$35 \$50 Other: \$_____

Name: (please print clearly) _____

Street Address: (required) _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Phone: (_____) _____ - _____ (day) (_____) _____ - _____ (evening)

Email: _____ Yes, I can distribute newsletters

Family Membership - list information about other adults in your household who wish to be members:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Email: _____

Please enclose a check made out to: **Summit Neighborhood Association**

MAIL TO: **SNA, P.O. Box 41092, Providence, RI 02940**

TODAY'S DATE ___ / ___ / ____