



Greenbelt Homes, Inc.  
**COMMUNICATOR**  
 Bi-Monthly Publication of the Communications Committee

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**WEEKEND EVENT PLANNED FOR GREENER GREENBELT INITIATIVE**

**BY JIM COHEN**

In the last few issues of the *Communicator*, information was provided about the Greener Greenbelt Initiative (GGI). For over a year, GHI's Green Ribbon Task Force, in partnership with the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), has worked hard to prepare for an event that will be the centerpiece of the GGI and will provide a framework to help our community prepare for the near future and thirty years beyond.



That event is called a "charrette," an architectural term which describes an intensive planning session where citizens, designers, and others collaborate on a vision for the future. A charrette provides a forum for ideas and a chance to see those ideas turned into designs and strategies. Participants can then give immediate feedback to the designers to make sure the plans accurately reflect their ideas. In this way, a charrette allows everyone who participates to be a mutual author of the resulting plans.

This two-and-a-half day weekend event will take place at Greenbelt Elementary School beginning on **Friday evening, September 28 and continuing to Sunday afternoon, September 30**. Many volunteer AIA professionals will be on hand to facilitate the event.



In particular, on Saturday, **September 29**, four concurrent discussion groups will focus on the following: 1) houses and adjacent land, including such topics such as maintenance and upgrades to improve energy efficiency, housing unit upgrades, design models and guidelines for home additions; 2) Roosevelt Center improvement that addresses economic, public safety, parking and other concerns; 3) historic Greenbelt, including the implications of historic district designation, improvements to Greenbelt Lake; traffic, pathways, transportation and utility infrastructure improvements; and 4) Greater Greenbelt and the region, including traffic and transportation improvements; alignment city and county land-use regulations and infrastructure programs; and factors that can positively impact economic, social and environmental well-being in the city of Greenbelt.

We're looking for community and Greenbelt related

PICTURES

**We know we've got talented members out there and we would like some help to show off our beautiful community!!!**

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We are looking for pictures (showing Greenbelt, GHI, and the surrounding areas) to be used throughout Greenbelt and in GHI publications. Credit will be given. For details, contact the GHI main office.

*Continued on page 3*

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY SYLVIA LEWIS

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**“In cooperatives, men and women have in their hands the tools to fashion their own destiny.”** Murray D. Lincoln (1892-1966)

Founder of many co-ops, including Nationwide Insurance

GHI members and our Board are putting those words into practice, using many tools as we collectively build upon the strong cooperative foundation that we have been given. On Saturday, July 28, eight of the nine board members, all three Audit Committee members, and key members of the GHI staff, spent the day in a Strategic Planning session. Aply led by GHI member Bill Duncan, senior program director with The Enterprise Foundation, we developed a list of priorities to be addressed within the next three years. These priorities included member services, policies, replacement reserves, finances, and organizational issues. More information on each of these areas will be covered in future issues of the *Communicator*.

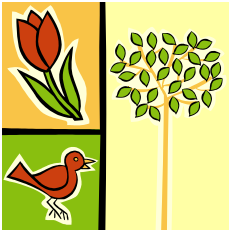
The Greener Greenbelt Initiative's Charrette, September 28-30, will provide additional information and recommendations that can be incorporated into our Strategic Planning, especially in the area of energy modeling, alternative heating sources and other quality-of-life issues. So far over 200 Greener Greenbelt surveys have been returned. The priorities listed by members will determine the subjects of the Charrette focus sessions. In addition to issues related to our GHI homes, the respondents are also very concerned about maintaining and strengthening the vitality of the Roosevelt Center, the health of Greenbelt Lake, and the walkability of the City. A detailed schedule for the Charrette will be printed in the September 20 *News Review*. If you haven't yet returned your questionnaire your input is still needed by the Green Ribbon Task Force to help guide the prioritizing and implementation of the Charrette findings.

A new tool in GHI's toolbox is the Legislative Initiatives Group. This group will not only address legislation that has specific impact on GHI members, but it also will build relationships with our elected officials at all levels to increase their knowledge and understanding of our co-op. If you have an interest in assisting in this effort please, contact me.

The Board is in the process of developing the 2008 GHI budget. At a member-input session on August 23 members expressed their concerns and priority needs and wishes. There are growing demands upon the cooperative. Two of the expenses that will have the greatest impact upon next year's budget are the need to add more items to the Replacement Reserve Fund and the 10% tax increase we will have to pay each year because the assessed value of GHI property tripled. (see the article on page 3). If you missed the member-input session, come to the Board meetings in the next two months when the Budget will be discussed. We need your thoughts as we discuss ways we can meet our current needs, build for the future and ensure we continue to be a vibrant, healthy, fiscally-sound community.



*Weekend Event continued from page 1*



A detailed schedule of the charrette will be available soon on the GGI website (see web address at end of article). People can “drop in” for different parts of the event and stay for as long as they want.

Of course, we encourage people to stay for as much of the charrette as possible. Supervised, creative activities for children, directly related to the charrette, will be provided.

Although you may think that this event is only for activist types or people who know something about architecture, home design, and urban planning, nothing could be further from the truth! If you are concerned about such issues as lowering our electricity bills, ways to increase living space and convenience in GHI homes, strengthening the economic and social viability of Roosevelt Center, improving pathways and woodlands throughout our community, and keeping Greenbelt a national model of a great place to live, than you are more than qualified to participate in the charrette.

In short, the charrette is not about fancy ideas, but about the ordinary—yet very important— aspects of living, shopping, eating and playing in Old Greenbelt.

For more information, visit [www.greenergreenbelt.org](http://www.greenergreenbelt.org). The charrette weekend will be Friday-Sunday, September 28-30, 2007 at Greenbelt Elementary School, 66 Ridge Road, Greenbelt.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Many GHI members have problems with ants. This pest is common in wooded areas like ours. There are a number of things you can do to keep them away. Outside, rake leaves away from your foundation and keep shrubs and trees pruned back from your unit. Inside, clean up spills quickly and keep sweets like candy and sugar bowls in the refrigerator when not in use. For bad cases, you can call on the GHI exterminator. Call (301) 474-6011 to schedule an appointment.



## GHI TAXES INCREASE

BY SYLVIA LEWIS

A giant increase in the 2007 Maryland state appraised value of GHI property guarantees a 10% a year increase in property tax assessments each year for the foreseeable future. GHI is appealing the appraisal, but the increase is so large it is unlikely we will be able to bring the increase below the 10% cap on assessments.

Here's why we are facing the current situation. The GHI tax situation is complicated. We receive 76 separate tax bills that cover our 1,600 residences, common areas and woodlands. Property appraisals are conducted every three years and the increases are phased in over the next three year period. In 2001, the State appraised our shared property at a little over \$90 million. We appealed the ruling and were able to reduce the assessment to \$80.75 million. In 2006, our assessment was approximately \$93 million. This year, the State appraised the value of GHI property at \$250 million, an increase of over 165%!

Our tax assessment is based upon the appraised value of the property. But there is supposed to be a 10% cap on any increase from one year to the next. Last year we paid \$1,712,565 in taxes, but our bill for this year is \$1,962,489 – almost a 15% increase.

So GHI Board and staff are currently appealing the State's property appraisal figure and also trying to find out why with the 10% cap rule, our tax bill shows an increase of almost 15%. The Finance Office, Finance Committee and Board will keep members informed of any progress we make in our appeals. But members need to be aware that in December, they will see a big increase in the tax portion of their 2008 member fees.

**Don't be caught in a dry spell.  
Order your Rain Barrel today!**



For more information on rain barrels, approximate costs, and other details, visit  
[www.ghi.coop/rainbarrels/index.htm](http://www.ghi.coop/rainbarrels/index.htm)

or contact Matt Berres, Landscape Specialist  
at [mberres@ghi.coop](mailto:mberres@ghi.coop), (301) 474-4161 x132

## MEET GHI'S NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Four new members of the GHI Board of Directors hit the ground running after their election in May, studying the issues, contributing to active board discussions and participating in an all-day strategy session on July 28. The four new directors are Suzette Agans, Edward R. Hickey, Errol Mazursky, and Luisa F. Robles — although Agans isn't entirely new, having served on the board for part of the past year as an appointed member to fill a board vacancy.

The new arrivals are interesting people who reflect GHI's growing commitment to sustainability. One good way to meet them is to show up at a GHI board meeting and listen to the discussion on issues that affect all of us in the cooperative. Below are excerpts from their e-mailed responses to a few questions: What are you passionate or excited about related to the cooperative as a whole? What's your background? What are your hopes for the year ahead?

### Suzette Agans



Suzette's first exposure to Greenbelt was sudden—ejected from Russia with other Peace Corps Volunteers in 2003, she stayed with a friend in GHI to look for a job and try to put her life back together.

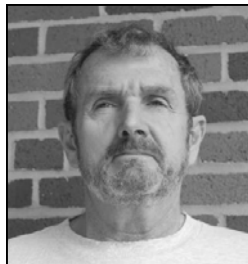
Little more than a year later she bought her first home in GHI. "It's funny. I had this dream home in mind, with low maintenance, where I could garden and be part of a community. Life worked its miracle and I found GHI."

Originally from upstate New York, Suzette first moved to the DC area 11 years ago as part of a career change and earned a BA in International Affairs and an MA in International Development. Currently she works with distressed rural communities at USDA—Rural Development, which has made her realize "just how special Greenbelt is because so many people are willing to step forward."

An avid gardener—her goal is to make her yard suitable for a push mower—Suzette is active with the Greener Greenbelt Initiative, which offers GHI members an opportunity "to have an impact beyond our unit and our yard, and also for generations to come."

Some tough decisions face GHI in the near future, she says, including "how to pay for a 150% increase in GHI property assessment, how to replace/upgrade the heat in our units, how to fund the replacement of items such as the pipes, electric wiring and a few other major items not part of the replacement reserve program. I hope to help find some solutions that work best for the membership today and for tomorrow."

### Edward R. Hickey



A nine-year resident of GHI, Ed is the current chair of the Architecture Review Committee and co-chair of the city's Public Safety Committee. Ed is a military veteran who applied his BA in accounting to a law enforcement career, beginning as a criminal investigator for the IRS in Miami. He moved to Maryland, joined the Montgomery

County Police Department, and rose through the ranks to become the Deputy Commander of the Germantown Police District.

Retired from police work, he now teaches Criminal Justice as an associate professor at Prince George's Community College, volunteers in Greenbelt, and enjoys spending time with his wife, Ronnie Scotkin, also an active volunteer.

Asked why he chose GHI, Ed said, "I chose to move here after retiring from the police department because people were polite and the community compared favorably with the small town where I was born in New Jersey." Also, crime was—and still is—almost non-existent here."

His goal is to "see GHI remain a healthy, vibrant community of neighbors." Adds Hickey, "GHI is approaching a critical period in its life, and I want to be involved in setting the course for the future.

"My personal passion is to bring young families who wish to raise their children in GHI. If this means expanding the current homes, so be it!"

## MEET GHI'S NEW BOARD MEMBERS .....CONTINUED

### Errol Mazursky



A Chicago-area native, Errol earned degrees in sociology, psychology, and a master's degree in public health from Tulane University in New Orleans. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in The Gambia, West Africa, and has worked as a Peace Corps recruiter and Public Health Fellow at the

Environmental Protection Agency. Currently he is the National Fellowship Manager at the Environmental Leadership program ([www.elpnet.org](http://www.elpnet.org)), a national nonprofit that inspires young leaders to work for a just and sustainable future.

Errol and his wife Sara moved into GHI in July 2006 because "we identified with the overarching values of the community: progressive thinking, character of the neighborhood, size of our home, walkability, affordability and the open green-space."

He believes it is important for a board of directors to "represent and mirror the diversity of the community it serves."

Challenges he sees are "increased economic pressure from new developments in the area, maintenance and repair of homes and infrastructure, and the continual challenge of increasing member participation. Although some may view these issues negatively, I choose to see them as opportunities for GHI and its membership.

"In the year ahead I would like to see an outpouring of participation in the upcoming charette (community visioning exercise)" he says. "This interactive event can be the cornerstone from which we as a community can make the important decisions that affect where and how we live - now and into the future."

"Of course, in true Greenbelt spirit," he adds, "I must admit that I'm also looking forward to the 2008 national elections and hope that we, as a community, will have a record turnout at the polls!"

### Luisa F. Robles



Luisa F. Robles, a native of Mexico, earned her PhD in Sustainable Development and Ecological Economics at the University of Maryland. She moved to the United States 13 years ago for graduate school and in the process, "fell in love with Greenbelt" – in particular, with the woods and the "plaza" feel of

Roosevelt Center, reminiscent of plazas in Mexico.

She moved into GHI six years ago, and served on the city's Forest Preserve Task Force before becoming a candidate for the GHI board. She works for a nonprofit called Ancestral Knowledge ([www.ancestralknowledge.org](http://www.ancestralknowledge.org)), a group focused on environmental education through the experiential learning of primitive skills such as fire by friction, tracking, and wild edibles.

This year Luisa wants to "keep learning how our coop works and how to be a good board member." She adds, "I want to contribute to the sustainability of GHI in all its facets: environmental, social, and economic, while at the same time being financially viable.

"I want to spread the word about all the good things that the Woodlands Committee and the Sustainable Design and Practice (SDP) Committee are doing with rain barrels, rain gardens, native plants., and other projects. I am interested in getting energy-efficient heating systems into our homes as well as good insulation."

For Luisa, Greenbelt is a "beacon of hope" and a model of a sustainable, close-knit community.



## WHO'S WHO AT GHI- AWARDS DAY ROCKS!

BY BRENDA C. LEWIS, SPHR

GHI's 12<sup>th</sup> annual employee Awards Day Program was held on June 27. This year, the theme of the program was "Rock & Roll." With the Board Room decorated 1950's style, Staff Engineer, Tom "The King" Sporney, served as MC. Staff dressed in 50's era poodle skirts, bowling shirts and bobby socks -- it was fun. Don't be surprised when you see dark Blues Brothers eye-glasses - they were prizes for correct responses to a trivia contest.

Please congratulate this year's winners when you see them throughout the community.



2007 Anniversary Award Recipients: Peter Joseph - 5 years, Paul Hill - 20 years, Roger Bonifacio - 20 years, Brenda Lewis - 10 years.

**2006 Manager's Award** Lawrence Brady, Grounds Team

### Recipients of Awards for Positive Impact:

**On Members/Board** Matt Berres, Landscape Specialist  
**On The Organization** Peter Joseph, Technical Services  
**On a Department** George Rose, Grounds Team and CJ Evans, Manager's Office

**Outstanding Attitude Awards** Desmond McAlmont, Mechanical Team  
 Rean Seecharan, Technical Services

**Best Idea/Suggestion Awards** Joan Krob, Member Services Director  
 David Jarmon, Mechanical Team  
 Bryan Crick, Team Manager  
 Steve Ruckman, Finance Director

Co-workers nominate two employees to receive peer awards. This year Robert Anderson, Structures Team, and Melvin Williams, Finance Department received them. The 2006 Outstanding Team award winner was the Grounds Team (Matt Berres, Lawrence Brady, Winston Taylor, Glenroy George Rose and Shawn Powell).

## AND THE E-Z WINNERS ARE.....

Every quarter, GHI holds a drawing of all members that have been on E-Z Pay for at least three months without an NSF transaction. The lucky member whose name is drawn wins \$200 of the next month's co-op fee. To date, eight drawings have been held. And the winners are:

- 1) Benjamin Skolnik, 8-A Ridge Road, October 2005
- 2) John Sauer, 6-D Crescent Road, January 2006
- 3) Stephanie Warner, 14-N Laurel Hill Road, April 2006
- 4) Anita Collins, 5-C Ridge Road, July 2006
- 5) Joseph Kamara, 13-G Hillside Road, October 2006
- 6) Solange Hess, 2-A Ridge Road, January 2007
- 7) Kenneth Jarva, 58-G Ridge Road, April 2007
- 8) Dale Scott, 8-B Ridge Road, July 2007

Sign-up for E-Z Pay and you could be the next winner! Enrollment forms are available at the GHI office or on-line at: <http://ghi.coop/Achpayment.htm>

## BOARD MEETING AND HIGHLIGHTS

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The GHI Board Meetings are held in the Board Room of the GHI Administration Building. Meetings are usually held twice a month on Thursday evenings, except during the summer when meetings are held once a month. Please check the calendar on the GHI website for details. With the exception of executive sessions, all meetings are open to the membership.

During June and July 2007, the Board of Directors took the following actions:

- Changed the policy affecting applicants who wish to purchase membership in GHI as follows, approving new financial criteria: in order to make it easier for young families and others with moderate income to become GHI members (see June/July issue of *Communicator*.)
- Made other revisions to GHI membership selection criteria. (The full text of the revised criteria is posted on the GHI website [[www.ghi.coop](http://www.ghi.coop)].)
- Approved the following exception requests:
  - to install skylights in a proposed gardenside addition (at 50C Ridge Road).
  - to install three trellises mid-yard on the garden side (at 73B Ridge Road adjacent to the chain link fence separating 73-B and 73A)
- Agreed to pay the cost to correct an improperly installed fence at 43F Ridge Road as the result of an oversight by staff during a work progress inspection during installation.
- Approved yard plats for 15 Court Laurel Hill Road (except for three yards that will receive further review).
- Approved 26 new memberships and authorized changes to 2 mutual ownership contracts.

Authorized the Manager to enter into the following contracts:

- for drainage system improvement at three locations for an amount not to exceed \$42,216 and repairs of underground sanitary sewage and storm drain utilities at ten sites for an amount not to exceed \$113,952 (with J&M Utilities, Inc).
- for relining defective storm drain piping at 9F Ridge and 33N-Q Ridge Road for a cost not to exceed \$18,102 (with Chesapeake Pipe Restoration).
- for masonry repairs at three locations at a cost not to exceed \$58,630 (with American Window & Building Cleaning, Inc..).
- for the repairs of parking lots for an amount not to exceed \$83,279 (with CPE, Inc.).
- for replacement of eight larger townhouse furnaces for an amount not to exceed \$18,085 (with DKS Climate Control Inc.)
- Accepted the Contract Bid in an amount not to exceed \$14,541 to rehab the unit at 6M Plateau Place that fell back to GHI as the result of eviction (with Warring Builders).

## It's a Date 2007

September 4	Pre-Purchase Orientation	7:15-8:15 PM
Sept. 6, 20	Board of Directors Meeting	7:30 PM
September 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yard Line Committee</li> <li>• Member &amp; Community Relations Cmte.</li> <li>• Sustainable Design and Practices Cmte.</li> </ul>	8:30 AM 7:00-8:00 PM 7:00-9:00 PM
September 12	Architecture Review Committee	7:30 PM
September 19	Woodlands Committee Meeting	7:00-8:00 PM
September 25	Yard Line Committee	8:30 AM
September 28	Greater Greenbelt Planning Charrette	Begins 6:00 PM
October 4, 18	Board of Directors Meeting	7:30 PM
October 9	Sustainable Design & Practices Cmte.	7:00-9:00 PM
October 10	Architecture Review Committee	7:30 PM
October 14	Community Wide Open House	1:00-4:00 PM
October 14	Annual GHI Picnic	4:00-6:00 PM
October 17	Woodlands Committee Meeting	7:00-8:00 PM
October 31	Happy Halloween!	

## New Legislative Committee

Board President Sylvia Lewis has started a Legislative Initiative to advocate for local, state, and federal policies and programs to benefit our cooperative community. Drawing on GHI's history as a hotbed of activism, the group is working to identify current policies that are discriminatory towards cooperatives, programs that could benefit GHI members, and other issues that affect our quality of life. The Legislative Initiative Group met and chose several issues to research: reverse mortgages, MD Accessible Homes for Seniors Program, The Intercounty Connector (ICC), the Metro Purple Line, and sustainability incentives.

The group encourages all members to think about and submit other public policy issues of importance to our community. We also seek additional policy wonks, organizers, and lobbyists to join us. No experience is required, and you choose your level of involvement. Please contact Sylvia Lewis at [revs.lew@verizon.net](mailto:revs.lew@verizon.net) or (301) 474-3635 to suggest an issue or to volunteer.

### Greenbelt Disability Connection

A "get acquainted" meeting of the Greenbelt Disability Connection took place last month. The group is an informal, peer support organization for disabled Greenbelt citizens, their allies, friends and family. The organization hopes to advocate accessibility, share information and resources, pursue social and recreational opportunities, offer peer support, and act as a liaison with organizations with similar purposes.

The first meeting was a time to share experiences, frustrations, and laughter and to talk about the type of future activities members would like to participate in. We plan to have a table at the Information Day for the Greenbelt Labor Day festivities and will be glad to talk about our organization. Our next meeting will be on Sunday, September 9 at the New Deal Café from 2 until about 5.

Other projects include setting up a phone tree to contact interested people without email access or who can't see well enough to get information through flyers or the *News Review*. We also talked about how to include members of the hard-of-hearing and Deaf community. If you have some ideas or questions, please feel free to come and share them at the next meeting! For more information, interested people can contact Terry Vanzetti at 301-345-9284 or Shirley Middleton at 301-446-1773.

### Too Much Plastic?

Recently, a member inquired if it is possible to do without the plastic bags that cover the Communicator for future distribution as they add to non biodegradable waste and suggested that future issues be put directly into mailboxes. The response from the Director of Member Services is furnished below since others may be wondering the same thing.

*"Indeed, your suggested solution is a good one and I wish it was that simple a solution. It would be nice if we were at liberty to put the newsletter and the other stuff that we hand deliver to members in mailboxes. However, doing so would be breaking the law and subjecting the cooperative to heavy fines. Mail boxes are strictly regulated by the Federal Government. It is a federal offense to put anything in mailboxes other than legitimate mail.*

*"As a bit of history, years ago newsletters, flyers, bulletins and other information were merely placed on door stoops. People began to complain about not getting the information (as it had either blown away or gotten soaked by rain/snow) while others complained about all the papers being blown into neighboring yards and parking courts. It was during this time that it was decided to use door hanger bags to contain the material so as not to have it clutter the community. We can suggest that members hang on to the bags and after getting a goodly amount (or not) take them to the co-op grocery store and put them in the recycling container provided for recycling of plastic bags."*