Finding common ground at Knock on Wood

The People and Places of Northwest Washington

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Tudor Place manor turns 200

Historic Georgetown home of six generations of Martha Washington descendants celebrates its bicentennial with garden party, family-friendly July 2 birthday festivities

By LEE CANNON Current Correspondent

The historic home and gardens of Tudor Place at 1644 31st St. NW in Georgetown were even more decked out in flowers than usual — impressive, considering many of the flowers in the 5 1/2 acres of gardens and grounds were in full bloom. The warm evening called for extra arrangements because it was Tudor Place’s Bicentennial Spring Garden Party.

“This is the most wonderful party of the spring season,” said Chris Minter-Dowd, a Tudor Place board of trustees member, said she has been attending the spring party for many years. “It’s important to keep the house and gardens in good condition,” she said.

The annual garden party is one integral part of raising funds to support preservation of the historic estate, although the fun of the May 25 event was an equal draw. Nancy Everett, a guest of McGee’s, said she enjoyed “watching adults on their playful side, with hats, costumes and party dresses.”

The guests indeed came prepared with their garden-party best for the celebration and mild weather. The ladies wore summery sun dresses, decorated hats and elaborate feather fascinators. Gentlemen brought out their best khaki suits, colorful ties and dashing straw skimmer hats. Guests entered through the main gate and filtered past the rose gardens and a vintage 1919 Pierce-Arrow Roadster on their way to the party tent, tables and conversation circles — some with upholstered sofas — on the front lawn of the estate.

Tudor Place is the historic home of the Peter family, famous as the descendants of America’s first first lady. President George Washington and Martha Washington had no children together, but Martha entered the marriage with two living children from her previous marriage to Daniel Parke Custis, a wealthy landowner and tobacco merchant. Her son John married and had four children; and his daughter Martha Parke “Patsy” Custis married Thomas Peter, another landowner and tobacco merchant. In 1805, Martha and Thomas Peter purchased 8.5 acres of land and existing buildings and began constructing Tudor Place.

The house was built in an unusual manner, as well as with unique architectural features. Two disconnected buildings were first built in 1795 by the previous owner, which became the two wings of the house. Martha and Thomas Peter then used designs of architect and friend Dr. William Thornton — known for designing the first U.S. Capitol Building, destroyed in the

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By GEORGE ALTHUSER Current Correspondent

At first glance, three of the stalwarts of the Knock On Wood tap dance studio wouldn’t seem to have much in common.

There’s Yvonne Edwards, an 81-year-old retired federal worker who has been teaching tap dance since the late 1950s.

Then there are Sam and Max Heimowitz, twin ninth-graders at School Without Walls High School.

But get the three of them dancing, and their eyes light up the same way. The Knock on Wood studio, located on Willow Street NW in Takoma, demonstrates how tap dancing can still appeal to a wide range of people.

Last Thursday, for example, Edwards led a class of 11 adult students — from 50 to 70 years old — who have been learning similar classes for five years.

“The thing that’s fun about tap dancing is that you can not only see it — like ballet, it’s beautiful — but you also hear tap. So you’ve got the two elements there, and to me that makes it more intriguing.”

In her Thursday evening classes, Edwards, who co-founded Knock On Wood 21 years ago and is now on the nonprofit’s board, offers her students phrases of encouragement and an unrelenting positive attitude.

“If you walk into this studio, you’ll tap your way out,” said Edwards, who goes by “Miss Yvonne” around the studio, located at 6295 Willow St. NW.

“She’s 100 percent cheerful,” said Sam Heimowitz, who said he and his brother have benefited from tap dancing at Knock on Wood.

The Heimowitz brothers, twins who attend ninth grade at School Without Walls, are among the dancers at Knock on Wood.

The breadth of the studio will be on display at its annual showcase on Sunday at Deal Middle School. Knock On Wood’s residents, Edwards, who co-founded Knock On Wood 21 years ago and is now on the nonprofit’s board, offers her students phrases of encouragement and an unrelenting positive attitude.

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This month in ...

■ 1971 — The Washington Senators hosted the ninth annual charity baseball game to benefit Children’s Hospital. The committee hoped to sell out RFK Stadium for the game against the Oakland A’s. The event recently had been attracting the second-highest attendance at Senators’ games, ranking behind opening day. In eight years, the event had earned $240,000 for programs benefiting children’s health and development.

■ 1976 — Members of the Spring Valley-Wesley Hills Citizens Association, faced with a number of proposed changes to traffic patterns in Spring Valley, voted against installing more stop signs on 49th Street NW as an attempt to limit commuter traffic. The association voted 505-36 to support the installation of four-way stop signs at nine other intersections. Members voted 115-79 in favor of forbidding traffic from entering Rockwood Parkway NW at Nebraska Avenue during the weekday afternoon rush hour. Members voted 84-80 for forbidding cars from entering Indian Lane NW from Loughboro Road during the afternoon rush hour.

■ 1981 — The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority held a public hearing on plans to consolidate 35 bus routes. Among the proposals was elimination of rush-hour service connecting Glover Park and the Federal Triangle, to be replaced with additional 62 buses ending at Farragut Square. The plan also called for the elimination of rush-hour routes connecting Chevy Chase and Wesley Heights with Potomac Park and Federal Triangle, again to be replaced by existing all-day routes ending at Farragut Square.

Ward 3 D.C. Council member Polly Shackleton, one of 40 speakers at the hearing, criticized Metro for increasing fares, reducing service and still expecting people to use public transportation.

■ 1986 — Wilson High School sophomore David Thompson organized a project to paint all the bleachers at the school’s football stadium, seating 4,000 people. To help reach his goal of becoming an Eagle Scout, Thompson recruited fellow students to help and also raised the money to buy all the supplies.

■ 1991 — The D.C. Council adopted a redistricting plan that transferred Burleith, upper Georgetown, Foxhall Village and lower Palisades from Ward 3 to Ward 2. “While these boundaries keep the political jurisdiction of the Foxhall and the Burleith citizens associations intact and restore the political integrity of all of Georgetown, unfortunately a piece of the lower Palisades area shifts to Ward 2,” said Ward 3 D.C. Council member Jim Nathenson. With the exception of the lower Palisades, he said, the bill kept neighborhoods intact and used natural boundaries to the greatest extent possible.

Photos by James R. Brantley Photography

Above, Garden Party chair Marcia Mayo with the Marquis de Lafayette, President George Washington and Nellie English, a Peter family servant; left, Tudor Place development director Mary-Michael Wachur, left, and Tudor Place trustee Pamela Jenkinson

This month in ...
TAP: Takoma dance studio offers broad range of educational opportunities for all ages

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from her praise and pointers.

Like Edwards, the Heimowitzes have discovered that tap can quickly draw people in, although they’ve figured this out in decidedly modern ways.

“After we performed at a school assembly, we basically exploded on Snapchat,” Max Heimowitz said of the response from other students on the social networking app.

The Heimowitz brothers also attribute the appeal of tap dancing to the fact that it is both auditory and visual. They explained that the Knock On Wood studio teaches rhythm tap, which is more focused on musicality and less on upper body movements than the other main type of tap, Broadway tap.

“Rhythm tap is less showy than Broadway tap,” said Sam Heimowitz. “We’re making music with our feet and dancing at the same time.”

In interviews, the Heimowitz twins and Edwards all emphasized how important it is to learn the history of tap. Colorful pieces of paper with the names of great tap dancers, including Fred Astaire, Shirley Temple and Sammy Davis Jr., cover one of the back rehearsal rooms of the Knock On Wood school.

These days, students in the Knock On Wood studio also learn the names of the school’s notable alumni. This includes the Grammy-winning R&B singer Mya; the composer, assistant artistic director and former Broadway performer Baakari Wilder; and Jason Holley, who is currently performing on Broadway.

At the Sunday showcase, in addition to performing with Capitol Tap, the Heimowitzes will dance two duets, including “Charlestwins,” which they choreographed themselves.

Edwards’ adult class will perform to “Poor Butterfly” by Erroll Garner.

Dori Gillman, who is the president of Knock On Wood’s board and the Heimowitz twins’ mother, said that Edwards’ classes are always the company’s most popular.

“They would show up to her classes at 7 a.m. the day before a holiday,” she said.

“Miss Yvonne is an incredible teacher,” Edwards, when asked about her success as a tap instructor, said she always preferred teaching to performing, and she likes that her classes attract a lot of students.

Knock On Wood Tap Studio’s annual showcase will take place Sunday, June 12, at 2 p.m. at 3815 Fort Drive NW. For more information, including ticket prices, visit knockonwood.org.

**BICENTENNIAL: Tudor Place celebrates with historical re-enactments at annual garden party**

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War of 1812 — to fill in between the existing buildings with two connector wings and a main, center building. The Federalist-style mansion was completed in 1816. The center building features the only fully round portico in America, with half the circle projecting from the front of the home and the second half dipping into what Martha Custis Peter called her “saloon,” the main room for music, dancing and entertainment. At first glance, the portico appears to have no entrance, but the cleverly curved wooden window frame slides upward to create a pass-through.

On May 25, waiting to greet the garden party guests around the grounds were costumed actors portraying key figures in the history of the house, from Martha and Thomas Peter to George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette, a friend of Washington’s and a Revolutionary War hero.

Also portrayed were successive generations of the Peter family, such as Britannia Peter Kenion, who safeguarded Tudor Place through the Civil War, and Agnes Peter, her granddaughter, who performed humanitarian work in France after World War I; on hand as well were a maid, a carpenter and a gardener, lesser-known figures but a crucial part of the home’s history.

On the grounds beyond the tent, actors portraying two of the final residents, Armistead Peter III and wife Caroline Ogden-Jones Peter, stationed themselves at one of the evening’s many vingettes — tables displaying antiques from Tudor Place’s collection: typewriters and tools, bicycles and baby carriages. The actors and vingettes added to the sense of history coming alive, as guests sampled delicacies and sipped punch made from Martha Washington’s own recipe: rum, orange juice and cinnamon.

“It’s a phenomenal house and phenomenal collection,” said Grant Quertermous, the new curator of the collections. “It’s quite a package — the history of this beautiful home, blooming rose garden and wide lawn ringed with trees providing a dramatic backdrop for the evening’s entertainment: The Sage String Quartet, Sage Jazz band and members of the Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program performing songs popular during the different stages of Tudor Place’s history, such as “Yankee Doodle” from the late 18th century, “The Battle Cry of Freedom” from the Civil War and “I Got Rhythm” from the Jazz Age.

Tudor Place remained in the Peter family for six generations until Armistead Peter III used the first scenic easement in the United States to provide for preservation of the property. He also created the Tudor Place Foundation, which, after his death in 1983, assumed ownership of the site. The foundation opened Tudor Place as a museum in 1988 and currently maintains the home, gardens, estate furnishings and the extensive collection of George and Martha Washington’s personal possessions — the largest on view outside of Mount Vernon.

“Armistead Peter III was very farsighted with his preservation easement,” said board of trustees member and Bicentennial Garden Party chair Marcia V. Mayo. “He knew the importance of this place. Tudor Place is history. It’s the future. It’s a vehicle to connect the past with the future.”

Thomas E. Crocker, president of the board of trustees, said of the home: “It’s quite a package — the gardens, the architecture. It’s a unique, hidden gem in the middle of the city. Lots of public school kids come through and get exposed to this family. Six generations lived here, so that’s unusual.”

For those who missed the Bicentennial Spring Garden Party, there are more anniversary celebrations throughout the year. In addition to regularly scheduled tours of the house and gardens available to the public, Tudor Place has a full calendar of events ranging from weekly Art in the Garden classes to Tudor Tots Tuesdays enrichment events for children and a brunch for the grown-ups on June 18.

The next major event is the Bicentennial Birthday Party, a family-friendly party scheduled for Saturday, July 2, from 1 to 4 p.m.

The joint celebration of Tudor Place’s bicentennial and Independence Day scenes fitting for the home of George Washington’s adopted family. Partygoers can tour the gardens, try traditional yard games, make patriotic crafts and enjoy picnic food from Dog Tag Bakery. Veterans and military families will be admitted free of charge.

For more information about these events, tours, the collections and the history of this beautiful home, visit tudorplace.org.
Traffic signal tweaks aim to cut congestion

**Transportation:** Latest effort focuses on wards 3, 4

The latest round of a multi-phase optimization project for the District’s traffic signals swept across wards 3 and 4 on Friday, with community leaders largely in agreement that changes are needed but, in some cases, frustrated at the lack of concrete information from city agencies.

The timing for more than 350 signals were upgraded on Friday, with the twin goals of reducing traffic congestion and improving pedestrian safety. The D.C. Department of Transportation says it has assembled data on vehicular and pedestrian patterns broken down by day of the week and time of day. Further adjustments to this round of signal changes could take place over the next few months as the agency takes stock of the optimization impacts.

Last summer, the agency initiated a larger round of signal upgrades, with more than 650 signals in the downtown area affected. A year later, the Transportation

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**Georgetown University unveils draft campus plan**

**By BRADY HOLT**

Current Staff Writer

Georgetown University will continue its current undergraduate enrollment levels through 2036; continue moving undergraduates out of neighborhood rental properties; and gradually increase its numbers of graduate students, faculty and staff, officials said Monday.

The school that day unveiled its draft campus plan, which was developed in partnership with Georgetown, Burleith and Foxhall community leaders, as well as university students. Universities in residential areas must periodically produce these plans for review by the Zoning Commission, which ensures that the schools aren’t causing undue impacts on their communities.

While campus plans are often contentious — as Georgetown’s have been in the past — the school says it’s working closely with neighbors to minimize opposition. The current campus plan, adopted in 2012 and expiring next year, won unanimous support after the university agreed to house more undergraduates on campus and invest more in protecting the neighborhood from noise, trash and traffic impacts.

“Being able to hear each other and not talk past each other has enabled us to get to where we are today,” Chris Murphy, the university’s vice president for government relations and community engagement, told residents at Monday’s presentation. A few dozen residents attended the meeting, and only a handful had any questions or concerns.

“Three years ago, this room would have been overflowing with people complaining about the conditions on the streets,” George-