



Top of the Hill Newsletter

Fall 2023

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President's Letter

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Welcome to the start of our Fiscal Year 2024 and Happy Fall. I hope everyone had a fantastic summer and enjoyed some of the more than dozen events offered over the last year. It was a busy year of transformation in which we increased membership by 40%. We are financially strong and excited to begin the new year contemplating more fun events for our members, increasing community awareness and being thoughtful of those members who may need our support.

We kicked off our new year on October 1st with a wonderful Historical Walking Tour of the Island Cemetery led by our TOH Historian and new Vice President, Mike Margonis. That was combined with a special tour of the Belmont Chapel, led by the President of the Restoration Project. One week later, we had a lovely morning for the Fall Clean Up of Luce Park – our restored neighborhood public park. There will be more tours along with many new fun events in the coming year so stay tuned.

Our new term begins with many new Board Members who, with our returning Board Members, are sure to make our neighborhood an even more wonderful place to call home. The Board is listed at: <https://www.topofthehillnewport.org/about>

For those not able to attend our Annual Membership Meeting, we missed you, but let me take the opportunity to once again thank all those members who served on the outgoing Board. Our association exists thanks to the time and talents of those members who commit to volunteering. It is sincerely appreciated. In addition to voting for our new Board Members, we voted to formally extend our geographic boundary from Gibbs to Eustis and to create the new standing Committee for Website / Communications. The updated Bylaws and the slide presentation from the meeting have been posted to the "Association Materials" Group for reference.

In response to multiple requests and strong support expressed at our Annual Membership Meeting, we will be distributing a new TOH Member Directory in November. The directory will contain Names and Addresses. For privacy, we will remove emails and phone numbers.

Lastly, plans for our Holiday Party at the Edward King House are underway. It will be the same successful format as last year where the cuisine is catered while members are asked to bring select beverages; charity to be named. Hope to see you December 3rd!

Be well and Happy Thanksgiving!
Laurie Love

Councilor's Corner by Second Ward Councilman Charlie Holder

Hello and Happy Autumn to you all!

The year is certainly moving along quickly as we turn to shorter days and cooler temps, however, that does not mean City business slows down. I would like to start by congratulating current Financial Director Laura Sitrin for her appointment as acting City Manager in the wake of Joe Nicholson's retirement. I am more than confident that Laura will be a very good City Manager for Newport, especially with the sensational work she has done in leading the financial endeavors of Newport.

Since the last publication there has been much work by the Council in a wide array of topics. We have chosen BCM Realty Partners to come up with a bid for the much-needed Coggeshall School renovation. Currently BCM has met with the public once to solicit ideas of what the area residents would like and not like to see of their plan. The conversation was highly attended and informative with BCM taking the information received and planning on another public meeting to discuss future plans and goals.

We updated the bicycle ordinance to include electric bikes (e-bikes) to allow City officials and the police department more leverage in enforcing the rules and regulations of this rapidly growing form of transportation. This change is only a start to helping to make sure all forms of transportation can coexist on our already crowded City streets.

A major point of concern for all residents, especially the Top of the Hill area, has been the issue of motor vehicle noise and speeding. We have passed a resolution allowing the NPD to start to enforce current noise ordinances by issuing warning and citations to vehicles that are found to be over the allowed decibel limit. We will be having a meeting on Oct. 23rd with City administration to go over how the program has been working and what changes need to be made. I can tell you that we are very much aware that the noise and speeding issues continue to persist, and that enforcement has been difficult, especially with the NPD being short-staffed. There will be more information coming out after that meeting.

I would like to see Newport continue to improve to help its residents in making our City more livable and safe for all. I also want to see Newport continue to thrive economically, so we are able to continue to build a better and more accessible infrastructure. As always, please feel free to reach out to myself or any City Councilor with concerns, questions, or ideas.

Have a great Fall,

Charlie Holder

cholder@cityofnewport.com

Historian's Corner by Mike Margonis

Touro Cemetery on Bellevue Avenue

Departing from my “every house has a story” series I’ll be taking advantage of the timing of the release of this newsletter. Happy Halloween (Samhain)!

Judah Touro was a wealthy businessman and philanthropist, although born here in Newport in 1775, he lived most of his life in New Orleans. Touro started out small with a store selling exports from New England including spermaceti candles, soap, and codfish. He quickly rose up the economics ranks of the city becoming a powerful merchant and ship owner. His rise to prominence was facilitated by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 making the city one of America’s great economic hubs. Despite being a wealthy citizen of New Orleans, he chose to defend the city against British forces during the War of 1812. Enlisting in Andrew Jackson’s army and fighting in the Battle of New Orleans he was severely wounded in the leg by cannon shot. After a long recovery he resumed his business empire and expanded his philanthropic efforts.



Judah Touro 1854



Touro Synagogue and Faubourg New Orleans

During his lifetime and upon his death Judah Touro donated his vast fortune, about \$9 million dollars today, to a number of organizations including a hospital and synagogue in New Orleans, both still bear his name. There is even a Faubourg (Neighborhood) running along St. Charles Avenue named Touro. Other philanthropic achievements include funding the Bunker Hill Monument outside of Boston and helping fund what would become Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. One historian noted “It would be an impossibility to enumerate all the acts of munificent beneficence performed by Judah Touro.” Newporter’s also benefited greatly from Touro’s many generous acts including

the funding of our own synagogue, the nation's oldest, Touro Park, and of course Touro Cemetery, the oldest Jewish Cemetery in America.

The cemetery located at the corner of Kay Street and Bellevue Avenue was first established in 1677 when the property was purchased by Mordecai Campanell and Moses Pacheco. Newport had become a safe haven for Jews fleeing the inquisition in Spain and Portugal. These were Sephardic Jews with names like Alvares, Lopez, and Rivera. At least 25 Jewish families lived in Newport prior to the Revolution making it the largest Jewish community in the colonies. These Jewish families had a disproportionate economic impact on the city through their business interests and international trade in products like whale oil, candles, rum, and slaves. Unfortunately, the Jewish population declined during the Revolutionary War, most choosing to move to other trade centers not occupied by the British.



Touro Cemetery 1677

By the early 19th Century with the decline of the Jewish population in Newport the doors of Touro Synagogue were closed but the Jewish community never forgot the synagogue or the cemetery. In 1843 Judah Touro donated the funds to build the current Egyptian Revival Gate and iron fence surrounding the cemetery. It was built by Isaiah Rogers who built an almost identical gate in Boston at the Granary Cemetery where leaders like John Hancock, Sam Adams, and the victims of the Boston Massacre are interred.

Today both the synagogue and cemetery are thriving, with over 200 Jewish families living on Aquidneck Island and thousands of tourists who visit the Loeb Center. Lew Keen, head of the Newport Historic Cemetery Commission even opens the cemetery

once a year so visitors can see the graves, many carved in Hebrew and created by our own John Stevens Shop on upper Thames Street, one of the oldest businesses in the United States. It has only been owned by two families, the Benson's currently still do stonework for graves and many of the monuments in Washington D.C. Even today we are connected to the past every time we walk around the city of Newport. When you get a chance, stop by the cemetery, and look inside from Kay Street. You'll see Judah Touro's obelisk, the tallest in the cemetery, and rightfully so.

Every cemetery has a story...

Mike Margonis

Gardening on Top the Hill by Claire O'Donnelly

So after a disappointing Spring, Summer arrived and I have to say it turned out to be a bit of a disappointment also! I cannot remember a summer with so much rain! My grass has never looked so good!

I understand that a weather phenomenon known as El Niño is to blame. How can something that sounds like a sweet little baby cause so much upset to the worlds weather? El Niño recurs irregularly, from two years up to a decade, and no two events are exactly alike. Our last one was in 2018 so I guess we were due.

The "good" news is that they are predicting a milder winter than normal and total snowfall will be only 42 inches on average across the Northeast versus our normal 46 inches! I know, that does not strike me as significant either! Don't cancel those flights to Florida any time soon but do pack a raincoat it might be wetter than normal down there.

So what can I tell you about fall gardening that I have not told you before. It is pretty much clean up, clean up and give yourself a head start for spring! So since you know that already I thought I would take some time today to talk about the humble and much maligned marigold.

The reason I wanted to make this my fall topic is that if you walk around Newport at this time of the year, the Marigolds are one of the few flowers that are "striking a pose!" They really are quite lovely and with their shades of orange, yellow, gold and red they seem to me to be the perfect backdrop for pumpkins, mums and other fall decorations.

Marigolds are one of the most popular annual flowers, easily grown from seed or transplant, and when given the right conditions will overflow with bright blossoms that fill the garden with cheerful color. Marigolds are equally as happy in containers, as they are in the garden. They can also be cut for vases and are very long lasting.

Many cultures have marigold traditions. In Mexico they are often found at day of the dead celebrations. In India on the other hand, they are often found in decorations for weddings and other celebrations where they are known as the "hundred leafed flower" because of their many petals.

Some forms of marigolds can have a very pungent smell and this can be helpful in the summer as a pest repellent. Try planting them around your vegetable garden next year.

Since marigolds grow so easily, they are considered an ideal plant for children to grow. I will check this out next summer when my grandson turns two and will definitely be ready for gardening! (I hope! Lol)

Happy Fall, Gardeners! See you in the Winter, Claire

Top of the Hill's Website by Laurie Love

Wow, time flies...it's now been more than six months since we launched the new TOH website. Our state-of-the-art site has enabled us to represent the association in a very positive manner - helping us increase membership with over 60 new neighbors joining since March. It has also enabled us to dramatically increase our membership interaction...and that's the topic of this last website piece.

Wonderfully, almost two thirds of our members now have Website Member Accounts (created on the Members Page). One does not need a website member account to receive invites to all the major events. At least two promotional emails are sent for all the major events (Holiday Party / Community Forum / Summer Garden Party / Annual Membership Meeting). One may also RSVP directly on the Events page. The promotional event emails are simply a proactive communication with an RSVP link back to the website.

The advantages for those with website member accounts are simply that those individuals will have more opportunities to engage with fellow members through group participation(s), may privately connect with fellow members via the chat function and will proactively receive community information from our online Forum.

Any website member may post to the Forum which then automatically generates an email to all website members. Most recent posts include several special City Hall meetings, a Preservation Society event, the Puddingstone Music Festival, the city's Strategic Plan, and the Broadway Street Fair.

Website members may also join any one of the more than two dozen Groups created to further increase activities based on more specific member interests. We've most recently added Photography, Concerts & Lectures; Art & Gallery and Association Materials...where, as mentioned, you will find our updated Bylaws and slide deck presentation created for the Annual Membership Meeting in September.

There's also a private Chat function for website members which provides direct communication with any other website member— no emails are shown – only one's name. Speaking of privacy, the Website Chair must approve Website Member Accounts as well as new Group members.

This is a binary function of the site – meaning names shown on both the Members Page and Groups Page may either be set as public or private within the website application. One may have to wait a day or so for approval, but the Privacy option has been selected as the default as this was a concern voiced by many members in the past when discussing the contents of the Member Directory. Thus, no member names appear publicly on the Top of the Hill website, apart from the Board Members.

Please let me know if you would like to see other Groups added and don't hesitate to post to the Forum. The guidance for posts is simply that they be *polite, informative, and objective*. The Notice of Interest Page has been discontinued in favor of the Forum as every member may post, it's quick and notifications are provided proactively to all website members. There's always so much going on in our City by the Sea, so please share those community events and updates.

I hope to see you soon! Laurie

Membership Update by Anne Marie Biernacki

As we bid another summer goodbye and pivot into fall, we continue to grow our membership, and the engagement of our members with planned and spontaneous activities.

As of the end of October, we are pleased to announce that our membership continues to grow, with many members joining or renewing as Pineapple Patrons. The Pineapple Patrons memberships are a new level of membership that enable you to provide additional support for the major events organized by our Association. If you haven't yet renewed your membership, please do as soon as you can, or miss being included in the member directory noted in the President's Letter. If you need any assistance with

renewal, you can reach out to tohnewport@gmail.com and we can assist you in completing your renewal and payment.

With the Association website, in addition to the variety of planned events, we are also making it easier for members to connect with each other socially. The interest groups and the Forum enable members to post coming events or gather a group together for shared adventures – and these have been getting some attention.

On September 29, a jolly crew of Top of the Hill members joined together to attend the Preservation Society of Newport County Member Appreciation Night, and a photograph of our group (along with the all-important silver wine cooler that caught the photographer's eye) was featured in Preservation Society email about coming member events – we're nearly famous! Also recently, gallery openings at the fabulous CUSP Gallery have been spotlighted, and TOH members have been spotted at their CUSP Friday evenings and the Broadway Street Fair; CUSP is owned by Top of the Hill members Curtis Speer and Tyler Martin. Most recently there have been posts by members looking to form a small group to attend newly released movies. We encourage you to make the most of the website to come together with your neighbors and make new friends through shared experiences.

Lastly, we have a new letter that serves to introduce the Top of the Hill Association to new members – this letter explains who the TOH is, introduces the website, and spotlights some special features of our neighborhood. We are using this as part of our outreach campaign. If you have enjoyed membership in the Top of the Hill Association, we strongly encourage you to reach out to your neighbors and invite them to join, if they are not already members. Word of mouth is our best way to spread the word about the Top Of the Hill and its goal of connecting our community.



Thank you to our Inaugural Pineapple Patrons!

Lynda and Mark Barnes / Barb and Jerry Baum / Anne Marie Biernacki and Ken Smith
Betsy Blair and Jim Van Winkle / Mark Braunstein and Elizabeth Niemiec
Mary Brunell and Rosalie Paillard / Marina Drooker and David Drooker / Joan Davis
Donna and Harry Elkin / Mark Frey / Gene Thompson Grove and Keith Grove
Alicia and Adam Hamblett / Lorna Harmuth / Larna and Dan Lackner / Laurie Love
Maggie Read and Mike Margonis / Jill and Barry Martin / Liz Mello and Michael Tsandilas
Maureen and Sandy Neville / Jill Rackett Pengue and Mike Pengue
Mary and Scott Robins / Stephanie Smyth / James Steele and Bonnie Watson
Maureen and Tim West

Committee Opportunities for our Top of the Hill (TOH) Association

As we begin our new term, we have several open Board member positions - chairing Beautification or Website/Communications. And as always, we invite and encourage help on all our standing committees. If you would like to support TOH, we would like to hear from you. For more information, please contact the respective Committee Chair(s) noted below or via the members chat on the website or via email at:

tohnewport@gmail.com

Committee Chairs:

Community – Harry Elkin

Events – Susan Kelleher & Claire O’Donnelly (Co-Chairs)

Membership – Anne Marie Biernacki

Welcome – Susan McCoy

Beautification – Open

Website/Communications – Open (Laurie Love, Acting)

We’re also looking for new ideas for the newsletter and welcome contributions,
so please send us your suggestions / input.

Photo Gallery

Below are photos of some of the TOH events held over the last few months--

August 4, 2023:

Wine Group - French Wine Tasting kindly hosted by Maureen & Sandy Neville



August 17, 2023: Blue Garden Tour





September 8, 2023: Friday Flick – kindly hosted by Maureen & Sandy Neville



September 15, 2023: Annual Membership Meeting at Innovate Newport



September 27, 2023: Preservation Society Member Appreciation Night TOH Meet Up



October 1, 2023: Island Cemetery & Belmont Chapel Tour



October 8, 2023: Luce Park Fall Clean Up – THANK YOU to all our volunteers!





October 19, 2023: Mahjong Group meeting kindly hosted by Larna Lackner



The End