

# The West End Flyer

Serving the West End Neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

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## Home for Christmas, and Maybe Easter, Too *Kennedy Center, Smithsonian, National Gallery Shut*

Many of us stayed home for Thanksgiving due to Covid-19, and we should be prepared to stay safely at home until ... well, we don't know when. But don't plan on going out much this month if you are here.

Not only will there be no Candlelight Christmas or Messiah Sing-Along at the Kennedy Center this year, but "the nation's cultural center," as it calls itself, announced on November 19, that it is cancelling all scheduled performances through April 25, 2021. That's after the Inauguration, and after Easter.

The Smithsonian Institution said on the same day that it will close its eight Washington, D.C., museums at least through January. The closing began on November 23. No reopening date was given.

The National Gallery of Art, which is not a part of the Smithsonian, "temporarily closed its doors to the public" on November 21. Director Kaywin Feldman tells us by email that "closing through the upcoming winter months is the safest course of action."

George Washington University will not be reopening its campus for the spring semester, although it will allow additional students to live there while attending virtual classes. This will bring the campus population

up to about 1,600, far short of the usual 7,000 or so.

With the Kennedy Center also dark at the same time, Foggy Bottom is not as culturally interesting or intellectually stimulating as it was in pre-Covid days.



A choral program from a Christmas past at the Kennedy Center.

Deborah Rutter, the Kennedy Center president, says it will lose \$80 million in revenue for the 2020-21 season. Not good for the neighborhood's economy or lifestyle. Symphony used to be just a walk away.

Meanwhile, the *Flyer's* listings, which follow the news section, have scratched up a few alternatives, virtual and otherwise.

## Local Homeowner Elected U.S. Vice President

Certainly Kamala Harris knew her way around Washington, D.C., before she and her husband Doug Emhoff bought a two-bedroom condo on 24th Street NW, at the brand-new Westlight, in November 2017.



Kamala Harris

Keep in mind that she went to college here—at Howard University—from 1982 to 1986.

After her marriage to Emhoff in California in August 2014, she came back to Washington as a U.S. Senator in January 2017. They have two grown children from his previous marriage.

We understand that the couple still owns her bachelorette condo in San Francisco, and the 3,500-

square-foot house that Emhoff bought in 2012 in the tony Brentwood section of Los Angeles.

As vice president, she and the Second Gentleman (surely there is a better term) have the right to live in the house at the Naval Observatory, but that perk began only in the 1970s, and is not required. Nelson Rockefeller, Gerald Ford's vice president, used it only to entertain. Walter Mondale was the first to actually live there. The V.P. has an office at the White House, and staff offices next door in the Executive Office Building.

So perhaps Vice President Harris will prefer walking to work, as so many West Enders have chosen to do.

One immediate result of Harris's election is more security around and inside the West End Library on L Street—but that's not such a bad thing.

# Welcome to ANC-2A, Mr. President

We look forward to having you here.

Your residence after noon on January 20, will be in Ward 2, Precinct 2 of the District. The White House is located within the boundaries of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A, in single-member district 2A01.

(See the purple section of the map below.)

You may already have heard from the Commission. At its November 18 meeting, it passed a resolution advising you to remove certain fencing near the White House that is impeding pedestrians. The District government is required to give such resolutions “great weight,” but it seems that yours—the Federal one—is not so strictly bound.

The incoming commission will have five new members. (See table below.) They are not paid, and all are volunteers.

As the map shows, a lot of our ANC’s territory is federal land. In addition to the White House and its grounds, it includes the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials and the Washington Monument.

The only presidential family that we remember getting involved much here was the Carters, who sent their daughter Amy to Thaddeus Stevens, the West End’s public elementary school.

That was on January 24, 1977. Our schools still could use some improvement. We know that Dr. Jill

Biden is an educator. But we’ll leave it at that. We don’t want to ask what you can do for our neighborhood. It should be the other way around.

However, while we are on the subject, the Stevens School building is still there. ANC-2A saved it from being turned into apartments in 2010.

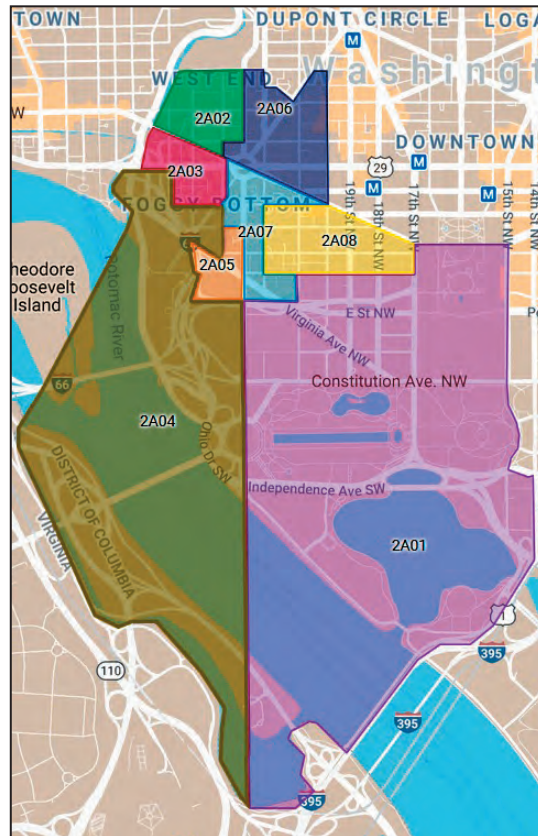
Our new commissioners will take office before you do. They begin their terms on January 2 at noon, and usually meet on the third Wednesday of the month. However, this year, that’s Inauguration Day—which used to be a big holiday here, with a parade and balls and dancing—so they have put it off for a week, until January 27. It will still be virtual, by Zoom, at 7:00 pm.

Four of our eight seats will be filled by write-in candidates. The D.C. Board of Elections does not tabulate write-in votes if only one candidate has affirmed that they will accept the office. So we list below the total number of write-in votes cast in that district, and assume that each candidate received less-than-or-equal-to (symbol:  $\leq$ ) that number.

No one has affirmed that they ran as a write-in for the 2A08 district which is mostly on the George Washington University campus and is traditionally held by a student. District law for filling such a seat complicates things this year. It states that “no vacancy shall be filled” during a health emergency, such as the one that exists at present.

Thus, ANC-2A is likely to be operating with only seven commissioners when it begins its 2021 session.

By the way, sir, in the area shown in the map above, you and Kamala Harris received 3,884 votes.



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A districts.

| SMD  | COMMISSIONER   | STATUS    | VOTE       |
|------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 2A01 | Yannik Omictin | Write-In  | $\geq 33$  |
| 2A02 | Joel Causey    | On Ballot | 542        |
| 2A03 | Trupti Patel   | On Ballot | 291        |
| 2A04 | Donna Barbisch | Write-In  | $\geq 221$ |
| 2A05 | Evelyn Hudson  | Write-In  | $\geq 51$  |
| 2A06 | Jeri Epstein   | On Ballot | 467        |
| 2A07 | Adam Friend    | Write-In  | $\geq 27$  |
| 2A08 | None           | Write-In  | 13         |

Source: D.C. Board of Election certified returns, December 2, 2020.

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# On and Off M Street

## RESTAURANT FUTURES

### Marcel's Reopens and Bears Watching

December 2020

We worried when **Marcel's**, one of our most highly regarded restaurants, closed in March due to the Covid-19 situation. It is one of the places that put the West End on the map as a dining destination.

Several others in the neighborhood have now closed permanently. These include **Boveda**, at 2350 M Street in the Westin Hotel, and its upscale brother, the **Caucus Room**, at the same location. Among other casualties so far are **District Commons** at 2200 Pennsylvania Ave, and its sister restaurant **Burger, Tap & Shake**.

Informed sources tell the *Flyer* that the **Ritz-Carlton Hotel** at 1150 22nd Street has decided not to reopen for the Biden Inauguration and that April is its new target date. Meanwhile the **West End Bistro** located there remains closed, as does its **Quadrant Room**, a lobby bar. Georgetown has had even more closings.

Thus, we were glad to see that Marcel's still had a pulse when it reopened in October,



Marcel's, 2401 Pennsylvania Avenue, November 28, 2020.

and put some tables and heaters on the sidewalk. But like many West End businesses, it got boarded up behind plywood to prepare for election-related troubles that have not materialized in the West End.

However, on November 23, Mayor Bowser issued adjustments to Covid-related Phase Two orders which will further constrain restaurants and their revenues.

Beginning December 14, indoor capacity will be reduced from 50% to 25%. Restaurants can stay open until midnight, but alcohol sales, service, and consumption has to stop at 10 pm.

Marcel's founder, Robert Wiedmaier, goes

back a long way in our town as a chef and entrepreneur. German-born and Belgian by upbringing, he cooked French at



Robert Wiedmaier

Aquarelle at the Watergate in 1996 and opened Marcel's in the West End in 1999. It remains the flagship of his nine RW Group restaurants.

Since its beginning, Marcel's has been a fancy place with terrific food. We remember it best when Wiedmaier was doing a lot of the cooking himself, and the late night scene at the bar included other big-name chefs who dropped by for a glass of wine or a Stella on tap when they were done for the day.

Wiedmaier's second restaurant, Brasserie Beck, at 1101 K Street NW, has been closed for a few months, and is not scheduled to reopen until 2021. His latest effort, the acclaimed sea-food restaurant Siren, in Logan Circle, closed in February 2019 and is still looking for a new address.

Marcel's itself was closed for Thanksgiving this year, but the plywood is down now and it is scheduled to reopen on December 4.

Pre-theater dinner was quite popular when the Kennedy Center was operating. Marcel's is reviving the concept with a 4:30 to 6:30 pm fixed-price "First Arrival Menu" with 3 courses Tues-Thur at \$65, and \$80 Fri-Sat. Reserve at 202-296-1166.

"Covid's really put a twister on our industry," Wiedmaier told the *Flyer*. "It's restaurant purgatory, now."

Although he is optimistic that the current situation will be over soon, he is making adjustments that include a smaller menu and a five-day week. There is also take-out: a "two-course curbside menu" at \$52. Plans for the sidewalk out front are on hold.

Whatever Wiedmaier does will be interesting. He has kept together a team who have succeeded in setting a high mark for food, style, and business management.

"We'll survive," he assured us.

## NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

### Restaurant Gift Cards

We are a little torn about encouraging our readers to go out to eat during this pandemic. On the other hand, the District's most recent economic figures show that food service employment is down 36.3% from September 2019 to September 2020, and hotel employment is down 58.4%.

Most of those who lost jobs had less than a college degree, and many of them earned their living here in the West End, where we have about 10% of the District's 130 hotels, and several of its most respected restaurants.

While we're on the subject of our endangered eateries, ordering take-out will help. The *Flyer* also encourages its readers to support their favorite spots by purchasing restaurant gift cards.

Just for starters, **Ris**, **The Prime Rib**, **Chef Geoff**, **Rasika West End**, and the **Blue Duck Tavern** all offer them, and most can be purchased on their websites. Give them as gifts or keep them for yourself. The restaurants will have the income, and you and your giftees can do the dining when it is more comfortable or convenient.

Think of them as investments in the hospitality infrastructure of the neighborhood.

### Foggy Bottom Leadership Change

John George, who recently ran a close race for an ANC seat in the Foggy Bottom Historic District, was elected the new president of the Foggy Bottom Association on December 1st by a vote of 27 to 2.



John George

Founded in 1959, it is the largest civic association in our area.

For more than two decades it has been closely aligned with the local Advisory Neighborhood Commission and has often had members of the ANC on its Board of Directors.

Outgoing president Marina Streznewski, who served in that office for the last seven years, could not run again because of term limits in the group's bylaws.

George stated that among his initial goals was to "engage and involve" the community and "support and promote" Foggy Bottom and West End businesses.

# Worth a Walk or Worth Watching

## LOCAL CULTURE

Not everything we want or need is available in the West End, but it is one of the most walkable of neighborhoods.

Downtown, Georgetown, Dupont Circle, and the Kennedy Center are all easily within walking distance. In the pre-Covid world, the Metro or a short cab or Uber ride got you to most of the rest of the civilized world, which, we believe, includes the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian museums.

We'll start off this month's list with one place you can actually visit physically (at least as we go to press).

### The Phillips Collection

This gem of an art museum in Dupont Circle is now open by advanced reservation,



Edward Hopper, *Le Pavillon de Flore*, 1909.

with timed tickets. No walk-ins are admitted, so it takes a little planning. It has a stellar permanent collection and interesting exhibitions, one of which, until 10 Jan, is 11 paintings by American artist Edward Hopper, all done in Paris between 1906 and 1910, on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art. Open Thurs-Sun, 11:00 am to 6:00 pm. 1600 21st Street NW. [www.phillipscollection.org](http://www.phillipscollection.org). 202-387-2151.

### A Candlelight Christmas

The Washington Chorus. The live show has changed every year, and was very popular at the Kennedy Center. How it plays—and sells—virtually from Strathmore, Maryland, will be interesting. \$15 by video over Internet. Dec 18-19 at 7:30 pm, Dec 20 at 3:00 pm. [www.thewashingtonchorus.org](http://www.thewashingtonchorus.org).

### Kennedy Center

Most performances have been cancelled because of Covid-19, but its video and outdoor offerings are worth exploring on its website: [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org).

## A GEORGETOWN STROLL

First, Georgetown begins halfway across the M Street Bridge. It is west of Rock Creek, despite the claims of several District hotels that should know better. If you haven't crossed a bridge, you're not there.



A Paper Source mask.

The wreaths are up on the light poles now, but brace yourself as you go west on M, for many of the shops are gone, some are boarded up, others bare, some with new tenants on very short leases.

Brooks Brothers is gone, but the **Apple Store** and other national concerns are still ticking. **The Paper Source** at 3019 M is actually busy. People want to be in touch, with cards, letters, and small gifts. Are the Christmas tree face masks still in stock?

It is the unique shops and boutiques (and bars) that have always made Georgetown's historic district so interesting for holiday shopping. So turn right at the golden dome of the Farmers and Mechanics Bank and walk north, uphill, on Wisconsin Avenue.

In that direction are many of the favorites: **Martin's Tavern** at 1264, the **Christ Child Opportunity Shop** at 1427, **The**



Martin's Tavern in its typical Christmas decor.

**Phoenix** at 1514, **Patisserie Poupon** at 1645, **Oliver Dunn, Moss & Co** at 1657, and **Ella-Rue**, just off Wisconsin at 3231 P Street. It's a downhill walk coming back.

Georgetown has had an even tougher time than the West End during the pandemic and social justice protests, and has lost over 75 businesses so far.

Rachel Shank, of Georgetown Main Street, a non-profit organization that supports small businesses, tells the *Flyer* that "a lot of our beloved businesses are still open." She describes the mood of the merchants as "hopeful" for this year's holiday shopping.

## THE SCHOOL WITHIN WALLS

One of the many advantages of residing in the West End is the Alumni Course Audit Program at George Washington University, which also allows non-alumni who are over 60 years of age and residents of zip codes 20006 and 20037 to audit classes for a nominal fee, usually \$60.

Permission of the instructor is required and some subjects—particularly languages—are excluded, but many residents have found this program rewarding.

However, the program is closed now, even for GWU's virtual courses. The silver lining to this cloud is discovering MOOCs—Massive Open Online Courses. Some of the best of these are on [edx.org](http://edx.org). You don't have to be over 60, and you can audit Harvard classes in your pajamas and within your own walls. Below are a couple to try.

### CS50. Introduction to Computer Science.

David Malan's enthralling course is



Harvard's David Malan, on-line, in class.

free to audit on line. The guru of distance learning teaches Harvard undergraduates "how to think computationally" from his techy setup in the 1878 Sanders Theatre. Malan provides a great model for what our public schools might do during Covid-19, as well as a taste of the future of remote education on all levels. [www.edx.org](http://www.edx.org).

### GSDIx. The Architectural Imagination.

Michael Hays lectures on the history and theory of architecture from classic to modern. Hays is a distinguished professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Design who shows how architecture allows us to see "culture representing its own values to itself." Has 10 modules, self-paced. Also at [www.edx.org](http://www.edx.org).

Edx.org was founded by Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2012. It now has classes on many subjects from dozens of top colleges and universities ... and is certainly worth a look.