

The West End Flyer

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

Vol. III

January 2021

No. 1

The 59th Inauguration and the Neighborhood *A Little Different for Hotels and Restaurants This Time*

For the 2009 Inauguration of Barack Obama, the Fairmont Hotel on 24th Street NW was entirely sold out by the day after the election. On Inauguration Day, the Metro set a new record for ridership: 1,120,000. The *Washington Post* estimated the crowd on the National Mall at 1.8 million. There were ten official Inaugural Balls that evening, in black tie and gowns.

For the 2017 Inauguration of Donald Trump, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel on 22nd Street NW offered a four-night package for \$150,000 which included pillowcases monogrammed with the presidential seal. The parade had 8,000 participants, with nine equestrian units and seven high-school bands from different states.

This one will be different. The Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies announced on December 16 that the public ceremony at the West Front of the Capitol will have

a live audience “that resembles the State of the Union Address.” If you are a member of the incoming 117th

Washington REIT Sells 2nd West End Building

The office building at 1227 25th Street NW, which faces Francis Field, has been sold by Washington REIT, a real estate investment trust that had owned the building since 2011. It sold an adjacent office building, 2445 M Street NW, in 2018.

The company’s CEO stated that this was a strategic move “to reduce our exposure to office assets allowing us to de-risk our portfolio.” The company, which is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange and has its headquarters in the District, owns about 48 properties, about half divided between office

Congress, you may attend and bring one guest.

The Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC) for Biden and Harris is urging the public “to refrain from travelling to Washington, D.C.”

Those of us who are here already won’t have good seats either, or get much of a show. PIC says “the parade will be reimaged.” The souvenirs, for one thing, will be sold mostly on-line. (See illustration.)

If the weather is good, we are within walking distance of the usual reviewing stand in front of the White House. A bicycle extends the range. Within a certain distance, you will probably need a credential. Other-

wise, the best seat may be the safe and comfortable one you have at home.

The West End has 16 hotels with a total of 3,611 rooms. Add Foggy Bottom and the Watergate and you have 4,831.

The 2021 Inauguration, with the “Don’t come!” message of its organizing committee, is another blow to our hospitality industry and its workforce.

Destination DC, the District’s tourism and convention bureau, records that hotel occupancy was 97.2% in 2009 and 95.2% in 2017 for the Inauguration period. “Historically, it’s a huge economic engine for Washington, D.C., during what is typically a slower period,” Elliott Ferguson, its CEO, told the *Flyer*.

Many hotels, he adds, required 3-to-5-night minimum stays in previous years. So far this year, hotel revenue is estimated to be down \$1.5 billion, and has already cost the District \$375 million in lost tax revenue.

Just as cold weather arrived, the Mayor put a ban on indoor restaurant dining. It began on December 23 and will last until January 15 at 5:00 am. That also put in the cork on any New Year’s Eve plans that restaurants and hotels may have considered—but it left open the possibility of indoor dining and drinking during Inauguration week. We’ll see—it’s a little hard to plan.



Seal Mask, Presidential Inaugural Committee Store, \$15.00.

Continued on Reverse

Strategic Planning on Tap for ANC-2A?

Two of the newest members of the Foggy Bottom and West End Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC-2A) have strong ideas on what their priorities are, and how the ANC might focus on its mission during the next two years.

Joel Causey, who now represents 2A02, the western half of the West End, told the *Flyer* he wants to concentrate on development. “Revitalizing existing businesses and getting new businesses to locate here,” he said, “that’s my platform.”

One of five new members on the eight-member commission, Causey is a project manager for a real estate development firm. He wants to get a “Main

25th Street Building Sold

Continued from Front Page

buildings and multifamily residential apartments. It purchased 600 New Hampshire Avenue, one of the two Watergate office buildings, in 2017.

Washington REIT has been increasing its share of rental apartments, taking advantage of the Washington metropolitan rental housing market, which is considered desirable due to the large number of government employees and contractors whose employment has been relatively stable during the pandemic.

The buyer of 2445 M was Beacon Capital Partners, a privately held Boston firm that has been upgrading the building and planning more retail.

The buyer of 1227 25th Street appears to be the investment arm of the royal family of the State of Qatar, which has an embassy building one block east at 2555 M Street.



1227 25th Street NW

A 2007 zoning case allows two floors to be added to the 1227 building, which may make it attractive for

conversion to residences in part or in full. Two other offices buildings with views over Francis Field have been converted to fully residential since then.

Real estate sources tell the *Flyer* that the Qatari fund has other holdings in the District—including the Demonet Building at 1155 Connecticut Avenue—as do other foreign investors that consider the nation’s capital a desirable area for real estate investment.

Street” program organized for the West End through the District’s Department of Small and Local Business Development. Such programs exist in 24 other neighborhoods, including Dupont Circle and Georgetown.

Another new member with a well-defined priority is Donna Barbisch, who now represents the Watergate area. “My biggest issue is understanding what the issues are, and putting them into a strategic plan,” she told the *Flyer*.

A former Army combat nurse who rose to the rank of major general—and whose last service before retir-



Boundary area of ANC-2A

ing was at the Pentagon—Barbisch was drafted into the ANC as a write-in when no one took out papers to run for district 2A04.

Her way of thinking about the ANC, she explained, is not to deal with just the “surface issues that effect immediate life on the hyperlocal level,” but also to identify the underlying problems.

As an example she mentioned the safety issue in crossing Virginia Avenue at certain times of day: putting in a traffic light or crosswalk “is only a Band-Aid” if the road was not designed to handle the traffic.

“I want to make sure that all the dots connect,” she said. She would apply the same thinking to communications, health, education, and other issues.

The new commission will meet on Wednesday, January 27 at 7:00 pm, via Zoom video conference, during which it will elect one of its members as chair, and others as vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer. The rest of the agenda is not yet determined, but it will be posted in advance on the ANC’s website: anc2a.org.

Copyright © 2021 Friends of Francis Field
Friends of Francis Field is a non-profit corporation and a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Board of Directors: Jim O’Connell, Patricia Tith, Gary Griffith,
Laura Belt, Tom Firestone

Editor: Gary Griffith, email: gary@fffdc.org

www.FriendsofFrancisField.org

On and Off M Street

RESTAURANT FUTURES

Checking In with Chef Ris Lacoste

Whoever thought Ris would wind up running a drive-up? The interior of her chic restaurant was redone earlier this year, but Covid has changed everything a couple of times already.

“We’re in a constant state of pivot,” she told the *Flyer* when we checked in with her right before New Year’s Eve.

Ris (the restaurant) has stayed open since the pandemic began, trying to adjust to the changing limits on capacity and bar service—and now the three-week ban on indoor dining that will last until January 15.

“Curbside” is a new pivot in take-out and delivery: the staff brings your order outside to you or the delivery driver.

There is also a “Ris’s Soup Kitchen” menu



Ris, at 23rd and L Street, December 28, 2020.

now and she’s experimenting with what travels well. Don’t expect butter sauces.

“When you’re putting food in plastic containers, it loses a little of its charm,” she says. Nevertheless, if anyone knows food and what to do with it, it is Ris Lacoste.

Her life sounds like a mini-series based on Audrey Hepburn’s role in the film *Sabrina*.

Picture young Doris (called “Rissie” then) at the family table in gritty New Bedford, Massachusetts, eating what everyone else

ate on Wednesday—which was “Prince Spaghetti Day” according to billboards.

Then cooking cheeseburgers at age 16 on a grill at Friendly’s ... majoring in French at UC Berkeley ... working her way up at a fancy culinary school in Paris, where she paid her way as a typist ... then back to Massachusetts ... but to Cambridge this time, just off Harvard Square, cooking at Harvest, the hippest restaurant in the Hub during the early 1980s.



Ris Lacoste

That would be season one, before she came to Washington ... but we must skip over season two and fast forward now to December 2009 when she opened a place of her own in the West End.

She told a reporter from a college news service that she wanted it be “a classy neighborhood joint.” It was and still is.

Ris has mothered many of us through good times and bad, and we have loved her back, for her comforting meatloaf, spaghetti & meatballs (on Wednesdays, of course), butterscotch pudding, and sophisticated dishes put together with a touch and a philosophy that seems impossible to have acquired anywhere but in France.

Asked about how she’s getting by in the Covid world these days, she answered honestly that she’s in the same boat with other restaurants. “Nobody’s running a sustainable business,” she said. “We’re only surviving on the patience of landlords.”

We are rooting for all our restaurants, but especially for Ris, our neighborhood joint.

We noted that her special take-out menu for December 31 included “Oyster and Champagne Stew” (\$15) and “Hoppin’ John” (black-eyed peas and rice stewed with bacon-braised collard greens, \$10).

In the South, having Hoppin’ John on New Year’s Day is supposed to bring good luck and prosperity for the coming year. Ris and the rest of us could all use a little of that.

Ris, 2275 L Street NW. 202-730-2500. Website: risdc.com.

TERRA NOVA

Reaching the REACH

Victura Park, the Kennedy Center’s alfresco pop-up wine bar located within the new REACH complex will reopen January 9.

If that sounds a little strange—drinking wine outdoors in the winter—remember that everything is a little different now.

The REACH seems always to be capitalized to indicate that it is something big. In geography, a reach is a straight stretch of river. (See illustration below.) *Victura* was the name of John F. Kennedy’s sailboat.

The building where drinks and snacks are sold is in the lower left corner. There are



Steven Holl, rendering of the REACH

picnic and café tables in the grove of trees. Also, we are told, there will be some patio heaters.

Thirsty (and warmly dressed) locals who want to give this a try, can easily walk from the West End. Our advance scout has estimated that it is a half-mile due south of Trader Joe’s and pretty much a straight shot down 25th Street to New Hampshire Avenue and up the KC’s main steps. Then go straight ahead.

Hours and other details are still scanty. The best source of information may be the Twitter account (@VicturaParkDC) which can be accessed on the Internet by Googling.

During the pop-up Christmas market there in December, the Twitter feed mentioned cocoa and other hot drinks with and without alcohol.

The KC calls Victura Park “family-friendly” and says that “pets (on leash) are welcome.” It seems to be bicycle friendly as well.

Steven Holl’s architecture is worth the trip. This is going to be an even neater place to explore in good weather.

Worth a Walk or Worth Watching

TRAVEL NEARBY

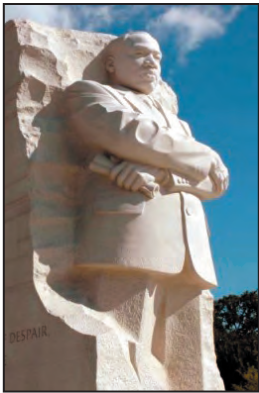
An MLK Outing on Foot

Another of the things that impresses us about the Village (see article on this page) is its walking group, which is still getting together physically, although in a socially distanced manner.

The group usually meets at the center of Washington Circle and heads off to an interesting destination. This takes place about once a month, usually on a Monday and is “weather contingent” as Village member and coordinator Lorna Grenadier tells us.

For January 18, the tentative destination is the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial** and the meeting time is 11:00 am. That date is the MLK Day holiday. Non-members are welcome to join in. The trek is about three miles one way. The group often “plays it by ear,” depending on who shows up. Changes in plan or detours are possible.

The concept, however, is easily replicated by individuals or smaller groups. A smart phone and Google now replace paper maps and guide books.



Lei Yixin, *Stone of Hope*, 2011.

The major element of the King Memorial in West Potomac Park, is the 30-foot, granite sculpture by Chinese artist Lei Yixin. It was unveiled in August 2011 and takes its title, *Stone of Hope*, from King’s “I have a dream” speech: “Out of a mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”

The memorial park covers four acres and is administered by the National Park Service. Nearby is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Bookstore, which has remained open since August and has restrooms and a ranger station. Telephone 202-347-1988 to check on hours.

Back issues of the *Flyer* contain listings for local restaurants, groceries, dry cleaners and other services that may be helpful during the Covid-19 situation. See website:

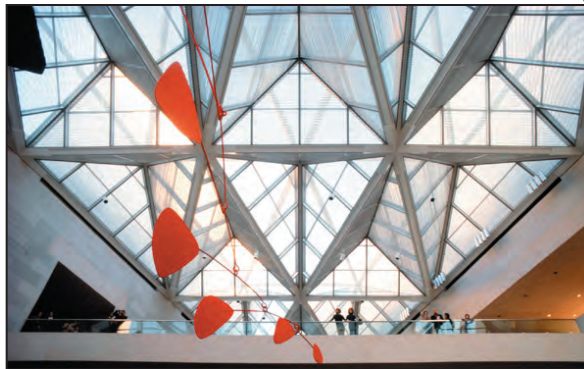
www.friendsoffrancisfield.org

THE SCHOOL WITHIN WALLS

The Village Teaches In and Reaches Out

While we don’t usually think of the Foggy Bottom West End Village as an educational organization, its programs to help its members age in place have always included cultural activities.

Before the pandemic, rehearsals at the Kennedy Center and museum visits were staples. There was also a weekly “Coffee and Company” at a neighborhood café, and



East Building Atrium, National Gallery. John Nicolais photo, 1978.

a once-a-month Happy Hour at a local bar or restaurant.

Now all of that is virtual. As the Village reaches out this winter, it is opening up some of its programs to the public, including **A Tour of the National Gallery of Art’s Campus**, the virtual version of its “Art Thursday” on January 7, at 1:00 pm via Zoom. Reservations are necessary, but there is no charge. (See contact information below.)

The tour will be conducted by Susan Wertheim, the museum’s chief architect. It includes the modern East Building designed by I. M. Pei (see photo above); the earlier, neo-classical West Building, and the Sculpture Garden.

“This will be a first for me,” Wertheim told the *Flyer*. But it is not the first virtual museum visit for the Village, which is doing a remarkable job of acquainting its mostly over-60 membership with the new technology.

For a December program via Zoom with the Phillips Collection on Renoir’s painting, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, the Village had 58 participants. This is now on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oomlc98urjg) and is also worth watching.

“Zoom offers the opportunity to do different things than you can do on site,” explains Jackie Lemire, who plans many of the art offerings and other programs.

The Village seems to be in the vanguard of organizing and innovating at-home learning and adult education.

Tech support by telephone is one of the many services the Village provides to its members. Keeping them connected with the world and with each other is another.

“Even over Zoom people establish relationships,” says Denise Snyder, the Village’s executive director.

There are more than 300 such Villages in the United States, and 17 in the District, each run by its own board of directors. Membership fees pay for a small staff, but much is done by members.

The Foggy Bottom West End Village has about 150 of them at present.

This winter it is reaching out further. Instead of requiring a full year’s membership, it is now offering three-month memberships to support older adults who may need



Some of the 58 Zooming Villagers in December.

extra assistance during the Covid-19 situation which has created more difficulty for seniors to shop, run errands, get to medical appointments and keep connected.

Contact: info@fbwevillage.org. Telephone: 202-333-1327.