

The Capital

ANNAPOLIS, MD.

PUBLISHED BY THE CAPITAL-GAZETTE NEWSPAPERS
AMERICA'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS

Founded 1727

Now In Our 270th Year

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Our say

Three key issues will play huge role in city's future

AS SUMMER turns into Annapolis' fall election season, it's a good time for a few comments on the city's long-term prospects. With all its faults, Annapolis remains a wonderful town, set in a marvelous bayside environment, and blessed with many residents who care about it passionately.

Our three biggest immediate problems are what to do with the Anne Arundel Medical Center's downtown building and its five-acre site, what to do about business and commercial development in city areas outside the Historic District, and what to do about the closing of the Naval Surface Warfare Center across the Severn River from the city proper.

A magnificent job has already been done in encouraging the preservation of some 1,500 older houses in the Historic District. But as St. Clair Wright, the leader of the preservation forces, maintained again and again, the object was more than simply to preserve houses. It was also to ensure that the city of Annapolis continued to thrive as a living, breathing, working organism — not as a Williamsburg, Va.-style museum.

Historic Annapolis is evolving into a more broadly based organization and many of its directors and members are wondering how best to carry out the original intention of keeping Annapolis whole and healthy. The answers, we submit, lie in the three issues we mentioned.

First, with respect to the hospital building, which is slated to close:

Three approaches have surfaced. One is to turn it into an assisted-living center. But hospitals are special-purpose buildings, with odd-sized bays, lead-lined walls, and other impediments that make conversion difficult.

A second approach: Tear the building down, keep the parking garage, and put up hotel or office space. A third approach is to tear it down and build luxury condominiums, which would have some excellent views and easy access to downtown Main and West streets.

The city's leaders are going to have to pick one of these approaches or suggest others.

Second, with respect to development in the areas outside the Historic District:

Here, too, there is a lack of consensus. Virtually all of the new construction around Annapolis has been outside the city limits. The tax base is shifting away from the town. It is easy to blame the politicians for this. More accurate, perhaps, is to note that the city has had a consensus, one way or another, against additional growth.

Forty years ago the population of Annapolis was the same as it is today, about 35,000. Meanwhile Anne Arundel County's population has increased from 100,000 to nearly 500,000, reducing Annapolis' share of the county population from one-third to well under 10 percent.

Why has the growth, even around Annapolis, come on county land? Because it is easier to do business there, and because special exception zoning, the norm in Annapolis, has been replaced in the county, as in most of the country, with regular permitted use zoning. In other words, builders don't have to ask the politicians for special exceptions for every yogurt stand or McDonald's.

Should the city encourage more growth outside the Historic District? If you believe that more people and more business will mean a healthier city, the answer is yes. If you believe that Chinquapin Round Road or West Street extended or the old Trumpy boat shed are enhancements, and should remain as they are, you would say no. A healthy city requires a balanced mixture. It is important to debate the proper balance: not no growth, not all growth, but, essentially, how much growth?

The malls and shopping centers just outside town are now the real main street of Annapolis. The downtown's health will depend largely on how many people live in or near it. Will we choose for it to be a tourist mecca, like San Francisco's Fishermen's Wharf or like Ocean City? Or will we prefer to develop more for the residents than for the tourists? Achieving the proper balance is a subject for serious debate. This is perhaps the central issue.

Finally, with respect to the huge infrastructure at the naval research facility, now slated to close:

This, too, will have a large impact. Should whatever takes over the site be commercial or residential? The sewer, water and power hookups beg for use. But what kind of use and what kind of user can best convert it, adapt it — or raze it in favor of something else? It's something to think about.

Reasonable people inside and outside the historic community can help define the issues, sharpen and identify key differences, and think more clearly about achieving a better Annapolis in the next century.



Readers' views

10-mile run

The city of Annapolis and the greater Annapolis community should be very proud of themselves after hosting last week's 22nd annual Annapolis 10-Mile Run. I had the privilege of participating in this year's event for the first time and found it to be the best-organized and best-supported race that I have ever run.

Credit for the success of the race has to be shared across the board. The Annapolis Striders must certainly be congratulated for their flawless organization of the event. The countless volunteers did a fantastic job, from parking cars to handing out water at water stops. Both the Annapolis-City Police Department and the Anne Arundel County Police Department did an A-1 job of protecting the route.

Equally impressive was the support given by people along the race route. Spectators were out clapping and yelling encouragement to the runners as they passed by (they had to be clapping and yelling for some time by the time I got to them). Homeowners had engineered sprinkler systems that would squirt cooling water onto

the course. Citizens even set up their own water and orange juice tables for our use. They made us feel welcome.

For most Marylanders, Annapolis is the state capital, the home of the United States Naval Academy and the "Sailing Capital of the World." The Annapolis 10-miler demonstrated to more than 3,000 runners that Annapolis is a community of people, and very friendly people at that.

DOUGLAS R. MILLER
Town Manager
La Plata

Youth shelter

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter in order to thank everyone for their private and professional contributions that were recently donated through me for the new Anne Arundel County Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter.

"Shelter From The Storm" will provide a variety of services to Anne Arundel County's youth and their families, ages 13 to 18 years. It is part of the Harundale Youth and Family Services Organization. As this is a grant-funded, nonpro-

fit venture, these many and varied donations have greatly eased the burden of the initial start-up cost. It has been most gratifying for me personally to see the level of caring and giving from the various individuals and corporations in the community and how generous they have been.

I want to offer my personal thanks to each of you personally for your many donations and the cooperative spirit with which you responded to the call. Congratulations on a job well done by everyone.

Bless you one and all.

EMILY A. HALL
Annapolis

Election letters

To ensure that we can print them well before the election, we ask that all letters concerning the Annapolis primary election be submitted to us by the end of the business day this Tuesday, Sept. 2.

Affirmative action is in trouble

When circumstances pressed President Clinton to declare himself on one side or the other on affirmative action, he embraced a classically Clintonian middle-ground position.

"Mend it, don't end it," he declared.

That sounded great, the perfect bumper-sticker slogan, even though nobody knew what he meant. Now we are beginning to find out what he meant. His recent efforts to "mend it" are essentially ending it.

First came the Clinton administration's Aug. 14 announcement that it is considering a proposal to make it easier for white-owned businesses to qualify for government contracts that originally were set aside for businesses owned by racial and ethnic minorities.

By expanding the groups that qualify for contract set-asides without calling for an expansion in the contracts, the administration offers black contractors a smaller piece of a pie that is not growing in these tight-budgeted times.

The small business set-aside program was conceived like other affirmative action programs in the 1960s to help black-owned businesses develop and create jobs after centuries of slavery and racial discrimination. But, it didn't take long for various administrations to expand the program's definition of "small disadvantaged" businesses to include a list of racial and ethnic minorities too lengthy to detail here — plus whites, male and female, if they could make a showing of past bias.

The Clinton administration's proposals would make it easier for whites to make such a showing. Defenders of the proposed change say it would help broaden the base of political support for affirmative action programs in general.

If everyone is included among beneficiaries of the program, it is reasoned, everyone will support it. But it is also true that if everyone is special, no one is special.

That point is underscored by Federal District Judge John L. Kane's ruling in Denver. He ruled last month that a white construction company owner became eligible for affirmative action precisely because he had been victimized by an affirmative action program the Supreme Court had ruled unconstitutional.

The case only applies to Colorado, for now. But, when victimization by affirmative action becomes grounds for a white man to qualify for affirmative action, you can declare the program all but dead.

Then came the revelation on Aug. 22 that the Clinton administration will no longer defend a decision by the school district in Piscataway Township, N.J., to lay off a white teacher rather than a similarly qualified black one in the interest of racial diversity when it had to reduce its staff by one person.

By taking the white teacher's side in the Piscataway case, the Clinton administration is giving up the fight before the battle has begun.

Under Deval Patrick, Clinton's former top civil rights enforcer, the administration argued the layoff of a white teacher in the interest of maintaining



Clarence Page

racial diversity was legal under existing laws and Supreme Court decisions. Its new position is almost identical to that of the Bush administration, which opposed affirmative action in this and just about every other case.

Both cases show a classically Clintonian effort to carve a middle ground that pleases everyone, but, in effect, concedes important arguments to opponents of the programs.

The administration's new Piscataway argument holds that affirmative action should rarely, if ever, be used as a basis for layoffs. Unlike general hiring and promotion programs, the administration argues, layoffs involve specific people and impose tangible hardship on those who are laid off.

Still, after undercutting its own legal ground, the administration clings to the argument that preferences to minorities in hiring and promotions is desirable and legally justifiable, even when there is no evidence of past discrimination.

In fact, this is a case that never should have been a case. While the media and others tend to argue that the two teachers were identical in every way but race, no two people are perfectly identical.

The school district could have chosen any number of reasons — or no reason at all — for laying off one instead of the other. Instead it announced to the world that it had made its decision based on race, which invited a lawsuit — which is precisely what it received, even though the white teacher was later called back to work.

With friends like the Piscataway school district, affirmative action hardly needs enemies.

Now the Clinton administration has conceded an important piece of legal ground by defending diversity as sufficient justification for a hiring, but not for a layoff. In other words, it is saying that racial preferences are OK, as long as no identifiable individuals are inconvenienced.

Civil rights law used to be argued on firmer moral ground than that. But the political ground has shifted. White folks increasingly think black folks have gotten enough breaks. It is getting harder to distinguish the friends of affirmative action from its enemies.

Clinton should embrace a new slogan: If you can't support it, don't contort it, just scrap it.

It would not be very catchy, but at least it would be honest.

Literary merit can still make a best seller

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — On a clear day, you can see Cold Mountain from here. What Charles Frazier calls its "blue bulk" is about 4 miles yonder. And Americans by the hundreds of thousands are traversing the "cudged, humped" terrain hereabouts by reading Frazier's spellbinding novel "Cold Mountain."

The story of the novel's success — it is currently the best-selling work of fiction — speaks well of the nation's literary taste and the publishers, reviewers and booksellers who shape and serve it. This is a story like the one the novel tells, one of regional and local particularities, with national resonance.

Frazier, 46, who toiled on this, his first novel, for six years, lives over near Raleigh, where he and his wife raise horses and a daughter. His novel takes readers on a long, eventful, sometimes harrowing walk from a Confederate hospital in Raleigh to the mountain late in 1864. It is a trek Frazier imagines for his great-great-uncle Inman, who, like his namesake in the novel, left the Confederate cause after Petersburg. Inman's is a walk on the wild side, through a semirural society on the losing side of a war. The murderous Teague and the Home Guard, and some of the book's darkest moments, come from the historical record.

"Cold Mountain" is not a Civil War novel like, say, Michael Shaara's "The Killer Angels." It is not about famous men fighting familiar battles, although Frazier's brief treatment of the fighting at Fredericksburg would



George Will

do Shaara or Stephen Crane proud.

Rather, "Cold Mountain" is a love story involving a soldier who has learned "how frail the human body is against all that is sharp and hard" and who is seeking "a life so quiet he would not need ears." He hopes that by reaching Ada he can blink away "the metal face of the age" and put away what years of warring have given him — a sense of being nothing but, "a hut of bones."

Frazier breathes new life into delectable old words of regional dialect (a foolish person is "clodpated"). He writes like a man frolicking in the language with the energy of the trout he describes as "bright and firm as shavings from a bar of silver." Asked if he considers himself a regional writer, he allows as how he can hardly think of a writer who isn't.

His book's success radiated from the Southeast region, where every bookstore and newspaper received galley or early copies. The publisher, Morgan Entekin of Grove/Atlantic, believed the book justified the gamble because "when you finish it you can't not talk to someone about it."

A grand fact about contemporary America is that the literary marketplace works remarkably well. It does because the brotherhood and sisterhood of the book business, including publishers, their traveling representatives, reviewers for local newspapers and booksellers — particularly the small, hardy independents who know their customers' tastes — love books. A labor of that love is talking about the books they love most ardently.

As Nan Talese of Doubleday did with another surprising success, Thomas Cahill's "How the Irish Saved Civilization," Entekin even sent galley of "Cold Mountain" to other publishers' reps, confident they would spread the word. They did. Vintage, a division of Random House, bought the paperback rights (Vintage recently had success with another literary gem, David Guterson's "Snow Falling on Cedars"), and helped build the demand for Grove/Atlantic's hardcover edition.

Elaine Petrocelli and her husband run Book Passage, an independent bookstore in Corte Madera, just outside San Francisco. The store, a sort of year-round literary seminar, has about 400 author events a year. She says that by the time their initial order of 40 copies of "Cold Mountain" reached her store, the staff was passionately committed to the book. They have now sold 180 copies.

Frazier credits similar stores nationwide, such as the one in Blytheville, Ark., and That Bookstore in Blytheville, and Leria in Jackson, Miss. He also believes reviewers in local newspapers have special credibility. There have been many ripple effects from these stores and reviewers. For example, that at the University of South Carolina where Frazier studied with James Dickey, he has mounted an exhibit of the 19th-century books mentioned in "Cold Mountain."

By now "Cold Mountain" has ignited a self-sustaining word-of-mouth chain reaction. The first printing, around Memorial Day, was 25,000. Shortly after Labor Day the first printing will put the total over 500,000. For Frazier, and for friends of serious literature, numbers are (to borrow his words) as soggy as creek noise.