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From: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>

To: Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization <info@munjoyhill.org>

Sent: Saturday, July 1, 2023 at 10:06:23 AM EDT

Subject: MHNO 2023 Annual Meeting Photos, Enjoy Summer on the Hill!

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization

92 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
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July 1, 2023



Proudly serving Portland's Munjoy Hill neighborhood since 1979.

2023 MHNO June Annual Meeting
Was Fun for All!



The 44th Annual Meeting of the Members of the Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization took place on Wednesday, June 21st on the side lawn of The Hill Arts, formerly known as St. Lawrence Arts.



Lively music for the social hour was provided by the Maine Ideal Social Aid & Sanctuary Band. Open to volunteer musicians of all levels, the band donates all net earnings Maine social justice organizations.



In the midst of a particularly rainy June, by a stroke of good luck, the MHNO managed to hold its Annual Meeting on a rare, warm, cloudless day. The sun was enjoyed by all.



The kid's area was managed by new Board member Ali Mann (left in red), continuing Board member Carol Connor (white hat) and newly elected Vice President, Mike Dixon (plaid shirt).



Munjoy Hill neighbors talk in foreground, while in background Board member Mary Casale reminisces with author and State Representative Ed Crockett about his experiences growing up on Munjoy Hill in the 1960s and 1970s as one of eight siblings, described in his memoir named after his father, [The Ghosts of Walter Crockett](#).



Maggy Wolf, retiring as the MHNO President but continuing as a Board member, talks with Umaru Balde about his first two months as Portland's first Director of Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Balde spoke briefly about his open-door policy and his willingness to engage with anyone about social justice issues.



Toe-tapping music, face painting, assorted crafts, play dough, and kiddie corn hole competition entertained many young Munjoy Hill residents during the event.



Munjoy Hill gardeners, past presidents of the MHNO, assorted old and new neighbors, and envoys from other neighborhood association were among those in attendance.



2019-2022 Past MHNO President, Wayne Valzania, stepping down from the Board after several years of service (right) talked with former City Councilor Justin Costa (left) about how to begin to address Portland's crisis in long-term and workforce housing.



Munjoy Hill author and retired history professor, Michael Connolly (food table, red hat) talked with neighbors about his book, Murky Overhead, a work of historical fiction depicting the life of a young Irish immigrant couple living on Munjoy Hill in 1900.

During the business meeting following the social hour, the Board of Directors for 2023-2024 was formalized. Board members continuing to serve the second year of their two-year terms were recognized during the meeting: Carol Connor, Mike Dixon, Karen Snyder and Barbara Vestal.

A slate of new Board of Directors members, starting new 2 year terms, elected by acclaim, are: Peter Blackstone, Mary Casale, Ali Mann, Deb Murray, Nina Schmir and Maggy Wolf. Ned Chester was also elected by acclaim to fill the remaining one year term of a Board member who resigned mid-term.

The new President and Vice President, put forward by the Nominations Committee from among the Board of Directors and elected for one-year terms were Barbara Vestal, President and Mike Dixon, Vice President. The Secretary and Treasurer are to be elected by the Board of Directors at the next monthly meeting, July 10th.

Free Summer Community Concerts in Fort Allen Park

Friends of the Eastern Promenade will again be hosting their FREE, family-friendly concert series on Thursdays, 6 p.m. at the Fort Allen Park Bandstand beginning July 20th. These concerts are weather permitting. If in doubt, visit <https://easternpromenade.org/summer-community-concert-series>.

- July 20th: Wildflower

- July 27th Chandlers Military Band
- August 3rd The Empress
- August 10th Muddy Ruckus
- August 17th Samuel James

Free Summer Concerts in Lincoln Park: Love Lincoln Park

Just beyond Munjoy Hill, at the corner of Franklin and Congress Streets, the Friends of Lincoln Park are presenting a free concert series on Tuesdays, 6-7:30 pm, for four weeks, starting July 18th. The schedule and descriptions are::

July 18: Wayne Street Band, an acoustic roots band playing originals, pop, country and bluegrass;

July 25: Zoot Jumpers, playing hot jump, blues and cool swing;

August 1: Blues Prophets, good time blues for dancing and having fun; and

August 8, The Renovators, playing original rootsy-rock, blues, soul, swing, country and a lot more.

For more information, see lovelincolnpark.org

Music! in the Evening Summer Breeze



**6pm - 7:30pm in Lincoln Park
Free To All • LoveLincolnPark.org**

MHNO Needlecraft Sundays Pause for the Summer, Resuming Sept. 10th

PRESIDENT'S NOTE:

Greetings, Munjoy Hill Friends and Neighbors!

It was great to see so many of you at the MHNO Annual Meeting on June 21st. It seems improbable that June marked the completion of 46 years of living on Munjoy Hill. My husband, Ned Chester, and I were among the first dozen incorporators of the MHNO in 1979, following the lead of Jim Price and other long-time Hill residents. We were heavily involved with the MHNO for its first 7 years, took a break for 30 years, and reengaged with the MHNO about 7 years ago.

Looking back over 46 years, I believe the MHNO can be as vital to our collective well-being now as it was back then, even though the issues and needs have evolved. But now, as then, we have to put in the collective effort to make it responsive to current needs.

Please indulge me for a short stroll back through MHNO history. I promise future messages won't be as long.

The issue that prompted the founding of the MHNO in 1979 was a sense that Munjoy Hill, which was then characterized as the poorest neighborhood in the State, was not receiving respectful treatment as an important part of the City of Portland. After experiencing years of disinvestment, it needed an organized grassroots voice to advocate for itself.

In particular, in the late 1970s, the neighborhood was upset that its small, hyper-local elementary schools (Shailer, Emerson, and North) were being shut and replaced by one large elementary school distant from most of their homes. The site of the current East End Community School (at the far end of North Street), then contained a large building that had been constructed as Jack Junior High School. With new junior high schools elsewhere in the City, Jack was decommissioned as a junior high and then was designated as the new, consolidated elementary school for the entire neighborhood. It had no playground. The facilities, including urinals, were not properly sized for little kids. The family connection to small schools was severed. And most kids could not easily walk to school due to the distance involved.

In 1979 and the early 1980s, the MHNO organized to advocate for the needs of the neighborhood. (Remarkably, there was a lot of federal money available to address problems in poor neighborhoods; during the early 80s, the MHNO had multiple full-time VISTA-volunteers, plus money to support MHNO's operating expenses, including the publication of a monthly newspaper. But that is a different story for another time.)

MHNO's early advocacy took many forms. For example, in 1981 the MHNO kicked off an effort to convert the vacant former elementary schools into cooperative housing. Ultimately, they were not structured as cooperative housing and other entities took over the redevelopment responsibilities, but they were converted into affordable housing. The MHNO tried to ease financial stress. It developed a fuel buying club to negotiate a better member price on heating oil. It engaged in large group efforts, including staging periodic spaghetti dinners for a hundred or more in the school cafeteria and, putting on elaborate, well-attended day-long annual family festivals. In 1985, the MHNO, in conjunction with the East End Children's Workshop, mobilized approximately one thousand volunteers (including a jail pre-release team, a fraternity, a group

from the National Guard, Root Cellar volunteers, many concerned parents, other Hill residents, and volunteer skilled laborers from the neighborhood) to construct two hand-built, community- and architect-designed wooden playgrounds over an intense 4-day effort. Support volunteers provided food and childcare for playground builders. By the end of the day on Sunday, community volunteers had built a massive, imaginative playground for Jack School and a smaller one for Adams School.

The issues have certainly changed over the last 46 years. Back in the late 1970s, the neighborhood faced a much higher incidence of poverty, a much higher density of residents, and it had a certain very visible cadre of disaffected youth who openly engaged in drug-trafficking on Congress Street.

But the critical strength the Hill had going for it was that it was a close-knit community. Everybody knew almost everybody else. People hung out on porches. Mothers kept an eye on everybody's child, and were quick to report problems to a parent. Residents participated in Boy and Girl Scouts, t-ball, churches and various social clubs. City employee Natalie Cotton oversaw weekday gatherings of up to 45 seniors at the Cummings Center for crafts, beano, and other pursuits. Some people may have been short on material resources, but the social network was there to provide necessary support.

At the same time as it was close-knit, it was also generous and welcoming. There was plenty of affordable housing for anybody who wanted to move to the Hill. There were many colorful residents who were accepted on their own terms. And there was an openness to people "from away" settling in to find creative paths to following their own interests. There was social, emotional and financial breathing room for people to explore different ways of living.

Now the pendulum on Munjoy Hill seems to have swung the other direction. Most current residents seem to have plenty of material resources. There is less crowding; often one or two people live in the space that 40 years ago would have housed large families with many children. Sadly, there are almost no "neighborhood characters" left. The open-air drug market is now long gone, which is, of course, a good thing. But housing is scarce and most of it is no longer affordable. The requirement to devote so much effort to cover housing costs takes away opportunities to socialize, explore and be creative.

While we generally have more material resources, we now find that the social fabric is sadly frayed. Many of us find that we don't really know our neighbors. Maybe they rely on their automatic garage door opener to come and go. Maybe they are living elsewhere for a good part of the year. Maybe we are surrounded by (possible illegal) non-owner-occupied short-term rentals. Maybe they, or we, don't feel the need to engage with the broader community because post-pandemic, we know how easy it is to get almost all of our needs met in the isolation of our own home.

But if you, like me, are hoping for more of a connection to others, consider investing more of your time in the MHNO. It is my expectation that we will continue to advocate for neighbors in need – particularly for those in the remaining deed-restricted affordable housing, those experiencing food insecurity, and others who may be the victims of fire or another casualty. And it is my expectation that we will continue to advocate for the Munjoy Hill community as a

whole. But I believe the MHNO can also provide valuable opportunities to engage with our Munjoy Hill community in order to reknit social connections.

During the next year, please be open to opportunities that resonate with you and join in. Board members have lots of ideas: Some of them include continuing the many things we are already doing: hosting monthly First Friday gatherings, weekly needlecrafters, and seasonal events such as Hilloween, the Earth Day Eastern Prom clean up, spring seedling and perennial sale, and East End Community School art show, and continuing to advocate for the neighborhood in various governmental decisions.

Other possibilities are new and, depending on energy, could include: reviving the walking school bus; hosting a series of gatherings for new arrivals to the Hill; and taking part in an environmental initiative to custom-build simple energy-conserving window inserts.

We are only going to be able to succeed if the MHNO can inspire active participation from more of its membership, beyond the hard-working Board of Directors. Participation may be old-fashioned. But it can be mutually beneficial. Please let us hear from you if you are inspired, have your own ideas, or are otherwise prepared to get more involved in reknitting our neighborhood's social fabric.

Let's connect,

*Barbara Vestal
President, MHNO
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The next monthly business meeting of the 13-members of the Board of Directors of the MHNO will be held on Monday, July 10th at 6:00 p.m. Monthly meetings are held in person at the Hill House, 92 Congress Street. If you are a member of the MHNO and are interested in sitting in on the Board of Director's meeting, please join us in person.

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization | 92 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101

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