

Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization

92 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
info@munjoyhill.org
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Proudly serving Portland's Munjoy Hill neighborhood since 1979.



Bobby Lipps, 1953 - 2020. Photos courtesy of Deidre Nice.

Neighborhood Remembers Bobby Lipps, "Extension Cord King", for his Decades of Contributions to the Community

Bobby Lipps, a familiar sight to many long-time Hill residents, died on December 21, 2020 at the age of 67 years. Bobby grew up on the Hill and was a life-long resident. He spent the last 27 years of his life working along side his friend and mentor, Deirdre Nice, on the transformation of the deteriorated parish house of the former St. Lawrence Congregational Church into the thriving St. Lawrence Arts.

Bobby liked to be where the action was, helping out in any way he could. Born to Jackie Lipps in 1953, Bobby grew up with brothers John, Teddy, and Jimmy in the heart of Munjoy Hill. In the 50s and 60s, the neighborhood blessed with an abundance of children. Bobby's mother and her friends were the Cub Scout and Boy Scout den mothers, the PTO officers, and members of the fledgling NAACP. The children may have felt some freedom roam the neighborhood, but they were actually closely monitored by a network of adults who would not hesitate to phone a child's mother if an intervention was needed.

Eventually Bobby started working at Goodwill Industries where he had first claim on any donated extension cords. By 1977 Bobby had collected and repaired enough extension cords that he was named "Extension Cord King" of Munjoy Hill. He proudly boasted that he could plug in at his mother's house on Mountfort Street and string his collection of cords up Congress Street to power his radio on the Eastern Prom.

In the early days of the Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization, Bobby proved to be a very important member. The first three Munjoy Hill Family Festivals in the early 1980s, complete with musical performances, field days, visits from dignitaries, road races, pony rides, baking competitions, tethered hot air balloon rides, etc. were powered by Bobby Lipps. He also inspected the construction of various booths.

In 1986 the MHNO joined with the East End Childrens' Workshop to muster 1,000 volunteers over 4 days to construct two playgrounds, built stick by stick at Adams School and Jack Elementary School, using playground architect Bob Leather's customized designs. Bobby was there from beginning to end with his extension cords and positive attitude to power up the tools, childcare operations, and mess tents.

And when the MHNO created the Munjoy Hill Housing Association to be the catalyst for the conversion of the former Emerson and Shailer Elementary Schools into workforce housing, Bobby assisted folks who were approved to harvest surplus blackboards, wainscoating, and other fixtures to repurpose them into buildings throughout the Hill.

Bobby did not restrict his neighborhood work to organized efforts. Anywhere it looked like people could use a hand, Bobby was there to volunteer. If the new lawyers on the Hill were trying to convert a storefront into offices, Bobby was there to oversee and offer advice. If a lawn looked overgrown and neglected, Bobby might track down the owner and volunteer to clean it up. He had very good common sense, a know-how for fixing things, and a sophisticated appreciation of irony.

Bobby found his life's calling in 1993 when he started helping Deirdre Nice reclaim the recently purchased, deteriorated church and parish house at 76 Congress Street. Converting the parish house into St. Lawrence Arts performing arts center and sustaining it on a daily basis was a project which was to consume most of Bobby's attention over the next 27 years. A 2010 video aptly captures Bobby's dedication to the effort, attention to detail, use of recycled materials, and sense of

invention: <https://vimeo.com/liquidcreativemedia/review/8852560/dd2421048d?fbclid=IwAR2j8AermvFmAbOct-tNZhCpZr03hOU6Ecz7aUgCRb431WSbVTPyPyQIVZA>

Bobby Lipps' life, and the way in which he was respectfully embraced in a manner that allowed him to utilize his unique set of talents, embody our aspirations for this neighborhood. A diversity of skills, talents, and points of view enrich all residents. Deirdre Nice was the anchor, great friend and mentor to Bobby Lipps for over 27 years. Many others enjoyed significant, symbiotic relationships with Bobby as well. Munjoy Hill is a better place because Bobby resided among us, and we at the MHNO want to acknowledge his lasting contribution.

It is hoped that a celebration of the life of Bobby Lipps, as a collaboration between St. Lawrence Arts, the MHNO, and others who knew him well, will be held later in the year, when it is again safe to gather in person.

If you have a particular memory of Bobby you want to share, either hold on to it for later or feel free to write it down and forward it to info@munjoyhill.org for safekeeping.



PROPOSED MUNJOY HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT GOES TO CITY COUNCIL FOR FINAL ACTION

After action was postponed by the former City Council in November, 2020, the new City Council (with 3 new members) again takes up the proposal this month.

City Council will have a remote workshop on the proposed Munjoy Hill Historic District on Monday, January 11th at 5:30. The agenda, which contains the Zoom link, should be available by clicking

here: <https://www.portlandmaine.gov/129/Agendas-Minutes> and then scrolling to Remote City Council Workshop - re Munjoy Hill Historic District.

It is not expected that public comments will be taken at the workshop, but emails to the Mayor and Councilors are always appropriate.

The City Council remote public hearing on the proposed Munjoy Hill Historic District, with anticipated vote on final designation, is scheduled for February 1, 2021. The agenda for that 5:30 meeting is not yet available. Public comment will be taken at that meeting. You can speak on February 1st or email comments prior to that date.

The MHNO remains strongly in support of the proposed Munjoy Hill Historic District and 6 associated landmark designations. Munjoy Hill

represents a remarkably intact example of working-class residential architecture of the 19th and early 20th century. The plethora of vernacular frame houses on small lots in Hill streets has survived past economic trends and contributes greatly to the ambience, sense of place and quality of life.

We believe designation of at least the recommended portion of Munjoy Hill as a local historic district is an important way to protect the rich architectural heritage of Munjoy Hill, while thoughtfully managing change. We also believe it will help stabilize our neighborhood character and protect existing affordable housing. Historic preservation protections are an important tool for managing compatible change while also protecting the important character-defining features of Munjoy Hill's built environment.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE: *The next monthly business meeting of the 13-members of the Board of Directors of the MHNO will be held on Monday, February 8, at 6:00 p.m. It will be held remotely using Zoom. Please note that this is NOT the Annual Meeting of members, which is always held in June. If you are a member of the MHNO and are interested in sitting in on the Board of Director's meeting, please send an email to info@munjoyhill.org and request that you be emailed a link to the February MHNO Board of Director's meeting.*

Stay safe and be well!

Wayne Valzania,
w.valzania@munjoyhill.org
President



Photo of the former St. Lawrence Congregational Church. St. Lawrence Arts occupies the parish house, the left portion of the building. The parish house is already designated as a local landmark. The sanctuary suffered from significant deterioration after the church use ceased and prior owners stopped heating the building. Despite major efforts by Friends of the St. Lawrence to stabilize the structure, extensive structural instability eventually required the dismantling of the bell tower and sanctuary in 2008.
