President’s Message

by Bruce Holberg, President, Society Hill Towers Owners Association

Welcome to the President’s Message, my first as your new SHTOA president. I was elected by the Council on May 22, 2017, along with our other officers. Jim Moss announced earlier that he would not stand for reelection as president, after doing a fabulous job, but he was elected vice president. Congratulations to Jim, and to Jeremy Siegel and Mary Purcell, who continue in their roles as treasurer and secretary respectively; and to Otis Smith who was re-elected. We look forward to serving you and working with management in our new terms to keep the Towers top-notch. Congratulations too, to Ben Avicolli, who joins us as our newest council member. Leaving the council after many years with our gratitude and affection is Paul Giordano.

As you will see in this report, we are navigating through unusual times here at the Towers, what with the HVAC project and the possibility of a new needle tower high-rise on the site of the Ritz 5 Theaters. My goal is to keep you informed and involved so that we can maneuver through these extraordinary issues together. Let’s look at these as well as some other timely items.

HVAC Project
We have made significant strides recently. We have had a committee meet with four potential Construction Management (CM) firms, and we have narrowed the field to two candidates. Please know that I am writing this column at the end of May, so by the time it is published in the newsletter we may have met again, fully vetted the proposals from two successful firms, and selected a CM for the project. If so, we will notify you. Retention of the CM will be key as we will be depending on the CM’s input in completing the draft of the Request for Proposals (RFP) that will go to the contractors who wish to be considered for this project. Among the other principal functions of the Construction Manager is working with our staff in keeping contact with our residents and keeping them informed up to and during the rebuilding. We are hyper-aware of this need.

Once our consultant, Howard Alderson, and the CM complete the RFP, it will go out to contractors. Simultaneously, a finance committee has been organized that will consider financing options, bank relationships, handling certain construction costs, etc. That committee will require some weeks to complete this task in order to give you the answers you need. Mr. Alderson believes that we may be able to begin the project in late 2017, although payment from owners won’t be due until 2018. We will be able to communicate the costs to owners after we have the contractor bids and have made a selection. Updates will be sent to you as we know more.

Ritz 5 Tower
As you likely have heard, 500 Walnut developer Tom Scannapieco has announced his intention to build a luxury condominium building on the site of the Ritz 5 theaters. It would be accompanied by a lower rise building that would house the relocated theaters in the adjoining Nelson Building in the 200 block of Walnut Street. Scannapieco met with the Society Hill Civic Association (SHCA) to present his preliminary plans. He has the Nelson Building under agreement and is in negotiation for the Ritz 5 site. If he is able to build the tower he wants, it will house 30-50 units and extend to approximately 29 stories. Obviously, this presents a concern to residents of Society Hill Towers, his nearest neighbor.

Every one of our Council members is opposed to the construction of this high-rise. We are prepared to fight for height limitations in conjunction with SHCA and Independence National Historical Park, and are in the process of defining a strategy to do so most effectively. When we have more definitive plans, we will let you know via letter what you can do to help fight this project. Meanwhile, if you have considered joining the Society Hill Towers Community Political Action Committee, this would be a good time to do so, as it will no doubt play a role in the strategy. For membership details, go to www.shtcpac.com.

The “Food Garden” Site
Unfortunately the possible tenant with whom we were negotiating decided to pull out of the project. We now have switched realtors and have retained Allan Domb Realty to find a qualified tenant for us. We are hopeful that we can rent the space to a business that will provide a real amenity for the Towers’ residents.

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Activities Calendar

Activities Abound

Thanks to your neighbors within the Towers, we have an ever-broadening set of activities for you to try and hopefully continue if you are a resident of the Towers.

Healthy Exercise
The summer schedule shows an expanded set of free health related activities designed for you. The newest one exists thanks to Lisa Levine. She will offer a Yoga Class on Thursdays (beginning June 15th) at 9 a.m in our community room.

Returning this year is the popular Aqua-Exercise led by Victoria Haas in our swimming pool. You do not have to be a pool member to join. However check with the leader on space available. This is offered most Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10 a.m.

These two volunteers join the ongoing Walking Club initiated by Susan Leshnoff. The walk time is targeted for those going to work. They leave from the flagpoles exactly at 8 a.m. and return exactly at 8:30 a.m. on most Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Donna Cotzen continues to lead Exercise With Donna in our community room most Mondays and Wednesdays starting at 9 a.m. This is a 40-minute exercise group that entails 10 minutes of warm-up stretching and 30 minutes with the group using a DVD from the Aging Backwards series of Miranda Esmond White.

Please try one or more of these to keep you in better health and stronger physical shape. This helps us all.

Gourmet Nourishment
For those of you who want to add physical nourishment to your schedule, we have both new and continuing offerings. Tom Newman will be offering new Tasting and Talking sessions, potentially quarterly, on how to select good wines for under $20 per bottle. The first of these, on summer white wines, will be held in our community room on June 15th, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. Please sign up early. There is a nominal fee for this fun event.

The wine tasting is joined by the ever-popular ongoing Dining Club, led by Bruce Holberg. This month’s gourmet restaurant will be Malbec’s Argentine Steakhouse, near the Towers on June 13th, 2017 at 6:30 p.m. Please sign up soon with Donna in the Management Office for this delicacy.

We also have periodic Cook-Offs, like the recent Cinco de Mayo cook-off created by Mansi Thakaar. The salsa, guacamole, and sangria competition was appreciated by all. More bakers and good cooks are welcome.

Mental Nourishment
For those who prefer more mental nourishment, your neighbors have three ongoing options to feed your interests. The newest is History Lite, co-led by Harry McCullough (who also has volunteered to create the posters about activities for our bulletin boards) and John Infanti. Virtually every other week (the next two are June 5th, and June 19th, 2017) from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. in our community room. The discussions promise to be entertaining and enlightening.

Please add to that the returning Let’s Talk facilitated by Jay Hummel. On June 27th, 2017 from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. in our community room, the topic will be “Getting Smarter on My Smart Phone.” Please bring your phones and your questions.

Do you like movies? Thanks to Annie and Bob Ursi we have a very thoughtful and active Movie Group that meets monthly. This month on June 29th, 2017 in our community room you are invited to join them to discuss a quality movie. Please check the bulletin boards and BuildingLink for the title. You will be very glad that you did.

We hope that you did not miss the superb event for Towers residents with Jeffrey Rosen, Esq., CEO at the National Constitution Center. This enlightening and fun event was facilitated by Jeanne Sigler, who may bring more ideas for the fall.

While you are enjoying your summer, please think of activities that you may want to lead or attend in coming months. There is some interest in short or day-long bus trips. If you have interest in this or new activities, please share your ideas with Donnamarie Dalicandro in the office or on BuildingLink. Any changes will always be posted on BuildingLink quickly because we value your time. Please let the office know if you want to receive BuildingLink notices. You are all welcome at each
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Rental Percentage Ceiling
To be sensitive to Federal Housing Agency (FHA) requirements, Council is considering a plan to establish a ceiling on the percentage of residences at the Towers that may be rented. This would be done to meet FHA requirements to obtain an FHA-insured mortgage, and done as a service to owners who wish to refinance, and to owners who wish to sell to buyers who desire FHA-insured mortgages. FHA currently will not insure where the percentage of rental units exceeds 50 percent, and to allow some cushion, we would limit the number of rental units to 45 percent. Currently about 37 percent of our residences are rented, so we are not near the proposed 45 percent ceiling. Even then, waivers are permitted in appropriate cases. Most condominiums have these kinds of limits in place, and our outside counsel has suggested that we do the same here at the Towers. If you have any questions, concerns, or feedback (positive or otherwise) about this proposed rule, please contact Ms. Sherman in the Management Office.

Activities Committee
Congratulations to our Activities Committee, co-chaired by J Otis Smith. The number of resident-organized activities is growing exponentially, adding to the quality of life here at the Towers. For an up-to-date look at what’s going on, you will find a calendar, an up-to-date recap, and special one-sheet announcements on the Towers’ bulletin boards as well as messages from BuildingLink. We urge you to participate and get to know your neighbors in a fun environment.

Very busy times for a new president. I truly hope to hear your concerns. Feel free to communicate with me via Beverly Sherman. She will forward your notes, emails, or letters to me, or the entire Council if appropriate. You should know that letters to Council are reviewed at every Council meeting. Meeting minutes are available in the business office, and we are considering other ways of communicating them on a regular basis as well. Improving communication was part of my campaign pledge, and we will be working on this over the weeks and months ahead. Thanks for your support.

— Regards, Bruce

Constitution Center Tour

On May 30th, Jeffrey Rosen, Esq., CEO led Towers residents on a fun, educational, enlightening and exclusive tour of the National Constitution Center, followed by a reception.

Photos by J Otis Smith
Dining Club Visits Las Cazuelas

Nuestra Fantástica Fiesta Mexicana

by Bruce Holberg

Slightly in advance of the Cinco de Mayo holiday, which commemorates the victory of Mexico over French forces in 1862, twenty-nine of us gathered to celebrate at the landmark Las Cazuelas on May 2nd. Helmed by owner/chef Alfredo Aguilar, the Mexican restaurant put some of its very best dishes before us, and we filled ourselves with lots of menu highlights.

Appetizers included shrimp ceviche, housemade guacamole, and chicken empanadas. Exciting mains were shrimp chipotle, Tamariena steak, eggplant bernejena, and Las Cazuela's signature mole poblano...chicken topped with special mole sauce and sesame seeds. For dessert we devoured the moist tres leches cake.

What is most special about the Dining Club's dinners is the discovery and/or enjoyment of our neighbors. The food feeds our bodies, but the friendship fills our souls. We have had ten dinners, each with a mix of "regulars" and new folks that adds to the excitement.

Coming up on June 13th: our next dinner at Malbec Argentine Steakhouse at 2nd and Pine Streets... another opportunity for those who attend to enjoy a mix of gastronomy and camaraderie.

Las Cazuelas
426 W Girard Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19123
215-351-9144

Save the Date: June 13th
The next Dining Club event will be held at Malbec's Argentine Steakhouse. You are invited to sign up in the office now!

Cinco de Mayo Cook-Off Participants and Winners

We celebrated Cinco de Mayo at The Towers with a cook-off on Thursday, May 4th. Neighbors prepared delicious guacamoles, salsas, and sangria and even brought chips and other goodies to go along with it. As always, each of the dishes was voted on by fellow attendees and everyone enjoyed a relaxed, fun-filled evening.
Who was Foglietta?

Foglietta Plaza sits just to the east of Society Hill Towers.

Though many believe the plaza is named for Thomas Foglietta, it is named in honor of Michael Foglietta.

Michael Foglietta, born in Italy in 1889, immigrated to the United States and settled in South Philadelphia. A graduate of Central Evening High School, he joined a union and worked on the presses in the printing industry. He was a powerful Republican ward leader and Committeeman. In 1948 he became the first Italian-American elected to Philadelphia City Council. He died in 1976, leaving behind two daughters and two sons, including Tom Foglietta.

Thomas (Tom) Foglietta was a lifelong Philadelphian, graduate of South Catholic High School, St. Joseph’s University and Temple Law School. He served on City Council from 1955 to 1975, was the Republican nominee for mayor in 1975 and was our US Congressperson from 1981 to 1997, when President Clinton appointed him ambassador to Italy. He died in 2004 at age 75.

During his time in office, Tom Foglietta introduced the bill that named Foglietta Plaza in honor of his father Michael.

On the west side of Foglietta Plaza sits the Korean War Memorial. Tom Foglietta had a strong connection with Korea. In 1985 Foglietta accompanied South Korean dissident Kim Dae Jung home to Seoul, where a melee ensued at the Seoul airport. The two formed a lifelong friendship, and in 1999, Foglietta received a Korean human rights award for supporting democracy there, while Kim received Philadelphia’s Liberty Medal.

What’s Happening at Foglietta Plaza?

There may be some changes coming to Foglietta Plaza. The Delaware River Waterfront Commission (DRWC) has commissioned the renowned Olin Studio to do a feasibility study for the site. There is a concept being reviewed for an international sculpture garden. There are sculptures currently available for the site, if this is feasible, and an appropriate design and implementation plan can be agreed.

The Olin Studio has drafted two thoughtful designs and has been doing outreach to various stakeholders, including holding a meeting with the Society Hill neighborhood in March. Other stakeholders include the city, PennDOT, other near neighbors and veteran groups.

Olin and DRWC understand that the community would like the space to be peaceful and contemplative, especially given close proximity to residences.

The Towers Council has asked that the design give particular focus to lighting, to ensure Towers residents are not impacted by lights coming into our residences. We also have requested that there be no commercial uses on the site.

Next Steps

We understand that the Olin Studio is reviewing with DRWC the input received from stakeholders, and also will be studying memorial design. We are awaiting further information about timing and next steps, and will update the community on developments.

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Marsha Moss, who received the Fleisher Art Memorial's 2017 Founder's Award, is renowned as a transformative force in the Philadelphia arts community through her passionate advocacy of public art as “the soul of our city, energizing its economy and enhancing the quality of its public life.”

A highly regarded leader and resolute champion of countless local and national artists whose works enhance innumerable public venues, Marsha is mission-bound to significantly expand the careers of these artists who benefit from her ardent commitment. She actively encourages artists to “come out of their studios and join the effort to shape the life of our city” through experiential opportunities that stimulate awareness and appreciation of the physical environment.

Marsha combines the artist’s vision with public purpose by advancing major permanent commissions at medical, corporate, transit and performing arts centers, at universities, and for Percent-for-Art projects, such as World Park by Ned Smyth (pictured to the left).

For over two decades as director of Sculpture Outdoors, she curated major exhibitions on public and alternate sites in Philadelphia and throughout the country. As a member of the Mayor’s Cultural Advisory Council, Marsha founded The Artfront Partnership, an innovative venture that commissioned artists to transform unoccupied city storefronts into illuminated, dynamic destinations.

For these outstanding achievements, Fleisher recognized Marsha Moss, advocate for artists and champion of Public Art, with the 2017 Founder’s Award on Wednesday, June 7th.

Congratulations, Michael Solomonov

Named Outstanding Chef by James Beard Foundation

Congratulations to Towers resident Michael Solomonov, who has been named Outstanding Chef by the prestigious James Beard Foundation. In prior years, Solomonov won Best Chef-Mid-Atlantic in 2011, and his cookbook “Zahav: A World of Israeli Cooking” was a 2016 James Beard Award Winner. Michael, along with restaurant partner Steve Cook, owns Zahav, Dizengoff, Abe Fisher, Federal Donuts, Goldie, and the Rooster Soup Company in Philadelphia. They are expanding to other cities.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Pei!

Still Going Strong at the Century Mark

The architectural world celebrated the birthday of one of its most visionary members recently. April 26th was the 100th birthday of I.M. Pei, who most of you know as the designer of Society Hill Towers. Mr. Pei has been a towering presence in Society Hill since the early 60s, so it’s only appropriate that we, too, should offer him warm wishes.

In addition to designing our Towers, which exemplified the integration of urban renewal into our city fabric, Pei left his mark on Society Hill by designing townhomes within the Tower complex, as well as those in Bingham Court and along St. Joseph’s Way.

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Welcome aboard! With National Historic Landmark ships Cruiser Olympia and Submarine Becuna, a boatbuilding workshop, small boat rentals, hands-on exhibits, a new Citizen Science Lab, one of the largest maritime collections in North America and more, we are the premier, family-friendly destination on the Penn’s Landing waterfront.

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**Beautifully Renovated, Corner Two Bedroom Plus Den, Two and a Half Bath**

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**Opportunity to Combine a Corner Two Bedroom and Adjacent One Bedroom**

The first unit is currently a two bedroom, one bathroom residence offering views to the south and unobstructed views of Center City to the west, as well as parquet floors and an updated bathroom. The second unit is currently a one bedroom with southern views. Both homes offer walls of floor-to-ceiling windows and great natural light. Combine them together to create a sun soaked three bedroom with amazing views. 1,900 sf | $675,000

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- 19A North
- 4G North
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- 4G South
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- 2B South
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- PH5 South
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