

4word

June 2001

Number 9



news & views in area 4

Math Literacy Is a Civil Right Robert Moses, Teacher-Activist

“Like sharecroppers demanding the right to vote 40 years ago, students will have to demand education from those in power,” says Bob Moses, Area 4 resident, author, civil rights activist, and founder of the Algebra Project. “Math literacy is a civil right. Just as black people in Mississippi saw the vote as a tool to elevate them into the first class politically, math is the tool to elevate the young into the first class economically. . . We are growing the equivalent of the sharecroppers in our inner cities.”

The nationally acclaimed Algebra Project, which began in 1982 in Cambridge, maintains its office in Area 4 at 99 Bishop Allen Drive. The premise of the Algebra Project is straightforward: A student’s economic success hinges on math competence. No algebra, no college, no success. At a recent lecture at Harvard University held to celebrate his new book, *radical equations: Math Literacy*

and *Civil Rights*, co-authored with Charles Cobb, Jr., Moses said that “kids are being told that algebra is not for them, just like sharecroppers were told that voting was not for them.”

“Change can’t just come from the top, it must come from communities of people who organize to make demands, and in the process transform themselves.”

—Robert Moses

the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which challenged the all-white Mississippi delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention. In 1967, because of his leadership in the civil rights movement, the government targeted the 31-year-old Moses for the Vietnam draft. Long opposed to the war, and an organizer for antiwar and nonviolent student rights, he fled to Canada and later moved to Tanzania with his wife,

continues on page 3

A Living Wage

by Dave Slaney

Area 4 resident, co-author of the Cambridge Living Wage Ordinance, member of the Cambridge Living Wage Community Advisory Board, and member of the Steelworkers Union (Local 2431)



Gerald Bergman

Cambridge living wage march

The 21-day “Living Wage” sit-in at Harvard University is over, but before it ended, a number of Area 4 residents joined the mayor, several city councilors, and about 400 other Cambridge residents in a march from City Hall to Harvard Yard in support of a “living wage” of \$10.25 per hour for all Harvard employees. Area 4 residents also played a part in getting the City Council to pass a “Living

continues on page 2

inside



From the Editor: pg. 2

Arts for Action: pg. 2

Open Space Planning: pg. 4

Attention Dog Owners: pg. 4

Squirrel Brand Properties: pg. 5

Graffiti: pg. 5

Changes Coming to Lafayette Sq: pg. 6

West Nile Virus: pg. 7

Area 4 Walking Tour: pg. 7

Fire Fund: pg. 8

Community Celebration: pg. 8

your calendar: pg. 8

From the Editor

Area 4 has one of the highest proportions of low-income residents, women heads of household, children, non-English speaking residents, and people of color of any neighborhood in the City. We also have one of the lowest voter registration and voting turnouts. The links between income and issues of voting, race, education, gender equity, language, and age are clear.

The living wage fight at Harvard and the ongoing struggle to guarantee that every worker in Cambridge receives a living wage are closely tied together. The stories of service workers at Harvard, many of whom are immigrants and women, magnify the fact that their poverty wages, beginning at \$6.75 per hour, are inadequate to provide basic needs. In Area 4, families are being forced from their homes due to rising rents and health care costs.

Harvard's wealth is immense; with its \$20 billion endowment, it is the world's richest university. In Cambridge, the gap

between the comfortable and the working poor increases daily. When workers are unable to organize, when social programs such as guaranteed health care fail, and when we do not have political power, then Harvard University workers and Area 4 residents will not achieve even a minimally decent standard of living. We are at one with Harvard University workers and they are at one with us.

"Two key aspects of the Mississippi voter organizing tradition underlie the Algebra Project: the centrality of families to the work of organizing, and organizing in the context of the community in which one lives and works," writes Robert Moses in his book *radical equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights*. This month's *4word* speaks of issues of concern to the Area 4



Gerald Bergman

Cambridge living wage march

neighborhood in the context of organizing and empowerment, such as voter rights, education, parent and community leadership, math literacy, control of open space, affordable housing, public health, and a living wage.

Please send your Walking Tour ideas, concerns and comments to Gerald Bergman, *4word* editor, 82 Elm Street (02139) or e-mail: Gerrberg@aol.com. Read all issues of the *4word* online: city.mit.edu/area4.

Arts for Action

Members and supporters of Arts for Action, a group of concerned educators and parents of color who have children in the Cambridge Public Schools, made their concerns about education known at the School Committee meeting on May 15 and again at a community forum on May 17. They spoke about their key issues of too few teachers of color and too few guidance counselors in the

Cambridge schools as well as many other issues facing students and parents.

Through the use of theater techniques and facilitated discussion, parents and teachers are learning to become leaders and better advocates for their children and for change in the community through Arts for Action. Parents are being trained to become more effective advocates in the schools around issues of race, gender, class, and language barriers. They are being trained to become advocates for

their children, not on an individual basis but as leaders for systemic school change. Teachers who are committed to enhancing their own advocacy and leadership skills are also being supported.

Residents of Area 4 are being asked for their input and participation in this exciting and provocative change process. For further information please call Area 4 resident Renae Gray, a member of the Arts for Action Advisory Committee, at 491-0200 or e-mail: renae-gray@hotmail.com.

A Living Wage

continued from previous page

Wage" ordinance two years ago. That ordinance says that every employee of the city, and every employee of every subcontractor working for the city, must be paid a living wage. When first enacted two years ago, the living wage was set at \$10.00 per hour, and each year it is adjusted upward for inflation. The current living wage in Cambridge is \$10.68 per hour.

The Living Wage Ordinance also prohibited cuts in non-wage benefits such as health care insurance, pension, and vacation.

When the Cambridge law came into effect on July 1, 1999, many city employees, including a number of Area 4 residents, received an immediate pay raise. Some workers' wages went from \$6.00 per hour to \$10.00 per hour. The law also indirectly benefits low-paid workers who are not city employees by putting pressure on their

employers to raise their wages to keep up with the community standard. The Cambridge residents who marched in support of the Harvard sit-in are hoping that if a large employer like Harvard can be made to pay all of its employees at least \$10.25 per hour (with benefits), then other low-wage employers will be more likely to increase their wage rates. That would certainly be good news for many Area 4 workers and their families.

Math Literacy Is a Civil Right

continued from page 1

Janet. From 1969 to 1975 he was the Chairman for the Ministry of Education in Tanzania. Moses returned to Cambridge in 1976 after President Carter offered draft amnesty, to resume doctoral studies in philosophy. He received a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant in 1982. This five-year grant gave him the time and resources to found and develop the Algebra Project.

Moses remains an organizer and a teacher, challenging young adults to demand their right to an education. "Change can't just come from the top, it must come from communities of people who organize to make demands, and in the process transform themselves." In a

discussion in the offices of the Algebra Project, Moses was asked to

describe himself. "I think of myself primarily as an organizer," he said. "Throughout the '60s we were using the vote as a tool to organize for political access...now you can look at math literacy in the same way." In his book he says, "The absence of math literacy in urban and rural communities throughout this country is an issue as urgent as the lack of registered black voters in Mississippi was in 1961...And I believe that

"The key is that young people have to organize themselves. Math literacy, like voter registration, provides them the tool for such work."

—Robert Moses

solving the problem requires exactly the kind of community organizing that changed the South in the 1960s."

Like the civil rights movement, the Algebra Project is a process, not an event. "There is a way that young people reach young people, are able to touch each other, that in my view is central to the future shape of the

Algebra Project. It is not about simply transferring a body of knowledge to children, it is about using that knowledge as a tool to a much larger end. Young people in Mississippi changed the country. Now we are asking young people to step out into a different way of seeing themselves. Just like gaining the vote, we are fighting a caste system where the

young have been assigned a place. In the process of making their demands the young are changing themselves."

Every Monday Moses flies from his home on School Street in Area 4 to Jackson, Mississippi, where he teaches math classes Tuesday through Friday. The Algebra Project began in 1982 when Moses' oldest daughter, Maisha, entered the eighth grade at the King School. At that time the school did not offer algebra, and Moses, who had taught math at a New York City prep school from 1958 to 1961, asked his daughter's teacher if he could teach Maisha algebra at school. The teacher said yes, but asked Moses if he could teach three of her classmates as well. The Algebra Project was born. His four children, Maisha, Omo, Tabasuri, and Malaika have all worked as teachers with the Algebra Project. This exemplifies the core of the Algebra Project—students teaching other students, the same principle Moses used to organize black Mississippians in the '60s. Students learn to rely on each other, rather than leaders, to bring about change.

The Area Four Neighborhood Coalition has been a strong supporter of the Algebra

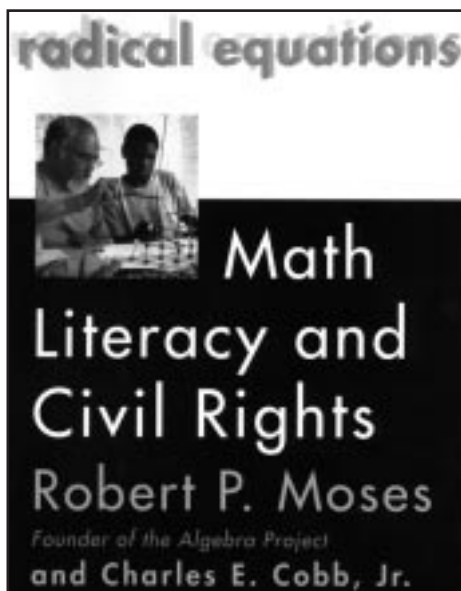


Gerald Bergman


Robert Moses at the Harvard lecture

Project through its Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) funding of the Young Peoples' Project (YPP). The YPP supplies math literacy workers to classrooms and out-of-school math sessions in an effort to develop a culture among young people around learning and sharing mathematics. (See the February 2000 issue of the *4word* on line at city.mit.edu/Area4)

Janet Moses, an Area 4 neighborhood activist and pediatrician at MIT, suggests we can help the Algebra Project by supporting their annual youth concert, which features the Washington, D.C.-based a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Janet is looking for suggestions about corporate/business sponsorship of this important annual event. You can reach Janet Moses and London Hardy, YPP director, at the offices of the Algebra Project at 99 Bishop Allen Drive (02139). You can call 617-876-8803 or fax 617-491-0499 for more information.



about **4**word

The *4word* is funded by a UDAG grant from the Area Four Neighborhood Coalition. We thank the Community Art Center for administering the grant. Suggestions about articles and interviews and contributions to People Pride and  Your Calendar are invited.

Contact Gerald Bergman, *4word* editor, PO Box 390768 (02139) telephone: 354-2648, fax: 864-2519 e-mail: gerrberg@aol.com. Read the *4word* online in PDF format at city.mit.edu/Area4

Open Space Planning

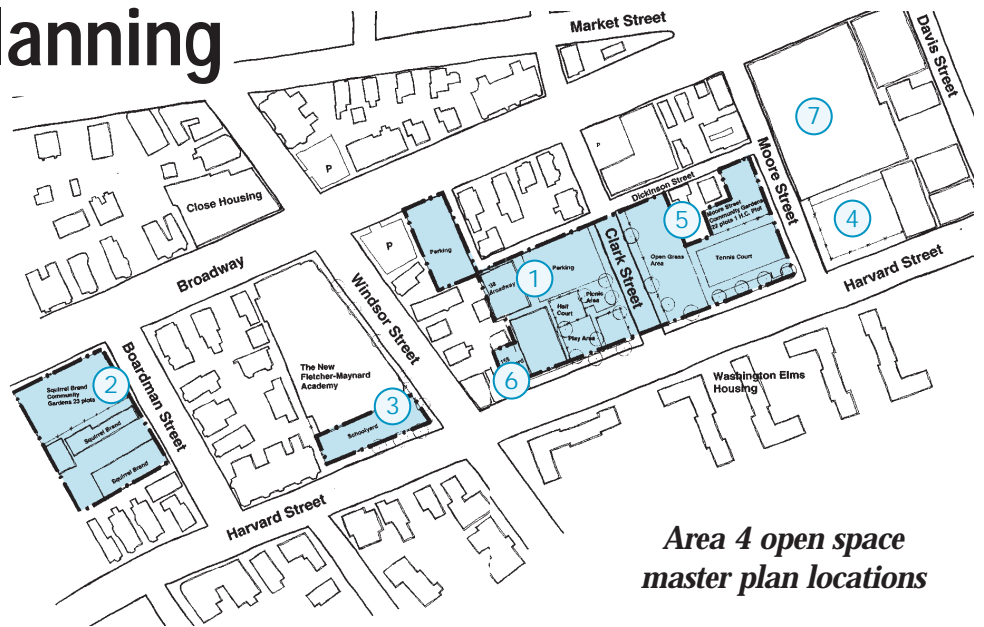
The City of Cambridge has begun a series of meetings to plan the use of open space in three locations in Area 4: 238 Broadway/163 Harvard Street (1); the Squirrel Brand community gardens on Boardman and Broadway (2); and the area in front of the New Fletcher-Maynard Academy on Harvard Street (3) (see map). Two neighborhood open space master plan meetings, on April 11 and May 23, have already been held.

It is expected that the New Fletcher-Maynard Academy play area (3) will be constructed in the fall and winter of this year; the Squirrel Brand property (2) will be finished by the summer of 2002; and the construction of the open space at 238 Broadway/163 Harvard Street (1) will begin in July of 2002. The development of the 238 Broadway site has been delayed due to the need to temporarily relocate city offices to 238 Broadway while 57 Inman Street is undergoing extensive rehabilitation.

The City's fiscal year 2001 budget, which started last July, included \$520,000 for the demolition of the buildings at 238 Broadway/163 Harvard Street and the design of all three sites. The City was urged to explore the availability of land on Harvard Street (4), which is controlled for the community by Neighbors for a Better Community (NBC), and the house on Dickinson Street (5). This additional land would provide many more open space options for the community.

Due to the advocacy of Area 4 residents, the city recently took title to 165 Harvard Street (6), which abuts the newly purchased land and buildings at 238 Broadway/163 Harvard Street. This unfenced 1,667-square-foot lot poses a danger to children because it is often strewn with trash and debris including jagged bricks and broken bottles. The city is now in the process of cleaning and securing this lot.

In 1997, the Area Four Neighborhood Coalition argued that the city should buy 210 Broadway, a 46,000-square-foot parcel that had remained vacant for years (7). Despite the fact that this was the last remaining large parcel still vacant in the neighborhood, and even though the Coalition offered to use \$200,000 of their



Area 4 open space master plan locations

community grant funds for this purchase (10% of the price), the city refused to buy the parcel. This land eventually was developed for use as an office building, with only 10,000 square feet made available to the community (4).

In 1999 the Area Four Neighborhood Coalition used \$300,000 of their Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) funds to ensure the purchase of the Squirrel Brand properties for affordable rental and home-ownership housing and the preser-

vation of existing Squirrel Brand open space (2).

Area 4 residents are urged to attend the monthly Area Four Neighborhood Coalition meetings for updates on open space plans and development in Area Four. You can also contact Venita Mathias of the Cambridge Community Development Department for neighborhood open space planning meeting dates and for minutes of past meetings. Call her at 617-349-4603 or e-mail: vmathias@ci.cambridge.ma.us.

Attention Dog Owners

by Erika Valenti, resident of Cherry Street and owner of two dogs

Ano-dog order has been proposed for the grassy field that abuts Columbia Park. This comes as no surprise considering the huge amount of dog feces left behind by negligent dog owners.

Even though there are signs posted reminding pet owners to clean up after their animals or else face a fine, the field is literally covered with dog poop. This not only poses a sanitation threat, but is simply a nasty sight to behold when walking through the park. The Department of Public Works maintains the field and even provides bags for dog owners to remove their pets' droppings. There are garbage cans at either end of the field to dispose of the poop.

I urge all dog owners to take some responsibility for their animals before the park is



Columbia Street Park

closed to dogs permanently. The field has such potential—were it not littered with dog feces, it could serve as a place to play, have a picnic, or even grab some time with a good book. Let's show some pride and keep our neighborhood looking nice.

Squirrel Brand Properties

In 1999 the Area Four Neighborhood Coalition took a bold step. They offered \$300,000 to the City of Cambridge from their scarce Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) funds if the Squirrel Brand properties could be saved for affordable housing and community open space/gardens. Like all other property in the neighborhood, real estate speculators had an eye on these properties at 17 Boardman (a two-family house), 10-24 Boardman (the factory and community garden) and the two-family house on the corner of Harvard and

Windsor Streets. This bold step coupled with neighborhood demands for the preservation of these properties was ultimately successful.

In the last few weeks neighbors have noticed activity at all three of these sites. Just-A-Start YouthBuild crews have been at work at 17 Boardman for several months, and recently, construction on the factory and the Harvard/Windsor property has been in full swing. When finished, these properties will provide 23 units of permanently affordable rental and home ownership to Cambridge families.



Gerald Bergman

Squirrel Brand affordable rental housing on Boardman Street

person household could make up to \$42,400 to be eligible for these units.

Beginning in the weeks ahead, a process for tenant selection will be reviewed with the Area Four Neighborhood Coalition and the Squirrel Brand Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Application information will be available at that time. Applications for units at 17 Boardman could be made available as soon as the fall of this year. Call Just-A-Start at 617-494-0444 for more information. You are invited to attend Area Four Neighborhood Coalition meetings to discuss these and future affordable housing opportunities.



Gerald Bergman

Affordable home ownership on the corner of Harvard and Windsor Streets

The property on Harvard and Windsor Streets will include three 3-bedroom condominium units, with off-street parking. These home ownership limited-equity units, selling for a maximum of \$140,000 each, will be offered to families with young children. A five-person family could have an income of up to \$56,700 to qualify. At 17 Boardman Street there will be two 3-bedroom rental units. The factory will have 18 rental units: two 3-bedroom, thirteen 2-bedroom, two 2-bedroom and one studio apartment. A five-

Graffiti

Graffiti is judged through the eye of the beholder. When is it art? Is it ever acceptable? When is it a political statement? When is it offensive? Does it represent the tag of a neighborhood "gang" or an individual marking out his/her territory? Graffiti artists have a history of respecting public art and neighborhood murals. In Area 4, many residents regularly remove graffiti from their fences and walls while other residents and businesses do little or nothing to clean up their property.

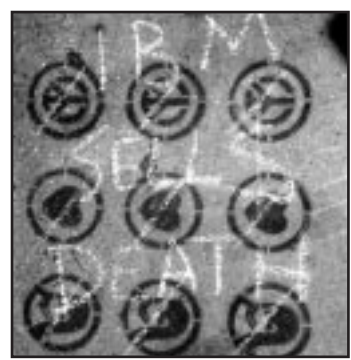
Recently the police publicized the arrest of two juveniles for painting graffiti. Painting graffiti is a crime. However, the police have not made any arrests as a result of the graffiti that was painted in Area 4, Cambridgeport,

and Central Square by IBM to promote the company's new computer operating system.

The Graffiti Task Force lacks direction and accountability. The graffiti hotline at the Public Works Department was recently discontinued and replaced with a Police Community Relations Department number (617-349-3236). One creative approach suggested by neighborhood activists includes the effort to link up graffiti artists with

groups such as Artists for Humanity in order to focus their talent in a different direction.

It is time that Area 4 organizations, residents, businesses, graffiti artists, and members of the Cambridge Graffiti Task Force have a conversation about graffiti. What do you think? Your comments and ideas will be presented in the next edition of the *4word*.



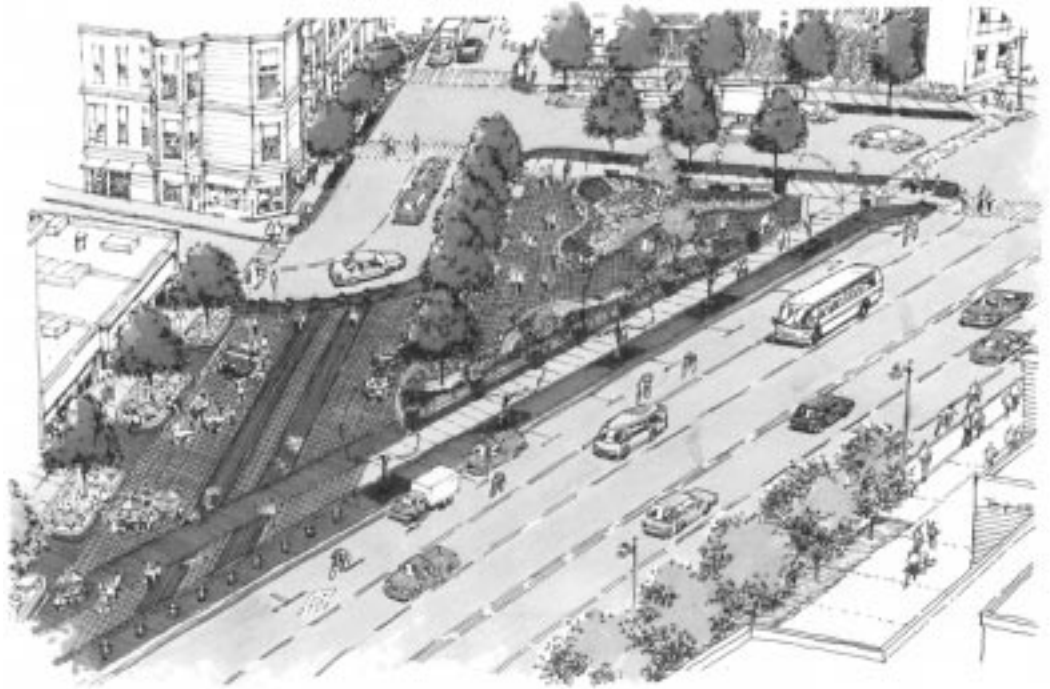
Photos, left to right: Graffiti on the corner of Elm and Broadway; IBM graffiti and additional graffiti in Area 4; Which is worse, graffiti or cigarette ads? These ads may be in violation of a state law against cigarette ads within 1000 feet of a school, a law currently under appeal by manufacturers.

Gerald Bergman

Changes Are Coming to Lafayette Square

The opening of the West Boston Bridge (Longfellow Bridge) on Thanksgiving Day, 1793, marked the beginning of Lafayette Square (the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue in Area 4) as a settled area. The commercial mix in Lafayette Square was firmly established early in the 19th century. As the main thoroughfare from the bridge to Old Cambridge and points west, Main Street occupied a dominant position. Lafayette Square was a market center with inns and other commercial structures.

The subway from Park Street to Harvard Square opened in 1912. Its route followed the old horsecar and trolley line. The subway cut commuting time to Boston by two-thirds, making the



Lafayette Square plaza design

business centers of Boston so convenient that Lafayette Square lost much of its importance as a commercial district.

The Lafayette Square of the early 21st century is about to be constructed. The roads through Lafayette Square are being realigned. The roadway design and community process have been underway for many years. At a cost of \$4.5 million,

surface reconstruction, including surface enhancements and construction of a plaza at Lafayette Square, which includes trees, seating, pedestrian lighting, and space for community events, will take place beginning in fall 2001. Construction is expected to last about 18 months and will be finished in spring 2003. For more

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Lafayette Square in the mid-1820s. The Old Hovey Tavern (Douglass Street) of 1802 on the left was located on the north edge of Lafayette Square, the junction of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue, and was a popular stopping point for travelers heading to or from Boston along Massachusetts Avenue. On the far right, partially visible behind a tree, is the First Universalist Church of Cambridge. The church was built in 1822 and was moved in 1888 to 8 Inman Street, across from City Hall. (Drawing from the Chamber of Commerce Collection, with permission of the Cambridge Historical Commission.)



Moller's furniture store, looking down Main Street. The vacant gas station, now on the Moller's site, will be torn down as part of the new development. (Photograph of June 23, 1910 from the Boston Elevated Railway Collection, with permission of the Cambridge Historical Commission.)

Lafayette Square, continued from previous page

information about the plaza design you can call William Deignan at the

Community Development Department, 617-349-4632.

Gerald Bergman



A look down Main Street today

The *4word* welcomes photos, stories, and comments from Area 4 residents about Lafayette Square. Did your family shop at Moller's furniture store? What do you remember from the past, and do you like the future look of Lafayette Square? Send information to the editor, Gerald Bergman, at 82 Elm Street or e-mail him at gerrberg@aol.com.



A look down Columbia Street at Lafayette Square. The vacant area on the right is the former site of Moller's furniture store. (Photograph from the Cambridge Planning Board Collection with permission of the Cambridge Historical Commission.)

Area 4 Walking Tour

We are going on an Area 4 Walking Tour, but we need your help. The *4word* is planning a special issue devoted to a walking tour of Area 4, which will highlight places, events, people, and the history of Area 4, past and present.

What about the history of the many immigrant groups represented in Area 4? Do you have stories to tell? Do you have photos that you can share with the *4word* that depict events, places, and people that should be highlighted? What are your ideas? Who lives and has lived in our neighborhood that has a

special place in our history? How does Area 4 shape the history of Cambridge? What events took place in Area 4 that had a special impact on issues such as rent control, civil rights, education, housing, arts and entertainment that should be memorialized? What do you know about your house, your business, the block you live on and your community group in Area 4 that you would be willing to share?

Please contact the *4word* by calling 617-354-2648 or e-mailing gerrberg@aol.com.



West Nile Virus

Cambridge held a hearing in May on the West Nile Virus (WNV) Response Plan prepared by the Cambridge Department of Public Health (DPH). Last January, the DPH formed an Advisory Committee to help them establish a response plan to the possible outbreak of West Nile Virus this summer. At the hearing, several residents spoke in support of an Advisory Committee statement, signed by a majority of its members, opposing truck-based (broadcast) spraying. Many in the Advisory Group have concluded that broadcast spraying has not been shown to be either safe or effective.

This year the DPH is undertaking a heavily preventive program of larviciding catch basins and using public outreach to get residents to eliminate standing water where mosquitoes breed. But despite all the public opposition to spraying, truck-based pesticide spraying is still a part of the DPH response plan. Many residents of Area 4 protested last summer when trucks rumbled down streets spraying clouds of pesticide, which may be harmful to humans, plants, and animals while being relatively ineffective against the virus (see October 2000 *4word* online at city.mit.edu/area4). Residents worry that this year, if a local person is found infected with West Nile Virus or if several mosquitoes are discovered carrying WNV, causing a media-induced WNV panic, spraying will once again resume.

The decision to spray might be made very quickly, in a matter of three to four days, and while more efforts will be made to notify the public this year, it is likely that we would have a repeat situation of what happened last August when residents were unprepared for the spraying. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the plan about educating residents about the relative risks of pesticide spraying.

The DPH response plan, including the Advisory Committee statement, is available from the DPH by calling them at 617-665-3800.

Fire Fund

The Area Four Neighborhood Coalition will take a final vote on June 14 on a motion to establish an Area 4 Fire Emergency Fund. Area 4 has been the scene of several fires in the past few months, and dozens of families have been displaced. The latest fire, which occurred on May 3 at the corner of Cherry and Harvard Streets, displaced five families and caused damage in excess of \$150,000. The proposed Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) Fire Fund would begin with a \$3,000 balance.



Gerald Bergman

May 3rd fire



The Area Four Neighborhood Coalition holds its regularly scheduled meetings on the **second Thursday of every month** from 7-9 pm, at the Area 4 Youth Center, 243 Harvard Street. The next meetings will be on **June 14** and **July 12** (tentative). The Coalition, a community-based organization open to all neighborhood residents, will vote to distribute up to \$250,000 in Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG) at their meeting on **June 14**. Grant requests totaling over \$500,000 were presented and discussed at a community meeting in May. Food and refreshments, often from local restaurants, are served beginning at 6:30 pm.

Community Celebration Grants

The Area Four Neighborhood Coalition has set aside \$6,000 to assist Area 4 individuals and community groups in holding free community celebrations, block parties, and community events that can help unify and celebrate our neighborhood. Up to \$600 is available for each event for such uses as food, outreach materials, postage, entertainment, prizes,

printing, etc. Requests for assistance must be made in writing to the grant coordinator and must describe the event, the approximate date, outreach strategy, a 25% donation match, and a contact person. For more information contact: Gerald Bergman, Volunteer Grant Coordinator; 82 Elm Street (02139), telephone: 354-2648, fax: 864-2519, e-mail: gerrberg@aol.com.

A community celebration in honor of Susan Richards Scott, Director of the Community Art Center, who is leaving after 15 years of dedicated service.



Joseph Douillette

Translating the 4word

Para Residentes Que Falam Português
Se precisa de ajuda com traduções ou qualquer outro assunto, a MAPS oferece serviços de traduções assim como assistência social a pessoas de lingua portuguesa que residem na zona. Para mais informações, por favor contacte a MAPS através do número 617-864-7600. A MAPS está aberta de segunda a sexta feira das 9:00 da manhã as 5:00 da tarde.

Pou Rezidan Ki Pale Kreyol
Si'w yon moun bezwen èd pou li JOUNAL ZON 4 LA e pou nou byen konpran enfòmasyon yo tou. Silvoupplè rele Biwo Ayisyen: 617-349-6351.

Para Residentes Que Hablan Español
Si necesita ayuda en inglés, tenemos intérpretes que le pueden acompañar a sus citas y traductores que pueden traducir sus documentos personales por escrito. Sólo llame a Concilio Hispano al 617-661-9406 y comuníquese con Sandra o Cecilia. Nuestro horario de atención es de lunes a viernes de 9:00 a.m. a 5:00 p.m.

4word
Gerald Bergman, Editor
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LOCATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE OF 4WORD

1. Open space planning area
2. Squirrel Brand community gardens/affordable housing
3. New Fletcher-Maynard play area
4. Squirrel Brand affordable housing site
5. May 3 fire site
6. One of many graffiti locations
7. Area 4 Youth Center
8. Columbia Street Park
9. Lafayette Square
10. Community Art Center

