

The Main Street **WIRE**

Roosevelt Island’s Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



Lighthouse Restored Major parts of the restoration of the Island’s landmark lighthouse have been completed. The cleaned stone appears lighter. Remaining to be done: Slate walkway around the structure’s base, plus interior and exterior lighting. The project was funded by Friends of Roosevelt Island Landmarks, Inc.



Say it doesn’t have to end. With Labor Day and the unofficial end of summer upon us, these Islanders made the most of friendly weather last week: Chess behind Eastwood, and a good splash in the wading pool behind Blackwell House.



Vass Quits RIOC Board

Says RIOC Lacks Professionalism

Slams Blue for Snubbing Residents Association

Telling Jerome Blue that he has “alienated the greatest majority of our people with your conduct,” Ron Vass resigned Monday from the Board of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC). Vass’s Monday letter to the RIOC President includes a stinging critique of Blue’s management of the Island. Vass hits Blue on a series of counts, many of which echo the complaints of the Common Council of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA). “Your personal outlook never really considers the citizens,” Vass tells Blue in the letter. He accuses Blue of fostering racism in an indirect reference to distribution by RIOC of a broadside titled “Eye on the Isle,” containing accusations of “racism” against the Island’s resident leaders, including RIRA President Patrick Stewart. Vass writes, “Your office... has served as a base for racism problems...” In a reference to a RIOC grant of Public Purpose Funds to the Young Adult League (YAL), headed by Jessie Rademaker (whose husband or son “E. Rademaker” signed the “Eye on the Isle” accusations), Vass writes, “You have been the catalyst that subverted the use of Public Purpose Funds...” (RIOC approved funds for YAL training for an “at risk” population, despite

rejection by the Residents Association as weak on several counts. In the past, no funding had been given to any organization without prior RIRA endorsement. In the letter, Vass criticizes Blue’s attempts to take parklands for commercial development. He told *The WIRE*, “It broke my heart, at the last RIOC meeting, that the Board doesn’t have the courage to respond to the community on a specific important question: Is Octagon Park parkland or is it not?” At

July’s meeting, the RIOC Board voted, over Vass’s objection, to move ahead on the eldercare facility originally proposed for Octagon Park. Vass said Wednesday, “I could not get a single Board member to agree with me.” While the vote to go forward on the eldercare project did not approve the Octagon site, neither did it formally prohibit use of the site. The Vass letter to Blue concludes, “It is very hard to understand what the Governor and Sena-



tor D’Amato were thinking of when you were given this position, but it is even harder to understand why you have not been removed as yet. Hopefully, it will be politically expedient to remove you right after election day.” When *The WIRE* asked Blue for reaction, his office provided one sentence: “Unfortunately, there were no complaints when there was excessive spending, waste and abuse.” The Vass resignation leaves the RIOC Board with only one resident member, David Kraut. He called Vass a “fierce defender and protector of Roosevelt Island, its people and its institutions.” Mayor Rudy Giuliani has nominated two Islanders to the Board – Patrick Stewart, President of the Residents Association, and Susan Whitaker, President of the Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations (RICO), but the Governor has acted on neither nomination. Kraut said he will continue on the Board, adding that he hopes the State will act quickly on the Stewart and Whitaker nominations.

“You have turned the Island’s population against you.”

Full text of the letter of resignation

August 24, 1998

Dr. Blue:

This letter is my official “Resignation” as a Director of RIOC. I have faithfully served RIOC and Roosevelt Island since the first day of its “birth” and have enjoyed the many hours of personal time spent in pursuit of the Island’s operations. It has always been a Board that shared with the President – problems, ideals, plans, etc., and I was always comfortable that whether I agreed at all, in part or in whole with the President’s thoughts and/or ideas I felt they were well-intentioned and had the Island’s best interests in mind. Since you have become President of RIOC all such feelings have disappeared and it is no longer enjoyable, but it is rather distasteful and has left me with a feeling that I am unable to accomplish anything positive or beneficial for the Island, while serving as a “Director,” therefore, I am resigning and will continue to work for the benefit of Roosevelt Island as a private citizen. I will attempt to briefly point up some of my grievances and complaints — in the future I will expound and pursue each of these thoughts, and more.

1. Your personal outlook is one that never really considers the citizens of Roosevelt Island – whether it’s about the Tram, Subway usage and cost, construction plans, merchant problems, safety problems and racial problems, you have alienated the greatest majority of our people with your conduct.
2. The physical deterioration of our streets, sidewalks, seawalls, etc., will eventually cause major problems and big expenses – you cannot make them disappear with a few flower pots – they are only band-aids.
3. Your office is lacks professionalism, real skills and has served as a base for racism problems, and under your leadership the racism problems are multiplying as quality of life on Roosevelt Island is diminishing.
4. You have been the catalyst that subverted the use of Public Purpose Funds and, I believe, your handling of the RICO [Roosevelt Island Council of Organizations] audit was accomplished without any RICO officer’s input and participation. (This should be investigated very carefully.)
5. Your procedure of “using” Barbara Gordon Espejo, RIOC’s commissioned advising counsel, to try and legalize your development attempts to construct on designated “parkland” is a display of your complete lack of professionalism and fairness – The Board of Directors has yet to confirm the fact that Octagon Park and South Point are “designated parkland” ... WHY?
6. You have continually refused to recognize RIRA [Roosevelt Island Residents Association], the only legally-elected representatives of the residents – and in fact, you have gone to extremes to give equality to “all Island organizations” – especially a certain few groups that basically have few or no members and have never been able to muster any quantity of votes in our Island elections.
7. You have turned the Island’s population against you, while at the same time turned all of our local politicians and Community Board against you as well, it must be obvious ... WHY!!!

It is very hard to understand what the Governor and Senator D’Amato were thinking when you were given this position, but it is even harder to understand why you have not been removed as yet. Hopefully, it will be politically expedient to remove you right after election day.

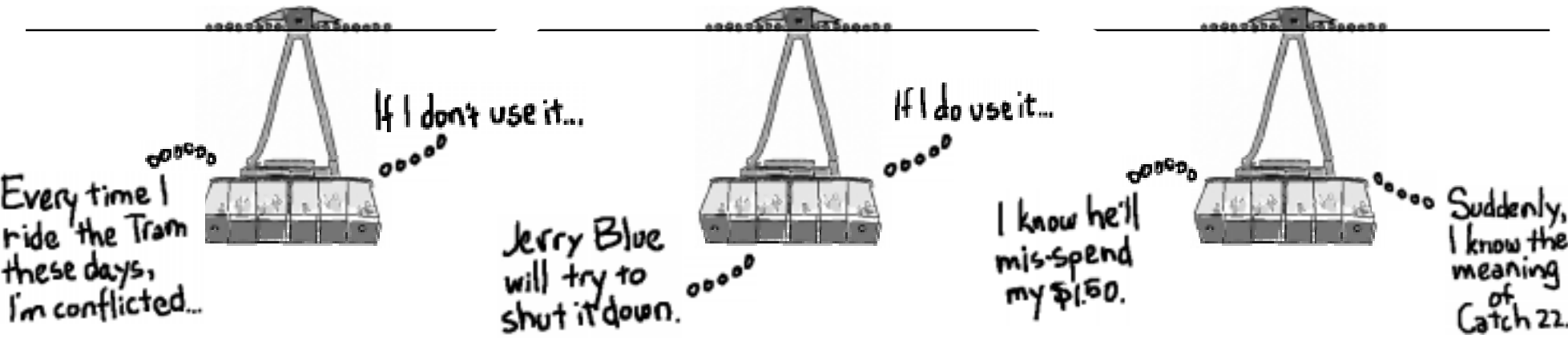
Goodbye,
Ronald T. Vass

New Rabbi For Congregation



Rabbi Leon Morris will become the spiritual leader of the Roosevelt Island Jewish Congregation, starting with Rosh Hashanah services September 20.

Activist Angst



Pages of Thought and Opinion

The Vass Resignation...

Ron Vass saw the handwriting a long time ago. And when his attempts to work within the so-called *system* – a RIOC Board powerless to do anything meaningful about a political hack failing at a job that’s several levels above his head – Vass resigned.

Now, of course, the entire RIOC Board should resign.

That would be one clear beacon to the top of the ruling political structure in this State – Senator Al D’Amato and Governor George Pataki – that Jerome Blue must go before he wrecks Roosevelt Island further.

But it is probably hope without promise to ask for a mass resignation by the remaining RIOC Board. Why? Well, except for David Kraut, who has become the Island’s only resident voice anywhere within shouting distance of the current power structure, nobody on that Board has any stake in Roosevelt Island. Their stake, in fact, is in serving the political structure by going along with D’Amato and Pataki. Quite simply, it is foolish to expect them to care enough about Roosevelt Island to sacrifice their own agendas to give Roosevelt Island better management.

...and What’s Next

There is a better way to send a bulletin to George Pataki about Blue’s failed administration, *and* do something more lastingly positive for Roosevelt Island:

The people of Roosevelt Island should start working now to insure passage of Assemblymember Pete Grannis’s home rule legislation for Roosevelt Island – legislation that will give Island residents direct electoral power over management of the Island. (If that concept sounds familiar, it’s called *democracy*, and it exists everywhere in the country but here.)

For that to happen, Island residents must show they have the power and drive to get a clear signal to every member of the State Assembly and State Senate. These legislators historically have had little interest in Roosevelt Island, and will have to *hear from **their own constituents*** that the Grannis bill deserves their *yes* when the roll is called.

We may assume enough votes will be needed to override a Pataki veto.

It is a massive task, but it can be done, and that will be the subject of future commentary here.

For the present, however, applause to Ron Vass for making an unequivocal statement about *Pataki’s Big Blue Blunder*. But let’s not sit back, hoping it’s enough to rattle the cages of the colonial rulers in Albany. Instead...

Let’s get to work.

DL



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Letters

To the Editor:

My week with RIOC began quite innocently. A neighbor asked me if I was going to a RIOC committee meeting on transportation and development. I quickly agreed I should but wondered why I hadn’t been informed before. The session was called for 10:00 a.m. On the dot, I arrived. There were about 20 residents around the table, most of whom I know. The first discussion was about transportation. Committee members anecdotally recalled the inconveniences of the present system and Dr. Blue acknowledged those and promised action.

I then raised the issue of environmental and historical preservation in the Marriott Hotel plan. Everyone interested in medical history knows we are not just interested in preserving facades but rather the transcendent moment when child fever, the western world’s greatest killer for centuries, was defeated. A Belgian doctor, a Tammany appointment, by simply requiring maternity rooms be whitewashed and the doctors’ instruments sterilized by boiling eliminated the deadly infections. That spot, under the RIOC plan, would be either a parking lot or a spa. Dr. Blue put the question on the agenda for the next meeting. I didn’t feel reassured, but I thought maybe members of the RIOC board would begin a serious examination of their historic inheritance.

After a discussion about RIOC’s requirement to demonstrate before both the State and Historic Preservation Board that the Marriott proposal meets the minimum state and federal standards for development, David Kraut introduced a novel, indeed radical, constitutional theory: It is the Marriott’s obligation to preserve our environment and

historical legacy. Previously, those requirements were contained in the public proposal for open bids. Kraut’s theory is that RIOC has no obligation to inform bidders of these essential elements that they must protect and advance. This Board has simply abrogated its responsibility and handed it over to the Marriott chain, whose contribution to visual pollution is known worldwide as well as just across the river.

Tuesday passed to Thursday: the monthly meeting of the RIOC Board with the residents. I arrived at 10:00

To the Editor:

As I walked on the promenade with my toddler daughter one sunny day last week, my father approached us riding his bicycle. I had warned him earlier that day that there was a huge mess of broken glass on the promenade. As he got closer, my daughter was excited to see her grandfather. My father swerved to avoid the glass as he waved to her. Before I knew it, he had fallen – quite badly.

I advised a Public Safety officer riding in a squad car on the promenade. He seemed concerned and I thought the glass would be removed, especially since it was located next to a playground.

Now it is almost two weeks later, my father still has not healed, and the broken glass is still there!

I’m appalled! So many children, adults, and senior citizens use the promenade and RIOC has not cleaned it up. There is broken glass everywhere: in the playgrounds, the sandboxes, on the promenade, etc.

Who is supposed to clean this and why is it there in the first place? Roosevelt Island is a beautiful place to live. Keep it clean!

Olya Turcihin Stern

a.m., the posted time. A crescent of seats at the front of the Good Shepherd Chapel were unoccupied. No staff member arrived to tell us there might be a delay. RIOC had thoughtfully provided the meeting with coffee and rolls. Time went on. I suggested that perhaps we should put up the luncheon menu.

Then they drifted in and ambled to their seats in no rush to perform what they clearly regard as a painful duty. They don’t smile or even chat much as they find their places at the head of the auditorium. Suddenly, the session begins in mock dignity; all that is missing are Dickensian white wigs and black robes. The chair intones that the meeting will begin. No apology that their employers, taxpayers of New York, have been kept waiting without even a phone call explaining the delay.

Then, one by one, residents who do the work on the Island lambasted them for their secretiveness, inattention to their most elementary tasks, deviousness in dealing with public officials and reneging on promises. None of this registered on the Rushmore faces in the crescent. Even two speakers reporting favorably to the Board aroused not a nod of approval.

It is not that the Board has been too busy running the Island. In May, Representative Carolyn Maloney, Assemblymember Pete Grannis, and City Councilmember Gifford Miller sent a letter of inquiry on RIOC’s policies. They never even got the courtesy of a reply, much less a date for a meeting.

To demonstrate the Board’s general lethargy, it has yet to answer a four-month old request from Edward Logue, the founder and grandfather

See **Letters**, page 3

Fear on Main Street

by Ethel Grod-zins Romm

The thugs were black. The couple was white. All apparently were Americans and Christian.

After we know that, do we know anything pertinent about the violent events of July 4 on Main Street?

Not much. This violence is no more about race than the Irish-Protestant bat-wielding, stone-throwing standoffs in the New England of my childhood were about religious differences, although that too seemed the obvious explanation.

We do better to remember that, before we are human, we are mammals, wary of those not exactly like us. We call this fear of The Other – everything from racism, ageism, homophobia, and sexism to anti-semitism and elitism. Now into the brew, add the universal search for identity, in this case young men looking for ways to feel strong and important, and choosing to put their feet on someone’s neck, throwing down a beer bottle in challenge, brick in hand.

Every religion teaches that a brick smashed against an innocent stranger is not the way to achieve manhood. But thugs scoff at such lessons. And when they are not yet thugs, rage trumps reason.

We tend to mirror the behavior in front of us, and so violence breeds more violence, hate escalates hate, fear reigns uneasily. But this is more of our automatic animal instinct. Even animals know how to chill out. As humans, we don’t have to become what we don’t like. We can soften the atmosphere, we can

use reason in the service of humanity. We can be not only street smart, but also wise.

Wisdom is called for. Law and order are our first remedies, although our own Island officers are the first to tell us that such remedies have limits, especially because this is a rare event. Nothing ever wholly eliminates violence and as our community grows larger, we can expect more.

Still, better lighting is an age-old efficient helpmate of night-time orderliness. We should take inventory of the dark places, particularly around the island’s two entries – the red bridge and the subway – and on our few short streets. And then install solar-powered lighting.

Ours is a tiny island, so that another uniformed officer on a scooter making irregular rounds would go a long way.

The message of lighting and cops is the same: Hate all you like, be as angry as you like – there’s no American law that says you can’t hate or rage. What the law does say is that you can’t hurt anyone.

But excessive law and order is as harmful as absent law and order. Let us be thoughtful. There is no epidemic here of violence. To the extent that thugs set us willy nilly against our neighbors, to that very degree have we let them win. The first motto of life: Never let the bastards win.

The writer has been an island resident since 1982. She is Chair of the Board of Directors of NITON Corp, which manufactures instrumentation for environmental specialists. An author, she has written for *The New York Times*, *Esquire*, *Penthouse*, *New York Magazine*, and other publications.

This is no job for an idealist, and I have to work very hard to “keep the faith.” I came to this job with the sincere belief that with unstinting disinterested effort... effort on the part of many people... we could accomplish a greater good for all of the residents of Roosevelt Island. I knew that the task we were taking on, that of holding the current administration of RIOC to its obligations to the residents, was going to be a very difficult job indeed. It never once occurred to me that it might be downright impossible.

But now, almost two years later, it does sometimes seem impossible, although usually only for a short period of time. It seems that although I did not underestimate the degree of incompetence at RIOC, I did underestimate the complete contempt they have for the good of the Island... or, for that matter, the good of anyone other than themselves and their very narrow political self-interest.

Luckily, they always manage to make me mad enough to bring me back into the fray. And, luckily, every so often, something will happen that gives me back every ounce of determination I had on day one.

This time it is the resignation of Ron Vass from the RIOC Board of Directors.

Anyone who has lived here for more than a short time knows both the Vasses, and the remarkable contribution they have both made to the Island’s public life. From the Eastwood Building Committee to the

Roosevelt Island Clean Up Day, to FDR Day and the FDR Games, as well as RIOC Board membership, it would be hard to name another couple with such a consistently tireless effort devoted to the good of the community.

Ron Vass has faced an almost Herculean task in remaining on this current board as long as he has. He sincerely believed that with his presence on the board he could best fight for the Island he cares so much about. Not many know what the effort has cost him to walk such a tight line of genuine commitment to the community while never compromising commitment to his obligations as a board member.

Like many of us, he believed from the beginning that good would triumph, that reason would win out, that sanity would prevail.



Patrick Stewart

Like many of us, his heart is sore. Like many of us, he had precious few illusions about the reality of politics. It is precisely because we have so few illusions,

that the grinding of those few illusions left us under Pataki’s heel, leaves our mouths so full of ashes.

Ron Vass is a man of integrity – Not an innocent, not a man who gives up easily or without a steadfast fight. I am grateful to him. We all on this Island owe him a large debt of gratitude.

And I know, before our fight with RIOC is done, and we have won, which we *will* do, we will owe him even more.

Main Street Parking

commentary by David Bauer

Recently *The WIRE* published a commentary by Edward Logue, the moving force behind the creation of Roosevelt Island.

One of the points he raised was whether parking on Main Street has become abused. To get a handle on this I looked at the vehicles parked on the west side of Main Street from Rivercross to the School on Wednesday morning, August 20, from 10:10 to 10:25.

There were 38 vehicles parked on the street. Seven had paid the parking fee. Thirty-one had not paid the fee.

Of the ones parking free, six had handicapped tags, and two were occupied. Two were Security force scooters. Four had cards that came from a police society such as the Fraternal Order of Police.

Four vehicles were private cars of employees of RIOC. Four more were unoccupied private vehicles. Nine were commercial vehicles which were not identified as to the location of the driver.

Does this make sense?

Letters

from page 2

of this Island and internationally the premier urban planner, who asked simply for public documents.

Yet there is still time for valor. RIOC could redeem itself with a decent, candid discussion with Islanders, who have the deepest stake in its future, appointed a professional staff that knows the law and the history of the Island, and consulted “new town” experts with ideas about how to enhance this “special experiment.” All of us are simply temporary custodians of a unique community where people of all ages, all incomes, all colors, the healthy and the disabled live an engaged and stable life. If we fail, so do the expectations and hopes of countless others.

Richard C. Wade

COMING UP

Compiled by Claire Friedland • 317-8523 (phone or fax)

Sun., Sept. 6, regular meeting of **Roosevelt Island Art Association**, 546 Main Street, 12th floor. Live model. Call **517-0564**.

Tue., Sept. 8, 7:30 p.m., Registration for all dance, exercise, acting, and voice classes, **Main Street Theatre & Dance Alliance**, including a brief introductory performance by the jazz, ballet, tap and aerobics teachers and a few of their students.. Classes begin week of Sept. 14. Call **371-4449** for information.

Mon., Sept. 9, Open registration night for **Island Kids**, 6:30-9:00 p.m. at 536 Main Street.

Thur., Sept. 10, 10:00 a.m., **RIOC Board Meeting**, Good Shepherd Chapel.

Fri.-Sat., Sept. 11-12, next scheduled issue of **The Main Street WIRE**. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., Sept. 4; decision on stuffers for *The Bag*, Mon., Sept. 7. **Future issues:** September 26; October 10, 24; November 7, 21; December 5, 19; January 9, thereafter generally every two weeks. Unscheduled **extra** editions may be published as news and/or advertising support warrant; advertisers who would like to be included in one or more **extra** editions, without advance notice at the time, are invited to call **826-9055** to make their interest known. **Plan now to include your business card in the November 21 Thanksgiving issue.** Phone/fax for news, (212) **826-9055/755-2540**; phone/fax for advertising inquiries, (212) **751-8214/755-2540**; phone & fax for event listings, **317-8523**.

Sat., Sept. 12, **FDR Day**, 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Sports, exhibitions, health fair, disco dancing. Volunteers are needed. Call **838-4747**, **223-0847**, or **755-4089**.

Sat., Sept. 12, **Youth Soccer Registration** for ages 5-13. Season starts September 18. Information: **935-6598** or **688-3358**.

Please Back the Advertisers Who Back The WIRE

The WIRE’s layout has been altered this issue to accommodate publication of the Island map on pages 4 and 5.

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9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

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10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Sports events at Tony Capobianco Field

3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Disco (adults only) at the Manhattan Park Theater Club

To volunteer or participate, call Marilyn Engstler, Director of Community Relations at (212) 838-4747 or Fay Vass, Chair, at (212) 755-4089.

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Photos: If you photograph a community event and would like to make your work available to *The WIRE* for possible publication, please leave prints (retain your negatives) addressed to *The WIRE* at the lobby desk at Rivercross, 531 Main Street. Prints (color or b/w) or TIF scans to 3.5-inch disk preferred. Slides acceptable with adequate lead time to have prints made. Please provide identification, information for a credit line, and a phone number, along with a caption and other relevant information. Materials will be returned if return information is provided. Questions? Call (212) **826-9055**.

Roosevelt Island
1998





Aerial photography by
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Elzbieta Kopec-Schrader
Philip J. Carvalho
Langan Engineering

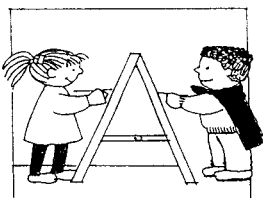


The Main Street WIRE, Saturday, August 29, 1998

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The Church of the Good Shepherd

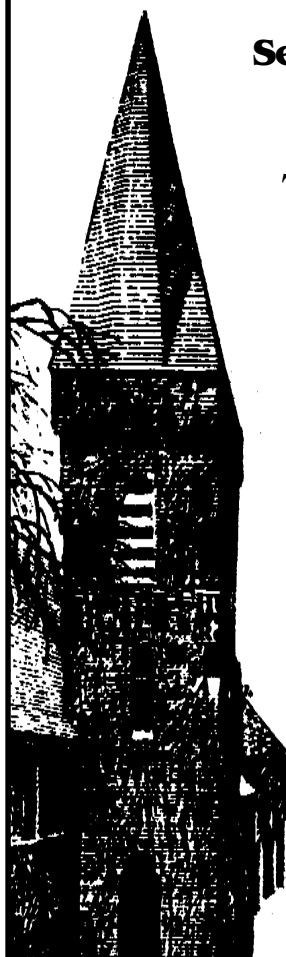
The Church of the Good Shepherd's full
Fall schedule resumes
September 20 with the Main Worship
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The Church of the Good Shepherd
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for all believers and seekers.

The Rev. Oliver T. Chapin
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Check the next issue of *The WIRE*
for more details on our Fall
schedule!

*Ecumenical means "embracing the
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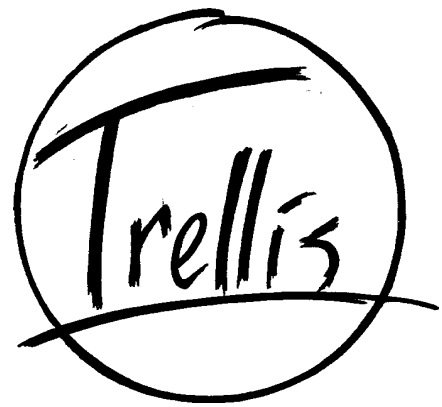
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Monday & Thursday • 9 a.m. - 12 noon

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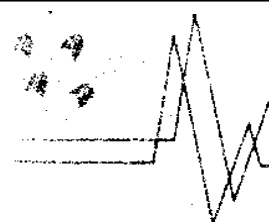
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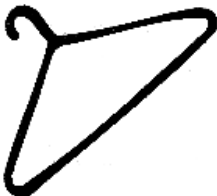
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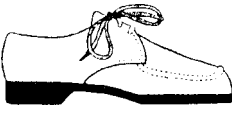


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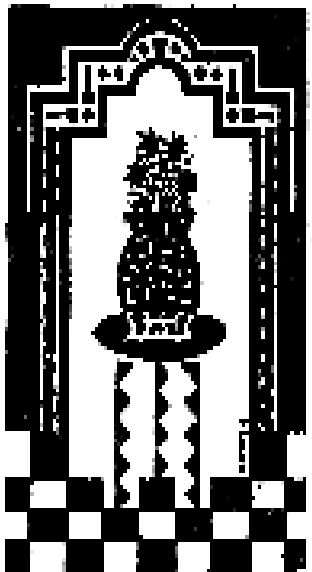
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