

SAVE THE DATE!
Saturday • Sept. 10
 NABB ANNUAL STREET SALE

Air-Spading: Pilot Project Aims to Revive Landscape Along Mall's Hereford Block

BY MARGARET POKORNY

The Commonwealth Avenue Mall Committee (CAMC, a joint committee of NABB and the Friends of the Public Garden) has launched a demonstration project on the Mall between Hereford St. and the Mass. Ave. underpass. With the encouragement and cooperation of the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, this 23,000 square foot area was treated with a new landscape restoration technique called Air-Spading.

"The Friends of the Public Garden are delighted to be working with NABB to make a difference on this section of the Mall," said Elizabeth Vizza, Executive Director of the Friends. "This pilot restoration project will give us a better understanding of how the growing environment can be improved not just here but in all of the parks of our care."

In urban parks, soil compaction is the primary reason for trees not being healthy and dying and for

the turf never developing. Treating this condition in an established landscape was formerly done by digging a series of trenches, which caused significant damage to tree roots, or by an aeration drum that only addressed the problem superficially. About 10 years ago a new instrument called an Air-Spade was developed. It essentially emits a stream of air under very high pressure, which disturbs and literally blows up the soil to a depth of 8 or more inches. This is the only technique that is effective and does not damage an established landscape such as the Mall.

This block was chosen because it has many zelkova trees with girdling roots, because the turf is almost nonexistent, and because of the very degraded condition of the soil.

The root flares of existing trees were exposed and killing, girdling roots were cut and removed. This will contribute significantly to the long-term survival of these trees. The soil was amended with a custom blend of organic materials and fertilizers. The whole area was regraded and reseeded with a special blend of shade-tolerant grass, and the trees were mulched. This process took about three weeks. The initial work was a little noisy and dusty, but everything was done to mitigate this by using dust shields.

Following this work, the two grass panels will be fenced off with a sturdy and not ugly wire fence for the remainder of the summer. CAMC knows that this will be an inconvenience to those accustomed to walking their dogs and sitting on the benches in this block, but it is only temporary. The central pathway should remain accessible.

This is the largest area ever to be treated in this way in the state. Many park agencies and advocacy groups are very interested in this project, as it may be the answer to the problems of compaction in other



PHOTO: PENNY CHERUBINO

Russ Chaffee, Sr., of Maltby and Co., cuts girdling roots.

parks. CAMC has been systematically thinning the tree canopy here in anticipation of this work. The contractor is Maltby and Company, an experienced Stoughton-based landscape firm that has had great success with this technique on a smaller scale.

The Friends of the Public Garden have retained Charles Sherzi, Jr., a soil scientist from the Landscape Institute, to evaluate the project. Soil samples were taken prior to the work and the condition of the trees and turf noted. Over the next year periodic soil tests will be taken and tree and turf health evaluated.

Time will tell how well this method works on the Mall. We are very hopeful. We appreciate the contributions we have received from The Friends of the Public Garden, NABB, the Garden Club of the Back Bay, the Boston Athletic Association, Timberland Company, NSTAR and neighborhood residents. Contributions to this project will still be gratefully received. Checks made payable to Commonwealth Ave Mall Committee may be sent to the NABB office. Please send questions or comments to CommAveMall@verizon.net. To view a video on this project by Penny and Ed Cherubino, go to <http://bit.ly/jtajQV>.



PHOTO: PENNY CHERUBINO

Air-spading around a heritage elm.

Graffiti NABbers Present Alley Security Plan to BBAC

"It is much cheaper to prevent vandalism than to clean up the mess the vandals leave behind," declared Graffiti NABbers Chair Anne Swanson, presenting a proposal for the installation of inexpensive security devices in commercial alleys to the Back Bay Architectural Commission (BBAC) on May 11. Swanson pointed out how preventing access at a single metal ladder on one building could save thousands of dollars in costs for graffiti removal on three adjoining rooftops.

To identify appropriate security devices, Swanson worked with Boston Police Officer Richard Litto and security expert Greg Montopoli of K&J Integrated Systems. The Graffiti NABbers' plan calls for the installation of beam detectors, fire escape alarms, motion-sensitive lights, no-trespassing signs, and security cameras as needed in commercial Public Alleys 430-444 to deter vandals' access to upper stories and rooftops. The proposal was supported by the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay representing residents, and the Back Bay Association and the Newbury Street League, representing businesses. It was well received by the BBAC.

The Graffiti NABbers plan to urge property owners to secure access to their properties and then remove or paint over graffiti as appropriate. The group plans to do a survey of affected properties, contact property owners and managers directly, and facilitate the process of (1) getting BBAC approval,

(2) arranging for installation of security devices, and (3) removing graffiti. To streamline the BBAC approval process for property owners, BBAC Senior Preservation Planner William Young will meet with owners concerning specific properties and consider individual installations administratively, rather than requiring a full commission hearing. The Graffiti NABbers work with Erik Barry of E.J. Clean to arrange for cleaning of upper stories and rooftops at the property owner's expense.

The city's Code Enforcement Department issues Green Ticket fines of \$100—multiple times if necessary—for failure to remove graffiti vandalism within thirty days. As Swanson observed, "We prefer that property owners spend money to solve the problem rather than spending money on fines paid to the city. This is a smarter solution for all of us."

Michele Messino, executive director of the Newbury Street League, also spoke in support of securing the alleys and removing this blight from our valuable business district.

"We hope that securing these alleys will deter other criminal activity as well," added Swanson. "Everyone who lives or works here will benefit."

More specific information about the security devices and procedure will be posted on the NABB website at nabbonline.com/committees/graffiti_nabbers/security_devices.

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NABB Comments on Berklee Expansion Plans

BY SUSAN ASHBROOK

On May 12, the BRA Board approved an Institutional Master Plan (IMP) for the Berklee College of Music. NABB has participated in the Berklee College of Music Task Force since it was formed by the BRA in 2006 to help shape the Plan for the college. Although the majority of Berklee's buildings are in the Fenway, the college's proximity to the Back Bay means that its planning decisions impact us significantly.

The college's "campus" has grown incrementally and opportunistically since its founding in 1945 and is housed in a variety of buildings clustered around the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street. Like many urban colleges Berklee feels an urgent need to enhance its physical

■ See BERKLEE EXPANSION on page 2

■ BERKLEE EXPANSION *from page 1*

amenities and architectural identity while responding to the Mayor's directive to reduce its impact on residential housing.

In January 2009 Berklee filed a preliminary Project Notification Form for its IMP proposing a 29-story tower at the southeast corner of Boylston and Mass. Ave. (now known as the Crossroads Project). At that time NABB submitted a comment letter stating that the project was far too tall for such a congested site, where the maximum allowed height was 100 feet. Subsequently Berklee acquired the property at 168 Mass. Ave., enabling it to reduce the height of the Crossroads project and spread its desired uses over two sites.

The approved IMP will increase the school's holdings by 500,000 square feet. It calls for:

- A 185-foot, 16-story mixed-use building at 168 Mass. Ave. with ground-floor retail, a dining

hall and 350 beds, designed by William Rawn Associates. Berklee plans to begin construction on this building this fall in hopes of occupying it in September 2013.

- A 290-foot, 24-story tower on the Crossroads site to contain a new performance center, academic and student-life space and 450 student beds. The timetable for this building is not specified.
- Future expansion of the administrative building at 161-171 Mass. Ave.

NABB's comment letter of April 19, 2011, submitted to the BRA and posted on our website supports Berklee's overall goals and the reduction of the height of the Crossroads building, but expresses grave concern that several entities, including Berklee, are proposing towers close to the corner of Mass. Ave. and Boylston Street. Of particular concern is the shadow that the Crossroads building would cast on the Commonwealth Avenue Mall

which, although narrow and of short duration, would clearly violate pending legislation to protect sunlight in urban parks, legislation that NABB unequivocally supports.

NABB also urged the BRA to require Berklee to follow the full Article 80 process for the Crossroads Project and for any future building projects, and to require Berklee to work with abutters to mitigate problems that inevitably arise from the concentrated student presence in the neighborhood. We also strongly recommended that Berklee make every effort to erect green buildings that achieve gold or platinum LEED certification.

Berklee College of Music is a unique institution that brings welcome cultural vitality to the city. NABB, in consort with Fenway residents and groups, looks forward to seeing the college's needs accommodated while minimizing negative impacts on the public realm.

16TH ANNUAL

Taste

OF THE BACK BAY



The 16th Annual Taste of the Back Bay was held Thursday, April 7, at the Prudential Skywalk. Over 300 revelers delighted in tasting the offerings of the participating restaurants and beverage providers while taking in the sweeping city views. Many thanks to this year's Taste Committee: Sue Baker, Natalie Bassil, Don Carlson, Sybil CooperKing, Jack Gregg, Nancy Macchia, Molly Mosier, Jeryl Oristaglio, Roberta Orlandino and Linda Zukowski, as well as all the volunteers and sponsors who helped to make the event such a success. We

are grateful to Richard Tominsky, catering manager of Top of the Hub, and his staff, who made the evening run so smoothly. Berklee College of Music provided the musical accompaniment. A portion of the proceeds from the event will benefit the Women's Lunch Place. (All photos by Patti Quinn.)



Alley Rally Helps Boston Shine

ALL PHOTOS BY PATTI QUINN



Alley Rally Chairs Ellen Rooney, Chris Mitchell and Roseann Colot

The sun shone on NABB's Alley Rally this year as 75 volunteers, including residents, fraternity members, and students and faculty from neighborhood schools joined together with Mayor Menino's *Boston Shines*. We had delegations from BPS Snowden International High School, the Commonwealth School, Boston Architectural College, MIT's Delta Nu and Phi Kappa Theta, TPC Systems fraternities and Northeastern University's Beta Gamma Epsilon. Everyone gathered at the Clarendon playground for breakfast provided by Dunkin' Donuts and Burger King. Will Onuoha of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services dropped off the rakes, brooms and shovels. The volunteers then split into teams, each taking charge of cleaning an assigned alley. Volunteers were rewarded for their labors with a picnic lunch at the playground, thanks to donations from Bostone Pizza, Burger King and Shaw's Supermarkets. Alley Rally Co-chairs Ellen Rooney, Chris Mitchell and Roseann Colot wish to thank all our hard-working volunteers and generous business-donors. Because of their collaboration, the Back Bay is a cleaner place today!



MIT's Nu Delta



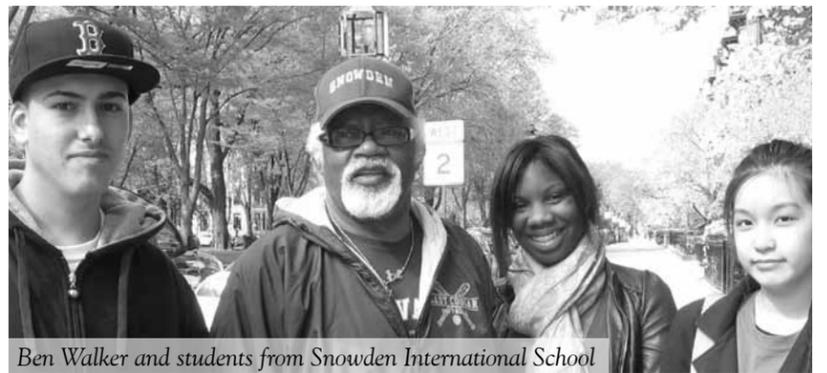
Commonwealth School



Northeastern's Beta Gamma Epsilon



Back Bayers Richard Oedel and Knut Cutter flank Jon Clough, visiting from Idaho!



Ben Walker and students from Snowden International School



NABB's Elliott Laffer (proud Rensselaer grad) with MIT's Phi Kappa Theta



NABB Chair Jim Hill, Commonwealth School Headmaster William Wharton, Commissioner of Public Works Joanne Massaro, and DPW Asst. Commissioner Frank O'Brien

This August NABB will bid a fond farewell to our retiring Office Administrator, Lois Harvey. Lois has been the face and voice of NABB since 2003, when she made the transition from volunteer, committee chair and board member to being NABB's only full-time staff person.

Lois brought this organization many practical skills from her previous careers in teaching, publishing and business, but most of all she brought her extraordinary people skills. As she interacted with the membership at events or via phone calls, letters, emails and office visits, Lois saw her main task as being a facilitator helping people participate in NABB activities or solve neighborhood problems. If Lois couldn't answer a resident's query, she could almost always provide a connection to a volunteer group or city agency that could help.

Lois states there was no such thing as a typical day at the NABB office, but the rise of electronic communication resulted in 30 to 60 emails on a busy day. Trash was one of the biggest issues, however Lois credits Alley Rally and NABB's City Services

Committee with making the alleys much cleaner now than when she first moved to the Back Bay in 1993.

Throughout her years of dealing with the public Lois has maintained her cheerful, even-tempered demeanor. As she explains, "I've never lost my cool with anyone because I'm the voice of NABB. I've tried to be helpful and pleasant because I think it's meaningful to people to talk to a real person rather than a machine."

Lois says she will miss the people she has met through NABB and those she has worked with over the phone for years and never met! She is impressed with the intelligence and hard work of the volunteers who serve on NABB's board and

committees. Her advice for any successor is, "Never be afraid to ask for help. I've always gotten it when I've asked."

Lois plans on moving to Cape Cod, where she spent childhood summers, and taking time to relax and figure out what she wants to do in retirement. She is already fielding offers! Lois promises to keep in touch with her many good friends in the old neighborhood. "I can't believe how fast these years have gone by," she says.

Neither can we. But we know NABB could not have been represented by a finer person.

**THANK YOU,
LOIS HARVEY!**



PHOTO: PATTI QUINN

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HAPPY 5th ANNIVERSARY, GRAFFITI NABBERS!
Back Bay phone boxes before and after cleaning by Graffiti NABber
Marco Baldassarre. Many thanks to Marco, Chair Anne Swanson and
all the hardworking NABbers!

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION OF THE BACK BAY
NABB NEWS

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How the Back Bay and NABB Have Changed Over the Years

Editor's note: Long-time Back Bay resident and NABB stalwart Marian Ullman passed away last December at age 99. In tribute, the winter issue of NABB News included part of an essay Marian wrote for NABB's 40th anniversary in which she described life in the Back Bay at the time she arrived here in the late 1940s, when her neighbors included families that relied on staffs of servants to run their houses—and to pack them off to summer homes on the North Shore. In this issue we conclude Marian's essay, which describes the postwar changes that almost destroyed the neighborhood and how NABB came to involve itself in the development and quality-of-life issues that occupy so much of its energy today.

After the end of World War II in 1945, families that had moved in together as young men went into the service began to split up again, creating a tremendous demand for housing. In fact, I bought my house because I couldn't find a suitable apartment to rent. Empty Back Bay houses were bought at prices considered laughable today and converted into apartments. Condominiums did not come in until the middle [nineteen]-sixties. I paid under \$20,000 for my house and spent an equivalent amount to convert it from a private home into four apartments. (In the depth of the Depression in the 1930s, houses had sold for as little as \$5,000.)

The big demand for housing also brought changes in the commercial world. Stores catering to Society with a capital "S" no longer found their clientele in the city, and the character of shops began to favor those with more moderately priced merchandise. Banks opened branches, and the three big insurance companies began to expand.

I was not active in the new neighborhood association, which was founded in 1955, but I was a member. I remember well the first meeting I attended. The matter of new benches on Commonwealth Avenue Mall was under discussion, and one serious old lady after another

got up to state unequivocally that wooden benches were superior to stone benches and then to give reasons why this was so. This was too much for me, and I lost interest until the threat of high-rise buildings on the corners of Commonwealth Avenue almost became a reality. This was an issue around which all residents of Back Bay could rally—and rally they did. At a meeting in New England Life Hall, every seat was taken and feelings and opinions were vehemently expressed. Eventually the proposal for high-rises on Commonwealth Avenue was defeated.

It was a short step to realization that a high-rise on Boylston Street was also a threat to the quality of life in the residential neighborhood, since it brought more traffic, which created more pollution, and it also cut off sunlight. NABB was very active in the effort to impose height limitations on developments such as Park Plaza and the new New England Life buildings. Efforts were ongoing at the time to attract young families to the neighborhood, and to that end a long and eventually successful struggle to have a playground for toddlers was under way.

My active participation in neighborhood affairs began about 1970 when a rash of arson fires, three of them near enough to endanger my property, frightened me into working on this issue with then-president Jack Williams. It wasn't long before I became a director, and, except for one stint as vice president, I have held that position ever since. It has been a rewarding experience. It has brought me many new friends, and it has often given me a sense of accomplishment. It has meant many hours of work, sometimes when it wasn't convenient, but on the whole I have enjoyed it.

NABB members tend to forget that the organization is, with the exception of one paid staff person in a small office, composed of volunteers. They do their best to solve the problems in the neighborhood within the limits of their time and ability, and they respond to your complaints as promptly and efficiently as they can. If it weren't for this dedicated small group of people, Back Bay would be a far different and less desirable place to live.



Left to right, Captain Paul M. Ivens; Don Carlson, NABB Crime Committee Chair; and Sergeant Gino Provenzano

NABB HOSTS CRIME FORUM

BY DON CARLSON

Crime is still with us in the Back Bay but generally declining. So said the Boston Police Department in the NABB Membership Meeting at the Boston Public Library on March 23. Captain Paul M. Ivens, Commander of District 4, and Sgt. Gino Provenzano, Community Service Supervisor, assisted by Lt. Detective Michael Conley, walked us through recent crime statistics, provided tips on how to avoid becoming one of those statistics, and explained the new sexual offender database.

Car break-ins are still our most prevalent crime. They are also the most avoidable crime. If thieves see nothing of value in a car they move on. Home break-ins are much less prevalent, but still occur too often. They, too, can be avoided. Officer Richard Litto will conduct a free home security assessment and tell you how you can make your home more secure. Call the D-4 Community Service Office at 617-343-4457 to set up an appointment.

The Sexual Offender database can be accessed through BPDnews.com. Click on the **safety** tab at the top of the page, then click on **sex offenders registry** in the dropdown screen and go from there. The **safety** tab also leads you to an array of very practical tips for avoiding becoming a victim of crime.

Another useful tool for owners of iPhones and Android phones is Citizens Connect, an application launched by the City of Boston that allows you to report problems to the city instantly and on the spot. It uses GPS in your phone to report your location. You can take a picture of the problem on your phone's camera and upload it over your phone to the hotline as well as a written description of the problem. You get an email response as well as updates on resolution of the problem. Go to CityofBoston.gov, click the **online services** tab and you'll get the Citizens Connect page, which will tell you how to get the service.

City Councilor Michael Ross also spoke about a range of topics and took the opportunity to congratulate Anne Swanson and the Graffiti NABbers for their great work in the neighborhood.

Eggcellent Event!



The Friends of the Clarendon Street Playground hosted its annual Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 23. Neighborhood children excitedly waited for the playground gates to open and dodged the raindrops to hunt for eggs. The Easter Bunny (Tessa Sanchez) dropped by and delighted the children. Many thanks to Ellen Rooney and Cathy Wallace who helped hide more than 900 chocolate eggs in the playground, and to Leslie Dressler of Hotel Chocolat, who distributed yummy free samples to all who attended.



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