

# BELOVED COMMUNITY NEWS

Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI) at Asbury Methodist Village (AMV)

## Happy Summer GBCI!

Over the past few months, several Gaithersburg Beloved Community intergenerational programs celebrated the end of the school year. Students, adult English participants, parents, and older adult volunteers shared reflections and gratitude for the intergenerational relationships they grew together and the fun learning activities that added to everyone's well-being. Thank you to our student, adult, and older adult volunteer participants for making the Spring semester a meaningful experience for all! In this issue, you will find stories from the end of the school year and updates on ongoing and upcoming activities.

## GBCI Mentoring Tuesday Team's 2023-2024 Character Trait Awards

by Kathy Sloan



Above: Mentors Doug Cook, Kathy Cook, Medie Snape, Kathy Sloan, and Meg Chandler with 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students holding their character trait awards at Gaithersburg Elementary School Tuesday Mentoring program.

Among the greatest pleasures for GBCI mentors is watching youngsters develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally each school year. By working with our students one-on-one and in small groups, the Tuesday Team has watched the children consider new concepts, hone their problem-solving skills, help each other, and build confidence in themselves. Their transformation has been praiseworthy indeed, and as our 2023-2024 sessions drew to a close, GBCI's program coordinator and mentors recognized their stellar qualities in a character trait awards program.

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*L: Deepika Bachu, parent volunteer, and her son Karthik receiving the Innovative award. R: Mentor Doug Cook and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student James who received the Participative award.*



The group came up with awards recognizing students' traits such as: brave, caring, cheerful, innovative, courageous, creative, enthusiastic, helpful, imaginative, innovative, inventive, meticulous, participative, patient, personable, resourceful, respectful, and thoughtful. Then corresponding commemorative cards and trophies were prepared. With the flourish of a glittering backdrop and a red carpet rolled out between the rows of desks, the classroom was magically transformed into a celebratory showcase. One by one, each character trait was announced, along with a brief description of its significance. Then the students created a dramatic drumroll by

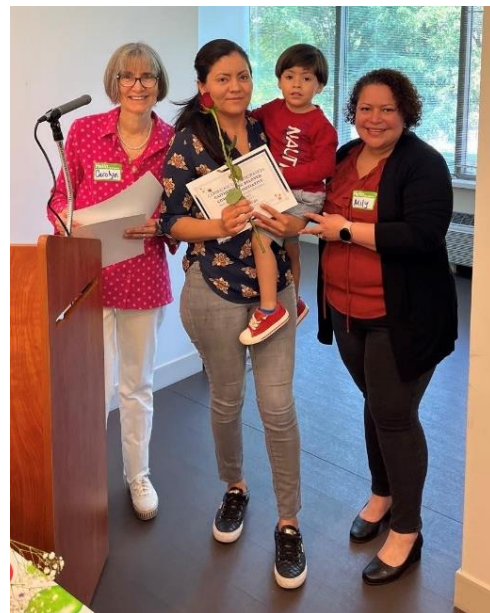
tapping their hands on their desktops. At the peak of suspense, the award card was opened, and the winner was revealed, rallying widespread applause as the recipient proudly walked down the red carpet and received a personalized trophy. Bravo! Keep shining brightly, young scholars!

## English Conversation Group Celebrates 13-year Partnership with Mujer Fuerza y Coraje and Identity *by Rebecca Cole*

GBCI's English Conversation Group gathered at the end of the school year to celebrate its 13th anniversary. The 2023-2024 class had 40 adult participants, 19 in the beginner class and 21 in the intermediate, and 19 class instructor volunteers from Asbury Methodist Village and the greater Gaithersburg area. On the last day of class, adult participants who have attended at least eight of the 11 Spring semester classes received an English certificate commemorating their hard work. This year GBCI was honored to have Milagro Cruz, Founder and Director of Mujer Fuerza y Coraje, and Carolyn Camacho, Program Director at Identity present the certificates to six beginner students and 13 intermediate students.

We celebrate the commitment and dedication of the adult participants who work very hard to attend classes and learn English--many juggling full-time work or multiple jobs while also caring for and supporting their children and families.

We are also grateful for the English Conversation Group volunteers who give their time and energy to listen to the students' interests and needs, plan lessons, teach, and practice with students and small groups.



*Above, L to R: Carolyn Camacho, Celia Rivas, intermediate English class participant and her son receiving their certificate for attending at least 8 out of 11 classes, and Milagro Cruz.*



Lastly, we thank Carolyn Camacho who 13 years ago reached out to GBCI's founder and Diamond resident, Hal Garman, about partnering with a group of Latina moms in the community who were interested in practicing English. Hal found a group of volunteers, and Carolyn introduced him to Milagro Cruz, a mom and community leader who was also starting a group called Mujer, Fuerza, y Coraje (Women, Strength, and Courage) to engage Latina women and their families. The partnerships with Identity and Mujer, Fuerza, y Coraje established the foundation for the English Conversation Group to grow and evolve over the last 13 years. We are beyond grateful for the participants, volunteers, and our partners. Congratulations!

Above: L to R- Asbury resident volunteer Helen Mahylis, Carolyn Camacho (Identity), Mily Cruz (Mujer Fuerza y Coraje), Peg Vert (Asbury resident volunteer), and Georgia Portocarrero (Asbury resident volunteer) sharing the history of the English Conversation Group with adult participants and volunteers.



## Highlights from the Early Steps Spring Semester *by Rebecca Cole*



Above: Asbury musicians Mary Ellen Bliss, Jay Phillips, Rhoda MacKenzie, Donna Marino, and Lyman Van Nostrand creating an orchestra experience with the Early Steps class.

Early Steps, or “Primeros Pasos” is GBCI’s early literacy program focused on developing vocabulary and literacy skills with young children ages 0-5 to prepare for pre-k and kindergarten. Parents of the students also attend sessions that include activities like reading, circle time, art making, music, and other academic activities. The parents build community with other families and volunteers, learn about the importance of reading to very young children, and identify the skills they have within them

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through lived experience, prior education, cultures, language, and traditions. These skills are essential for young children to be prepared for preschool and kindergarten. Most importantly everyone involved is dedicated to cultivating a joyful spirit that exemplifies how learning is fun!



*Above: Dr. Cassandra Carter of Zumba Divine leading Early Steps students and parents in high-energy movement and dance.*

The Early Steps program meets on Asbury's campus on Monday mornings. This past semester we had an abundance of special guests sharing their talents, knowledge, and wisdom with the young students and their parents. The program took a Zumba class with Dr. Cassandra Carter who led everyone in fun & healthy exercise for all ages.

Early Steps founder and volunteer Pat Johnson invited five Asbury musicians to teach the students about music, the instrument they play, and what each instrument sounds like on its own and when played in a small orchestra. The visit from the "Asbury orchestra" was a huge hit. Thank you to Donna Marino and Lyman Van Nostrand (drums), Mary Ellen Bliss (violin), Jay Phillips (trumpet), and Rhoda MacKenzie (recorder) for sharing your music with us!



The Early Steps students were ecstatic about learning how to grow their own peppers! They practiced responsibility and patience while working with soil, planting seeds, watering their plants each week, and setting them to sit in the sun—all to nurture growth over several weeks!

We ended the semester with a special children's book reading at the Early Steps graduation by Asbury resident Phyllis Childers. Phyllis also volunteers in GBCI's mentoring program and is the



*Right: Parent facilitators watering plants with students. Above: Early Steps participants Kenis Torres and her daughter planting pepper seeds in potted soil.*





author and illustrator of the children’s book “The Cat, the Rat, and the Big Red Hat.” It was such a treat for the little learners to meet the author/illustrator during story time and receive a gifted book to take home. Many thanks to Ms. Phyllis!

Each activity enriches learning and opens the door for the young children and their parents to imagine many different possibilities for their academic journey and future. Thank you to the volunteers for creating this opportunity!

*Left: Phyllis Childers reading “The Cat, the Rat, and the Big Red Hat” to the Early Steps students and families on their 2024 graduation day.*

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## **GBCI and Asbury Advocates for Its Neighbors** by Janet Garman

On a warm June evening, Asbury Executive Director Michele Potter and forty-eight members and friends of the Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI) were among an overflow crowd at Gaithersburg City Hall Chambers to hear WRS, the new owner of the former Lake Forest Mall outline their plans for the mall. Michele Potter reported that Asbury employed over 700 associates and pointed out that “Affordable housing is essential because it supports those who are the backbone of the Asbury community...healthcare workers, dining room attendants, housekeepers, first responders, maintenance personnel, and many others who keep Asbury Methodist Village...running smoothly.”

Spearheaded by Rollie Smith and Spence Limbocker, GBCI has been involved in negotiations with WRS and the City for four years. In his testimony, Limbocker, GBCI’s chair, said that after studying the plan, GBCI is in strong support of it going forward as soon as possible. He proposed changes including WRS increasing the number of three and four-bedroom units to promote family housing, increasing the number of affordable units beyond the required 15%, and encouraging WRS to work with a non-profit housing developer who understands how to utilize federal, county and city resources to create and finance affordable for-sale and rental housing. Limbocker also proposed that any funds donated to the city from WRS related to the development be used to expand affordable housing on the site. Lastly, he asked that plans include a “recreational center for youth and their families, providing a safe and engaging space for the community.”



*Asbury residents Linda Culbertson, Helen Mahylis, Maria Roberts, and Teresa Wright among the GBCI/Asbury group listening to the testimonies. GBCI partners & Safe Places members, Ramatou Bakori, Adama Moussa Harouna, and Chrystl Lindo preparing to share their testimony with the Mayor and City Council.*

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*2024 GHS graduate Mike Nwaogwugwu giving testimony about the importance of affordable housing and space for youth recreation.*

Other members of GBCI echoed the need for affordable housing. David Winfield praised Lake Forest as “a model of how development should occur with the participation of the community, government, and the developer.” Also testifying were GBCI Board Member and Gaithersburg resident, Marvin Lynch, Adama Harouna, and Chrystl Lindo from the Safe Places Resident Association, GBCI’s community partner at Cider Mill Apartments, Mike Nwaogwugwu, 2024 graduate of Gaithersburg High School and student-athlete representing GBCI’s partner the 480 club, and Oscar Alvarenga, husband of GBCI’s Sarahi Segura. Carmen Castro-Conroy, Gaithersburg resident and HUD-certified housing counselor spoke about several clients who want to stay in the city but cannot afford more than a one-bedroom condo.

Other Asbury residents were prepared to testify but the hour grew late. Their sheer numbers indicated their concern for affordable housing for our community’s middle and low-income, hard-working neighbors. John Roddy, a longtime active resident of Gaithersburg who recently moved to AMV, emailed his remarks to the Mayor, City Council, and Planning Commission reiterating the need for affordable housing for families. Roddy said that “This target population wants to contribute to the fabric of the Gaithersburg

community. They want to live, raise children in, and have their tax dollars benefit our city.....What GBCI asks is the right thing to do and this is the right time.”

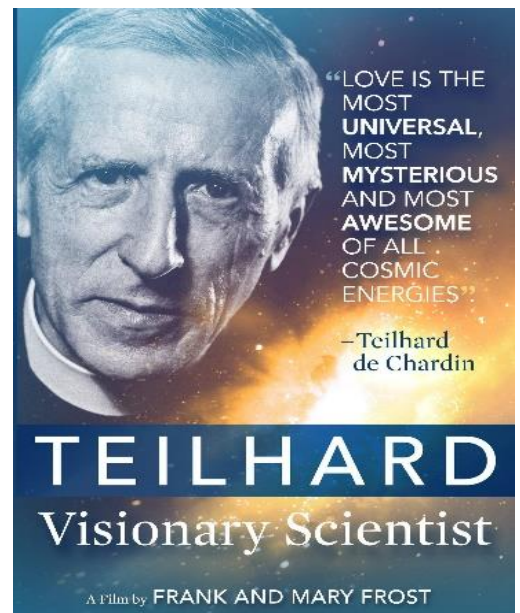
Until the final decision in September or October, GBCI’s Neighborhood Action team will be engaging Asbury residents, community members, and neighbors to do what they can to steer the new development so that it includes all who call Gaithersburg home.

## Upcoming Events

**Film Screening and Discussion Saturday, July 27, 1:00pm**  
Rosborough Theater

Filmmakers Frank and Mary Frost will join GBCI members, Rollie Smith and Spence Limbocker in a special viewing and discussion of their recent independent film: ***Teilhard: Visionary Scientist***.

“Teilhard de Chardin was a French priest-paleontologist-visionary who was suppressed by his Jesuit order for advocating for evolution. Told largely in his own words, with a mix of archival film and images, expert interviews, commentary, and recreations, the film explores Teilhard's theories and how he was exiled to China by the church as a way to silence him. The film also explores his role as part of the team that made the remarkable discovery of Peking Man in the 1920s, the most important "missing link" in evolution to that point.”



# GBCI Monthly Meetings Resume in September

The GBCI Monthly Meetings take place on the third Friday of every month (September-June) from 9:30-10:30am in the Hefner Auditorium on Asbury's campus. This gathering is a time to hear speakers and discussions on current issues and events relevant to Gaithersburg residents and GBCI programs. Asbury residents, associates, and staff, students, community members and partners are invited to attend. ALL ARE WELCOME.

## Fall 2024 GBCI Monthly Meeting Schedule

### **Friday, September 6, 9:30am: 2024-2025 Programs Kick-Off**

\*Please note the date change. Due to room availability the September meeting has been moved to the first Friday of September!

### **Friday, October 1, 9:30am: *What does it mean to be a Beloved Community?***

Guest Speaker: Dr. Fred Smith

### **Friday, November 15, 9:30am**

**Friday, December 13, 9:30am** \*Please note date changed to second Friday.

## **GBCI MONTHLY MEETING** **Friday, September 6, 9:30 am**

**Location: HEFNER AUDITORIUM**  
Asbury Methodist Village Campus  
(301 Odendhal Ave, enter through gatehouse.  
Turn right upon entering and follow signs for  
Hefner building)



### **2024-2025 Programs Kick-Off**

GBCI Staff, along with lead program volunteers will share outcomes from the Board Retreat in July 2024, and program plans for the 2024-2025 year.

We will also welcome  
**Natasha Kalitsi,**  
Admin & Communications Manager  
who joined GBCI staff in July.

*We hope you can join us!*



Questions?  
Contact 301.216.4090

**3RD ANNUAL  
GBCI COMMUNITY DAY**  
Saturday, September 21, 2024  
10AM-2PM  
**SAVE THE DATE!**

**WE HOPE YOU CAN JOIN US  
FOR A FUN DAY OF:**  
FACE PAINTING, GAMES, FOOD, MUSIC AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES!

**Location: THE VILLAGE EVENT TENT**  
@Asbury Methodist Village  
301 Odendhal Ave, Gaithersburg MD

For more information call GBCI: 301-987-6635

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual GBCI Community Day- SAVE THE DATE!**

GBCI will host its third annual Community Day on

**Saturday, September 21st from 10am-2pm at:**  
The Village Event Tent at Asbury Methodist Village,  
301 Odendhal Ave, Gaithersburg, MD 20877.

The GBCI Community Day is a day filled with educational and recreational activities for all the family and community to be together and have fun! Join us for face painting, nature activities, games, food, and music. ALL ARE WELCOME!

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## Announcements



### Interested in Volunteering with GBCI?

Since 2011, dedicated volunteers have been at the heart of GBCI. They have made a tremendous impact in local schools and neighborhoods. As we prepare to start another year of programs this Fall, GBCI is actively recruiting NEW VOLUNTEERS!

#### 2024-2025 Volunteer Opportunities (varying commitment levels):

- “Early Steps” early literacy program (Monday AM or Wednesday AM at Asbury)
- Mentoring elementary school students (Tues, Wed, or Thurs after school- 4 different programs available)
- Working with adults who are learning conversational English (Wednesday mornings at Asbury)
- Organizing with the Neighborhood Action team to work on affordable housing, equitable education, neighborhood safety, and other community concerns.
- Writing articles for GBCI’s Newsletter
- Taking photos for GBCI programs and/or events
- Volunteering to support administrative, research, program evaluation and impact work.

..... and much more!

***Each day, our caring and passionate volunteers are making a difference in the lives of children, youth, families, and the community!***

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Rebecca Cole, [rebecca@gaitHERSburgbelovedcommunity.org](mailto:rebecca@gaitHERSburgbelovedcommunity.org) or 301-216-4090.