

The GREEN LIGHT

BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION
OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND



REMEMBRANCE

See page 6 to read Lisa Stuart's appreciation of stone carver John Everett "Fud" Benson, who died in June. Fud, pictured at left, is flanked by his son Nicholas and his granddaughter Hope, both stone carvers, at the entrance to the John Stevens Shop at 29 Thames Street. The shop has specialized in the design and execution of one-of-a-kind inscriptions in stone since 1705. Photo by The John Stevens Shop/Benson.



The Point Association is a group of neighbors working together to improve the quality of life in our neighborhood by getting to know each other; preserving our historic heritage; maintaining the Point's residential character; beautifying our parks, streets and piers; and promoting public policies that strengthen all of Newport's neighborhoods.

FROM THE EDITOR

Farewell from Ann McMahon

Dear Readers,

This is my last edition as editor of *The Green Light*. I have been in this position for seven years, and I'm very proud to have been an important part of this journal. I'm grateful to all the writers who have contributed their expertise over those years. In particular, we have been fortunate to have Lisa Stuart so involved. Her initiative and historical knowledge have been great assets to this publication.

Without *The Green Light* and Lisa's writing, very few of us would know that the Point was laid out in a grid by Quakers and that our little neighborhood played an outsized part in the American Revolution. We've learned that we have the world famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. to thank for, among other things, the beauty of Washington Street and the preservation of open space for parks. We should ponder that when walking our dogs or playing pickleball.

The Green Light is a unique and continuous source of our astounding history, and it's relied upon by historians and genealogists as well as our members. Our bulletin can hold its own in professional circles and is at the top of its class as a publication by volunteers. Its 67-year history is a crowning achievement of our venerable Point Association, and I am trusting it will continue to get the support and respect it deserves.

It would be good news if you would like to participate in the future of *The Green Light*. Please email Laura Treonze (thepointpresident@gmail.com) if you'd like to pitch in.

See you 'round the neighborhood.

Ann McMahon
Editor, *The Green Light*
greenlight@thepointassociation.org

THE GREEN LIGHT

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CONTENTS

- 2 From the Editor
- 3 From the President
- 3 Welcome, New Members
- 4 Spring and Summer Highlights
- 6 Fud Benson; A Remembrance
- 9 Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s Plan for the Point
- 12 Save These Dates

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

These Memorable Months



Thank you for the warm welcome and for making my first few months as president of The Point Association so memorable. We ended winter on a high note with a fantastic turnout for Neighborhood Nights at the Brenton Hotel. Our Block Party

saw record attendance in its new location, our Music on the Lawn series was filled with outstanding performances, and the August Cocktail Party was a wonderful way to close the season.

We are extremely proud of our beautification efforts, including the Spring Cleanup and the Annual Plant Sale. Our dedication to preserving the Point's history continues to shine through online with our "History & Archives" and *The Green Light* and was highlighted at our Point Nights at the Brenton. (To enjoy our "History & Archives," click the Our Neighborhood tab to see the History & Archives tab.)

I look forward to seeing you at our Fall Meeting. In the meantime, keep an eye on your email for our bi-monthly *Points of Interest* to learn about the latest happenings in the neighborhood and beyond.

Best wishes,

Laura Treonze

Welcome, New Members

Since last March, 21 households have joined The Point Association. Welcome to all of you! We need all of our neighbors' voices in our Association. To renew a lapsed membership, click the Join tab at thepointassociation.org or use your phone to scan the QR code. Mail checks to P.O. Box 491, Newport, RI 02840. While you're at it, hit the auto-renew button to lock in the good times.



- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Jason Bertsch & Anne Kuuskvere | 1 Maitland Court |
| Maureen Best | 14 Second Street |
| Doug & Cheryl Both | 34 Third Street |
| Christine & Tim Brown | 11 Poplar Street |
| Debbie & Mike Cooney | 1 Elm Street |
| Johan & Martha deWeerd | 71 Washington Street |
| Dennis Donnelly | 28 Elm Street |
| Brittany Hullinger | 19 Walnut Street |
| Frederick & Monica Huntsberry | 21 Cherry Street |
| Anna & Lew Lassow | 89 Wolcott Ave., Middletown |
| Tracy Marinan Freese | 47 Third Street |
| Steve Liechty & Erin McCarthy | 10 1/2 Maitland Court |
| Annette Norton & Bobby Melillo | 102 Second Street |
| John Meroth | 1 Sycamore Street |
| Nan Morgan | 61 Second Street |
| Adrienne & Steven Morotta | 106 Second Street |
| Mark & Susan Nolan | 3 Third Street |
| Grace & Alex Perkins | 54 Second Street |
| Lucy & Pete Pittroff | 22 1/2 Third Street |
| Juliet Smith | 12 Maitland Court |
| Moth & Mary Teixeira | 53 Third Street |



New Members Reception

This year's Coffee and Mimosas, the reception for new Point Association members hosted by Laura and Todd Treonze, brought together more than 30 neighbors in June. With the sun shining and drinks flowing, this annual event offered a wonderful opportunity to welcome new faces to our neighborhood Association and reconnect with friends who recently renewed their memberships. Photo by Laura Treonze.

TOGETHER ON THE POINT IN 2024: HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR SPRING AND SUMMER GATHERINGS

by Ann McMahon

May



May's gathering in The Brenton Library featured a display created by historian Lisa Stuart of successful artists who have worked on the Point: photographer Alexander Nesbitt (left); stone carver Hope Benson; Ilse Nesbitt, the owner of Third and Elm Press; painter Rupert Nesbitt; and stone carver and MacArthur fellow Nick Benson. Photo by Ann McMahon.



Gardeners on the Point always eagerly await the Plant Sale, and this year's event, on May 28, did not disappoint. It also raised a record-breaking amount of money for the Point Association! Many thanks to the 23 hard-working members of the Beautification Committee. Committee co-chairs Mike Conroy and Susan Powers and volunteer Beth Castiglia were there to help. Photo by Ann McMahon.



Popular at the Plant Sale this year was a Hold Your Dog service that let customers devote their full attention to the wide selection of plants donated by and purchased from local nurseries and neighbors. Enjoying the shade, Nancy Abbinanti holds tight to a handsome canine friend. Photo by Ann McMahon.



Col. William Farrell, Colonel Commanding of The Artillery Company of Newport, joins with others for a Memorial Day ceremony remembering those who have perished at sea. Just off Storer Park, the City of Newport's fireboat, *William H. Connerton Jr.*, marks the occasion with skyward arcs of 3,000 gallons of water from its twin deluge guns. Photo by Susan Farrell.



Speakers at May's Point Association Spring Meeting included Community Policing Officer Frank Pirri and Lt. Joe Carroll of the Newport Police; Lynda Stevenson, the president of Friends of the Waterfront; and the founder of Newport Film, Andrea Van Beuren, and its executive director, Cathleen Carr. Above, the president of the Point Association, Laura Treonze (left), interviews Van Beuren. Photo by Beth Cullen.



The brainchild of Barbara Bessette, the Fairy Tree in Battery Park continues to be a charming spot for children and adults. Children often bring toys for Fiona the fairy and her friends the Gnomes; sometimes they take one or two away as a keepsake. Photo by Ann McMahon.

June



Mary Beth Walker Jenkins (left), Peter Jenkins, and Bill Bagwill enjoy June's Block Party, held on Willow Street between Second and Third streets. Always a popular gathering, this one was no exception. Photo by Laura Treonze.



On one of the monthly Point Neighborhood Nights held on the roof deck of the Brenton Hotel, Lisa and Bill Ruh (from left), Roseanne and Roger Oullette, and Tony Caprero enjoy the spectacular views. Photo by Laura Treonze.



For June's Point Neighborhood Night at The Brenton, historian Lisa Stuart created a display of photos capturing Point residents enjoying summers in the past: people sailing off the Point in their catboats, children amusing themselves, and, like today, neighbors gathering in this lovely neighborhood. Photo by Laura Treonze.

August



Dick Desrocher (above, left) and his pal Mark Walsh share a good laugh at the Point Association Cocktail Party. Photo by Laura Treonze.

July



Music on the Lawn returned to the magnificent grounds of St. John's Church for four summertime concerts, one featuring Sugar Ray Nocera & The Bluetones (above). MOTL, directed by Vin Fraioli and co-sponsored by St. John's Church, and Edge Reality was made possible by grants from the Point Association and the Royal Little Foundation and by donations from generous neighbors and attendees. Photo by Laura Treonze.



MOTL's director, Vin Fraioli, is also a talented musician who often sits in with the band. His granddaughter, Sofia Fraioli, is a very big fan. Photo by Juliana Fraioli Wilson.



Jenn Medeiros (far left, from left), Janet Perkins, and Hinda Perdreaux enjoy the Hunter House setting. From the Hunter House lawn, partygoers could see a beacon across the harbor: *The Green Light's* namesake standing bright as the sun sets. Photos by Laura Treonze and Lisa Elliott.

John Everett “Fud” Benson, a Remembrance

October 8, 1939 – June 13, 2024

by Lisa Stuart

It is a daunting task to write a memorial about the remarkable John Everett “Fud” Benson for *The Green Light*. Not only was he a renowned calligrapher, stone carver and figurative sculptor; he was also a musician and singer, a son, father, grandfather, and our neighbor.

I came to know Fud through his works and through the stories told by friends, family, and other artists and by his son Nick and granddaughter Hope, who carry on the family’s craft at the John Stevens Shop on Thames Street.

Fud was raised here on the Point. His mother, Ester Fisher Benson, was from a Quaker family whose ancestors lived at 64 Washington Street since 1759. Her grandfather, Benjamin Smith, a Philadelphia Quaker, spent part of the summers there. Smith purchased all three houses on the corners to protect his property from the development of a commercial pier, and he eventually moved into 62 Washington Street.

Fisher met her husband, John Howard Benson, through the Art Association, now the Newport Art Museum. They married in 1934 and lived in a little apartment in her father’s home at 62 Washington. They inherited the house when her father died in 1940. It was here that the couple raised their three boys—Thomas, Fud, and Richard “Chip” Benson.

In 1927, John Howard and Donald Sanford paid \$1,200 for the John Stevens Shop, which has been continuously operated since 1705. The shop made gravestones, many of which can be seen in Island Cemetery. When they purchased it, the shop had a supply of sample stones and carving tools, such as chisels, mallets, and a spin-drill.

The partnership with Sanford ended when John Howard returned to Newport after working as a guide on a cruise to find that Sanford had installed a sandblasting machine to do lettering on granite in order to increase the shop’s productivity. Benson believed that letters made by hand using a chisel, which have a V-cut to them, were far superior

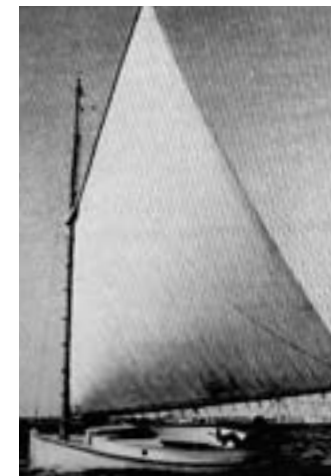
to those made with a sandblaster. He called the sandblasted letter “a hapless rut deeply eating into the stone.” It was at this moment that the direction of the John Stevens Shop was established - a focus on the perfection of craft rather than building a large commercial enterprise. Fud took over the shop in his 20s when his father died in 1956.

The first time I walked into the John Stevens Shop, I was taken by an Alphabet Stone (see photo) that had been carved by Fud that hung on the wall. At first, to my untrained eye, it looked very simple. But the beauty and complexity became more and more apparent as I looked at it more closely.

Then it hit me. This unassuming little shop in my quaint neighborhood was the workshop of the man who carved the lettering for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; the JFK memorial at Arlington National Cemetery; the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.; the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.; and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. Fud was the recipient of many awards.

I thought back to the 1979 documentary about Fud’s work, *Final Marks*, (www.folkstreams.net/films/final-marks). While carving the lettering for the National Gallery, Fud spoke with filmmaker Frank Muhly Jr. about the tremendous emotional appeal of a carved letter: “It partakes of the substance of the building. This particular letter has the best historical association and the most ready communication with the material itself.”

But to talk only about his work would not do Fud justice. Other artists, friends, and family always mention his sense of fun. Many artists came to train at the John Stevens Shop over the years, including Point artist Ade de Bethune, known for her illustrations for *The Catholic Worker* and for her work advocating for the Point community. The artists who studied with Fud enjoyed playing pranks on each other, and there was much camaraderie and fun.



Fud Benson chats with a visitor during a book-release event in his studio at The John Stevens Shop. Photo by Lisa Stuart.

Fud Benson sailing *Kingfisher II*, his first catboat, off the Point. This photo first appeared in “A Few Point Catboats” by Jane MacLeod Walsh, in the *Winter 2008* issue of *The Green Light* (thepointassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2008-winter.pdf).

Fud could be seen sailing his catboat, *Kingfisher II* (see photo), off the Point. The boat was built in 1895 by the Barkers, the original catboat builders of Long Wharf. A previous owner had moved the mast farther aft. This changed the point of resistance, so the boat always wanted to head up into the wind. Fud would have to sit on the leeward side of the boat and push the tiller with his foot to keep *Kingfisher II* sailing off the wind. He skippered the boat until 1975, when he donated it to Mystic Seaport. He also built and sailed a catboat he named *The Point Hummer*.

Fud sang with Jim McCrath and *The Reprobates* (www).



In this Alphabet Stone carved by Fud Benson, notice the angled V-cuts made in the stone by the handcarver’s precise steel chisel.

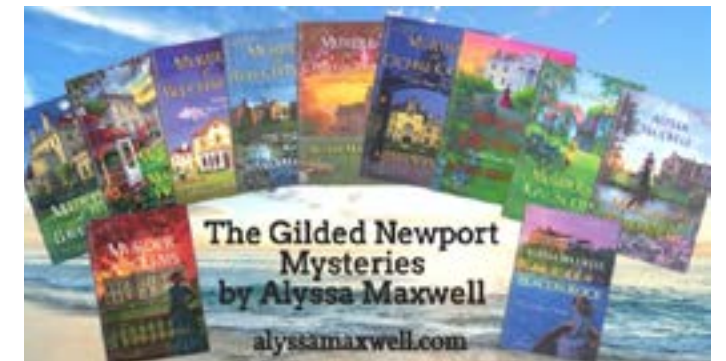
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youtube.com/watch?v=1dKLG5cNudQ). I love listening to the recordings of their sea chanteys as I watch the sailboats crisscross Newport Harbor. I sailed many an ocean mile myself, so “All for Me Grog!” always brings a smile to my face. After docking our boat, we’d find the nearest pub, raise a glass, and declare that we’d certainly earned our grog!

In “Pace Matters,” his TEDxBeaconStreet talk (Available on YouTube) Nick Benson describes what it was like to have Fud as a father. He shared that when he was a kid, he didn’t realize that being born into a 260-year-old tradition was not common. He didn’t know that his dad was a renowned craftsman. From his perspective, his dad was a fun-loving, charismatic guy. He was always making things with his hands and would draw Nick and his brothers into that process.

When the children would say, “What are we going to do today?,” Fud would tell them about a project he had planned for them, such as making a sword. Fud would ask them, “What would you like? A cutlass, or a scimitar?” He’d pick up a piece of driftwood and start shaping it with his pen knife. In this way, he’d teach his boys about carving — and about swords.

I saw Fud a few years ago at a book-release party at the Shop (see photo). I walked over to say hello, and the next thing I knew, he was opening cabinet drawers full of papers detailing letterings and designs and explaining each one to me. The technical aspects were way above my layperson’s level of understanding, but he made it all so approachable. His passion for typography, calligraphy, letterform design, and stone carving was engaging, fun, and inspiring.

Fud brought to the Point his remarkable artisanal sensibility and joy. He gave us all great gifts in his works and in the legacy of the John Stevens Shop. He was family, friend, and neighbor. He will be missed and remembered.

A memorial service will be held in the fall. In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the *Rose Island Lighthouse & Fort Hamilton Trust* or to the *Redwood Library & Athenaeum*.

To learn more about John Everett “Fud” Benson, the Benson family, and the John Stevens Shop, explore oral histories of the Point at The Point Association website (thepointassociation.org/oral-histories).

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.’s Plan for the Point, Part 2

by Lisa Stuart

(In Part 1 of this series, which appeared in the Spring 2024 issue of *The Green Light*, we learned that the Newport Improvement Association, formed in 1912, hired Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to write a report to guide the city’s development; this report, *Proposed Improvements to Newport*, was submitted to the city in August 1913. To read Part 1, go to The Point Association website, click on the Our Neighborhood tab, then click on *The Green Light* tab.)

Playground and Park Improvements on the Point

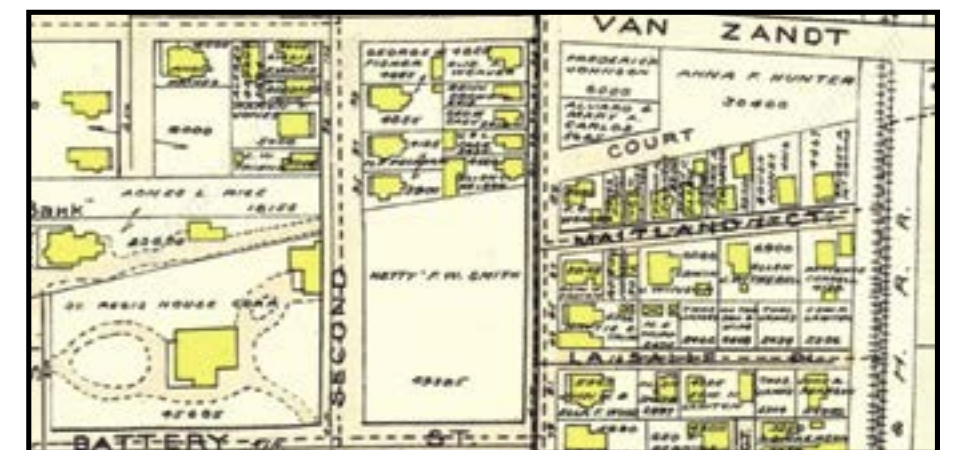
Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. believed that local playgrounds should not be more than a quarter or a third of a mile from a home, that 5 percent to 10 percent of the total city area should be given over to local parks, and that once they were developed, a plan must be in place to maintain the high standard.

In his report, he noted several vacant lots, including the vacant field in the block northwest of Battery and Third streets. The 1907 Sanborn Map (see map) shows that this land is owned by Hetty F. W. Smith. *Proposed Improvements* notes, “This section of the city west of the railroad tracks now has no playground space whatever.”

In May 1944, the City leased land nearby from Anna C. R. Dunn and Caroline K. Phelps. The leased land was named for Anna F. Hunter, its former owner and an ancestor of Dunn and Phelps. In June 1946, the City purchased the land, about 80 percent of the area occupied by Hunter Park today.

Improvements in the Vicinity of the Railroad Station

In the first decade of the 20th century, lower Washington Street on the Point looked very different (see photo). It was home to the steamship docks and the railroad terminus and station. The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad



The 1907 Sanborn Map

Company had plans for a new station in the same location. The New Haven, as it was known, was unwilling to change the location unless radical improvements were made by the City to provide a spacious and attractive approach and setting for the station on a new site.

Olmsted Jr. suggested two potential plans for the new railroad station. Plan A (see map) recommended a widening of Long Wharf from Washington Square to the new




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Plan A for Railroad Station Improvements



Plan B for Railroad Station Improvements

thoroughfare to secure a generous approach to the station from Washington Square and Broadway. Bridge Street would be widened. Plantings were also recommended.


Plan B (see map) was more radical and would require a change of heart by the New Haven. A new station would be built and located on Long Wharf opposite the City Wharf, and a new direct walking connection would be provided between the railroad station and the steamer landing.

At a meeting of the Newport Improvement Association in October 1914, the association reported that the New Haven agreed with Plan A for increased landscaping to make the location more attractive. A vote was taken, and the executive committee was authorized to proceed with the plan as far as the funds at its disposal would allow.

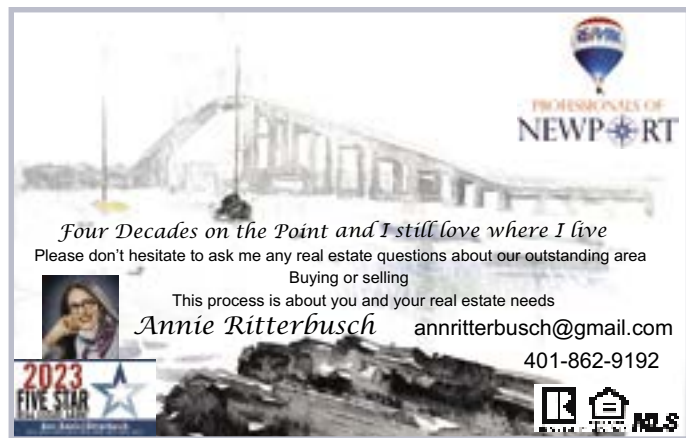
The association also presented significant code changes to the City to preserve and protect Newport at this time.

Today we enjoy vistas of Newport Harbor, the grandeur of Washington Street, and the trees, parks, and charming streetscape of homes and gardens on the Point, and we have Olmsted Jr. and the Newport Improvement Association to thank. As Mr. F. P. Garrettsan, chair of the Newport Improvement Association's executive committee said at the October 1918 meeting, "If we have not accomplished all we have undertaken, it is not from lack of energy or initiative. As a matter of fact, however, we have accomplished much more than the general public is aware of."

The author would like to thank John Ward for his review of this article. Go to <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t1pg27n9m&seq=9> to read Olmsted Jr.'s complete report.



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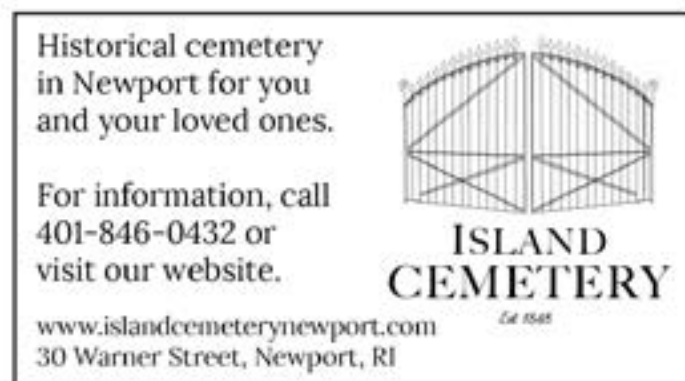
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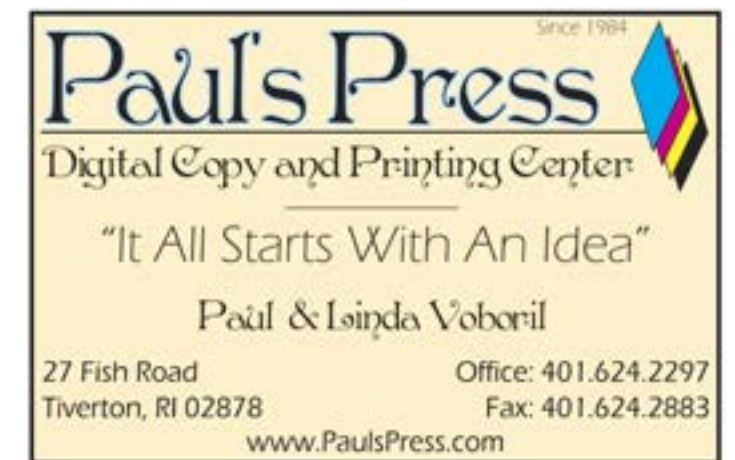
Did you Know...?
In the late 1960's, the Point Association saved Storer Park from commercial development by raising funds amounting to over \$40,000, that included the pennies of school children, to purchase the property. In 1973, the land was presented to the City of Newport by the Point Association as a public park. Its deed reads that the lots "shall be used and maintained solely for park and recreational services and no buildings shall be erected thereon." *Green Light, Summer 1998 pp 10 to 13. History of Storer Park by R. Potvin*

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Save These Dates

Tuesday, September 17, from 6 to 7:30 PM:
Point Association Fall Meeting for all members
at St. John's Church.

Sunday, October 27, from 2 to 3 PM:
Halloween Parade and Party at Storer Park.
(Rain Date: Monday, October 28, 4 to 5 PM.)

Thursday, December 5, from 4:30 to 6:30 PM:
Tree Lighting and Holiday Party at Storer Park
and St. John's Guild Hall.

Monday, January 6, 2025, from 6 to 8 PM:
2025 Kickoff Party, with location TBD.

Neighborhood Nights at The Brenton Hotel
continue on the second Wednesday of every
month. Start date TBD.

Check [The Point Association website](http://thepointassociation.org)
(thepointassociation.org) and *Points of Interest*
for any time and date updates.

A favorite spot on any dog's walk on the Point
is Hinda Perdreaux's porch on Third Street.
Crosby Stafford-Bagwill waits patiently for
his treat.

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The Point Association
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