Meet the 'visionaries' to spark at April 21 event

by Dan Macey for the Chestnut Hill Conservancy

It's been nearly 50 years since famed architect Louis Kahn characterized Chestnut Hill as a "spirit," in which "it seems as though the trees and gardens and the carefully scrutinized streets have told everyone to be dreaming about the steps they will take." In the face of the urban growth much of the city of Philadelphia is experiencing, it is time to reflect on Kahn's words and publicly discuss Chestnut Hill's assets and the role growth could play in affecting the "spirit" of the community.

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy has gathered some of the most prominent local and national experts on urbanism, historic preservation and architecture's role in the community to spark a community discussion on the tensions between preservation and change facing Chestnut Hill. The Visionaries Roundtable, dated for 6:30 p.m. Friday, April 21, at Springcote Chestnut Hill Academy, is intended to begin this dialogue.

Who are the Visionaries? The evening will begin with some remarks (continued on page 9)

Local developers behind plan to transform ‘downtown’ Wyndmoor

by Pete Mazzaecaro

A partnership of Wyndmoor residents won zoning Monday, March 27, from the Springfield Township Zoning Hearing Board, to move forward with a town center development plan that will bring what they hope is a transformational change for a "downtown" in need of modernization.

The project’s three partners, Jay Overcash, Ox Repetto and Bill Casey, all live in the neighborhood and are eager to bring a development to the area that they can enjoy with their own children. It’s a mixed-use development that will include a corner market, a coffee shop, yoga studio and a family friendly Mediterranean restaurant and wine bar. Repetto told the Local that they have preliminary deals in place with tenants, but don’t want to reveal the names of businesses until the deals are finalized.

The restaurant, coffee shop and yoga studio will be on the ground floor of a three-story building that will have 10 condominiums on the top two floors. The building is being designed by the Philadelphia architecture firm DIGSAU, which has built a number of award winning projects in Philadelphia, Delaware and elsewhere. It designed the cafe and welcome center in Logan Square, the Dogfish Head craft brewery in Milton, Del., and the Philadelphia Union’s training facility in Chester.

"The plan is to create a transformative project for Wyndmoor that will hopefully attract other developers and people to come in along the strip," Overcash told the Local in an interview last week. "We want to add a village feel ... We want to select tenants and an aesthetic that would create walkable, friendly community environment consistent with the surrounding neighborhoods."

Repetto agreed, noting models for the development could be found in Ambler, Keswick and even Chestnut Hill.

"We’re not trying to replicate Chestnut Hill," he said. "We’re trying to maybe create an annex to it. This creates somewhere else for them to go as residents of Wyndmoor. Willow Grove Avenue needs redevelopment."

Overcash grew up in Chestnut Hill, on the 100 block of E. Hartwell Lane, before moving to Wyndmoor as a teen. He went to school, married and settled in Center City. When he and his wife had children, they moved back to Wyndmoor.

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Hill librarian Pat Leeming to retire at 88

by Brendan Sample

After nearly three decades of working for several branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Pat Leeming is now set to retire at the beginning of May. Though she is currently working at the Chestnut Hill Free Library, her impact on the community has reached far further than just one institution.

Leeming began working for the Free Library of Philadelphia in 1989 when she joined the Andorra branch. This was the first paying job she had ever had, as she had previously focused on volunteer work and raising her children. “I was at home raising 10 kids, or maybe they were raising them themselves,” Leeming joked.

Having put in 16 years at Andorra, Leeming went to the Lovern Memorial Library in Mt. Airy, but later came to Chestnut Hill when that branch closed for renovations. This sort of turnover is not uncommon for library employees and allowed her to gain a unique perspective on the different branches in Philadelphia.

Who are the ‘visionaries’ sparking the conversation

(Conspired from page 1)

from Louis Kahn’s filmmaker son, Nathaniel Kahn — a Chestnut Hill native — and continue with a provocative keynote by another Chestnut Hill native, Witold Rybczynski, an internationally renowned and insightful architectural commentator and thought-provoking author on culture and architecture.

“American cities are not shaped by architects, planners, legislators or mayors, but by the people who live and work — and play — in them,” Rybczynski said in his 2010 book "Makehift Metropolis: Ideas About Cities." He is the emeritus professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania and, from 2004 and 2012, served on the U.S. Commission for Fine Arts. He has been called "one of the best writers on design working today," and "having a special knack for making everyday objects and ideas seem captivating, in part because he places them in a larger historical context." He has written and co-authored 20 books — some best-sellers — on culture, architecture, the home, design and urban history.

Following Rybczynski’s talk, Carol Harris, president of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, will hold the position of Director of New York’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where she was the project director for the museum’s $850 million Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain. Previous to that, she held a variety of senior positions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She is a resident of Chestnut Hill.

Those participating in the roundtable are:

• David De Long, professor emeritus of architecture at the University of Pennsylvania who headed the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, as he had earlier at Columbia Univesity. He received his Master of Architecture degree from Penn, where he studied with Louis Kahn, and his Ph.D. in architecture from Columbia University. As a licensed architect, he was an associate of John Carl Warnecke and Associates, Architects and Planners. He has served as guest curator for exhibitions at major museums, and among his many books are studies of Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown and Frank Lloyd Wright, among others.

• Bryan Hanes, founding principal of Studio Bryan Hanes and a registered landscape architect who has been involved in a diverse range of work from significant urban and open space planning and design projects to small-scale designs for institutional and private clients. Each project strives to acknowledge and understand the natural and cultural systems of the site. He has been instrumental in the creation of the Rock Hall Park which is reclaiming channeld Reading Railroad rail right-of-way into a gathering space and a public space for all.

• William Strickland, former director of the Philadelphia Inquirer's architecture critic who writes about architecture, design and planning. His column, "Chasing Skylines," has been appearing in the paper’s Home and Garden section since 1996. In 2012, she completed a book Fellowship at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design.

• Michael Snowden, the managing partner in Bowman Properties which owns and manages a portfolio of historic and commercial buildings in Chestnut Hill. His involvement with the historic preservation movement spans three decades and includes service on the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, the Atkins Foundation, the Preservation Task Force and the Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

A ticket to the Visionaries Roundtable can be purchased for $10 for students (18 and up) through the Chestnut Hill Conservancy website, www.chchconservancy.org, or by calling 215-247-7466. A “feed the Speeches” reception with fondue and wine will begin at 5 p.m., and tickets to the event are $40 including the main event. A complimentary frozen yogurt social will follow the event, courtesy of Chilly Frenzy Yogurt.

The Visionaries Roundtable is sponsored by the Friends of Chestnut Hill Conservancy 50th Anniversary Preservation Sponsor, the Notebook, Goodman-Mercantile’s Merrill Lynch, as well as Johnson, Kendich and Krueger; Associates Architects, Earch Construction, and Dennis & Meyer Iron Works, Master Printers, and Pure Insurance.

Dan Maczy is Chestnut Hill resident and one of the organizers for the Visionaries Roundtable.

Andorra was closed to accidentally locking a patron in after hours. When coming to work things about her time, Leeming appreciated the variety of her tasks most of all.

“It’s quite varied here,” Leeming said. “You’re helping patrons at the desk, you’re shelving books, you’re answering the phone, etc. I felt that was the variety that I really wanted.”

Though she doesn’t plan on leaving the community any time soon, Leeming says the time will certainly be missed after so many years with the library. One patron even suggested that she get her own parade down Germantown Avenue on the day of her retirement. Going into her final book of work, she can certainly take comfort in the many supportive friendships she has developed over the course of this time.

“I would say I’ve made a lot of friends in these years,” Leeming said. “You know, the patrons and people with whom I work, and that’s good. I still see them, so I’ll just pick up from there.”