



# MONTFORD

THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHEVILLE'S MOST HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD  
Vol. 20 No. 8  
AUGUST '15



## Remembering John Robinson



[Compiled by the Editor—Thanks to the Asheville Citizen-Times for much of the material and timeline. And thank you to John Russell, Deborah Austin, and Kenn Kirby for spending time with me giving further information and stories.]

Our good neighbor John J. Robinson died peacefully in his Montford home July 8 at age 91. His wife of 62 years, Hazel Robinson, was with him.

The memorial service was held at the Hazel Robinson Amphitheater, which John built in honor of his wife, and is the home to the Montford Park Players (MPP), North Carolina's longest running Shakespeare Festival. The Montford Park Players was founded by John and Hazel in 1973, bringing free theater to Asheville.

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### Hot August Night 5k

Register now for the Montford Community Hot August Night 5k! The race will be held **Saturday, August 15 at 7pm**. Registration form is on page 14.

The course winds around the Montford neighborhood. Cost is \$20 for adults, \$15 for 12 and under; but if you sign up by Friday, August 7, you will receive a \$5 discount! A 5K race for \$15—unheard of! And refreshments are provided after the race.

Awards (given after the race) for the top 3 finishers (male/female), top masters (male/female) and small awards awards for the top in each age division; 10 and under, 11-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, and 75 and over, lots of door prizes and t-shirts for the first 150 registered.

**Walkers are welcome!**

continued on page 14...



### Join a Local Advisory Board



Looking for neighbors who are interested in serving on the Montford Community Center Advisory Board. We had an informal board in the past, but we have some exciting projects coming up and we thought this would be a great time to try to revive this board. You can make a difference by weighing in.

Our first official meeting will be Thursday, September 10 at 6pm at the Montford Community Center, 34 Pearson Drive. If you can't make the meeting and have questions, call Kim Kennedy at 253-3714, [kkennedy@ashevillenc.gov](mailto:kkennedy@ashevillenc.gov).

☾ CALENDAR ☀

**MONTFORD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MEETINGS**

- Third Tuesday of every month, Montford Community Center, Pearson Drive.
  - Next meeting: **August 17, 2015**, 7pm. Watch the list serve for agenda items.
- All residents are welcome. Everyone in Montford is a member of the neighborhood association.

**MONTFORD PARK PLAYERS**

- August 7 - 29, 7:30 - 10pm *Richard III*, Hazel Robinson Amphitheatre, Montford

**MONTFORD COMMUNITY CENTER**

- Afterschool Adventures, Mon-Fri 2:45-5:30pm
- Snow Care (on most City of Asheville inclement weather days)
- Fun Day Out (teacher workdays) – Sept 25, 28, Oct 26, 27, Nov 11, 25. 8:30am-5:30pm \$5
- Holiday Camp – Dec 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31. 8:30-5:30pm \$40 per child

- Youth Tennis – Mon-Thurs, Sept 14-17, 4-5pm, \$10 per child
- Developing Future Male Leaders – Fridays, Sept 18-May 20, 2016, \$10 per child
- Diamonds in the Rough – Wed, Sept 23-Dec 16, 5:30-7:30pm, \$5
- Prehistoric Pals – Mon, Oct 5 & 12, 4-5pm, \$10 per child
- Co-ed 4-on-4 Volleyball Tournament – Sun, Oct 18, 9am-4pm, \$40 per team
- Zombie Mania – Sat, Oct 24, 9am-noon, \$5 per child
- Fall-o-Ween – Sat, Oct 30, 5:30-7:30pm, \$5 per child
- Holiday Craft Fair – Sat, Nov 14, 10am-4pm. Vendor booths \$15
- Co-ed 2-on-2 Volleyball Tournament – Sun, Dec 13, 9am-4pm, \$20 per team
- Holiday Gift Making – Mon, Dec 7 from 4-6pm or Saturday, December 12 from 10-noon; \$10 per child per session
- Climbing Wall – Mondays, 5:30-8pm; \$5 per climber + belay fee if needed
- Gong Fu Martial Arts – Tuesdays, 6:30-8pm, \$10

**Montford Park Players presents *Richard III***

***August 7 - 29, 7:30 - 10pm, Hazel Robinson Amphitheatre in Montford***

***Richard III***

Shakespeare's *Richard III* may be a product of historical fact or Tudor propaganda, but there is no doubt that he is Shakespeare's greatest villain and dark comedian. His bitterness at his outward disfigurement fuels an inward deformity, leading this "bottled spider" on a bloody rise to the throne. Feel the paranoia of the times and witness the tragic and thrilling end to the Wars of the Roses in Shakespeare's hit, *Richard III*.

MontfordParkPlayers.org

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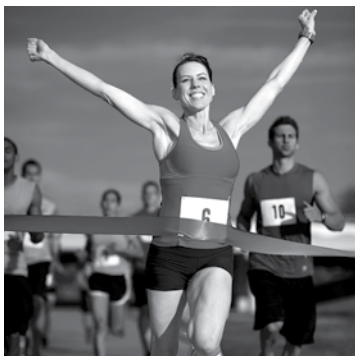
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## Community Recreation News

Kim Kennedy

Come beat the heat at the Annual **Hot August Night 5K Saturday, August 15 at 7pm**. Fees are \$20 for adults, \$15 for



youth 12 and under. There is a \$5 discount if you register by August 7. The course runs exclusively through Montford. Not a runner but want to get involved? Get out and cheer on the runners somewhere along the course. Typically we get a lot of first-time runners and they really appreciate the encouragement!

On another note, the Montford Community Center offers an **afterschool program for children grades K-5**, Monday through Friday, and all-day care on most teacher workdays, holidays, and snow days. The program provides homework time and study help, afternoon snack, games, crafts, field trips, and much more. Pickup is 5:30pm. Weekly fees are \$40 for the first child; \$30 each additional.

We are reviving the Montford Center Advisory Board and need your help. If you are interested in getting involved in YOUR community center, then come by our meeting on **Thursday, September 10 at 6pm**, and find out what we are all about.

**Saturday, September 12** is the **Annual Fall Community Yard Sale**. You can reserve tables at the recreation center for \$5 per table or have a sale at your house and be on our map for \$10. Tables at the community center are first-come-first-served and they fill fast so get your money in soon. Deadline to be on our yard sale map is Wednesday, September 11.



**Cheerleading has come to Montford!** N2IT will be offering a cheerleading program that combines Cheer and Pom dance into one. Their techniques include motion drills, jump stations, proper stunting from basic to advanced. Students will learn cheers, chants, and dance routines. **Registration is Tuesday, September 1, 5:45-7pm**. Registration fee is \$8; weekly class fee is \$7. Classes are Tuesdays, September 8-January 12 (no class Dec 22 & 29). Class times: ages 4-6 is 5:45-6:30pm, ages 7-9 is 6:30-7:15 and 10 & over is 7:15-8pm.



If you would like a copy of our fall brochure or have questions, send an email to Kim Kennedy at [kkennedy@ashevillenc.gov](mailto:kkennedy@ashevillenc.gov) or call 253-3714.

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*Wednesday,  
September 30th 4pm-?*

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covered dish  
to share!*

**Montford Neighbors Support Non-Profits and the Western North Carolina AIDS Project**

**Pam Siekman, Montford Neighbor and Event Chairperson**

The Western North Carolina AIDS Project (WNCAP) is gearing up for their annual **Raise Your Hand Benefit Auction & Gala**, to be held **Saturday, September 26** at the Asheville Event Centre, 291 Sweeten Creek Road.

“For over 20 years the Asheville community has generously supported WNCAP by donating, attending, and bidding at this event,” says Pam Siekman, Montford Neighbor and Chairperson for the Raise Your Hand Benefit. WNCAP collects an impressive lineup of local art, antiques, fine wines, vacation packages, and in-home dining experiences from some of Asheville’s favorite restaurants.

Andrew Brunk of Brunk Auctions will take the stage and entice the expected crowd of nearly 300 people to bid top dollar to help WNCAP raise much-needed funds to continue their HIV services throughout Western North Carolina. The highlight of the live

auction is when the Signature Piece of art comes to the floor. This year’s winner of the juried competition for the acclaimed Signature Piece is Cindy Walton from the River Arts District. Walton’s winning piece of art, *In Flight*, is a 36 x 36 oil and cold wax abstract filled with energy and vivid colors. View all auction items at [wncapgala.org](http://wncapgala.org).

Emmy nominated Kat Williams will receive recognition as the Raise Your Hand Honorary Chair. Guests attending the event will enjoy a sit-down dinner prepared by Strada owner & chef, Anthony Cerrato.

Tickets are \$125.00 at [wncapgala.org](http://wncapgala.org) or call 252-7489. To donate, contact Pam at [pamsiekman@earthlink.net](mailto:pamsiekman@earthlink.net)



**RAISE YOUR HAND**  
*Auction and Gala*



**Kat Williams**  
Honorary Chair  
**Andrew Brunk**  
Auctioneer

to benefit the **Western North Carolina AIDS Project**  
**Saturday, September 26 2015**

*Asheville Event Centre* Dinner catered by **Strada**  
Italiano

6:00 Cocktail Reception & Silent Auction  
8:00 Dinner & Live Auction

For Tickets or to Donate: [www.wncapgala.org](http://www.wncapgala.org) or  
828-252-7489



## Montford Neighborhood Association Meeting

*Tuesday, July 21, 2015*

The Montford Neighborhood Association held the regularly scheduled monthly meeting on Tuesday, July 21, 2015 at 7pm at the Montford Community Center, Pearson Drive. In attendance were MNA Board members Brian Elston, President, Michael McDonough, Vice-President, David Patterson, Secretary, and at-large board members Ellen Nutter, Joan Miller, and Ross Terry. Also in attendance were a WLOS-TV news crew and Alex and Deb Kirby of Montford Hall. There were 35 total in attendance for the meeting.

Brian Elston, President, called the meeting to order at 7pm.

### Safety and Security

Asheville Police Officer Brigman give an update on police matters in Montford. While activity has been quiet in Montford, Officer Brigman reminded attendees to keep their cars and homes locked. There is a new website for tracking crime stats. Go to [SimpliCity.ashevillenc.gov](http://SimpliCity.ashevillenc.gov)

### Treasurer's Report

Susan Eggerton, Treasurer (not in attendance) provided a financial report showing current MNA expenses and account balance.

### Montford Hall

Alex and Deb Kirby were on hand to answer questions about Montford Hall, the extended care drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility located in the Highland Park Hospital property at 75 Zilicoa.

Alex said the facility should be open "before 2016" after some required remodeling to meet state standards. When fully occupied, Montford Hall can accommodate 28 patients, ages 13-17. The ratio of patients to employees will be approximately 1:1. The facility will also include an accredited school.

The former hospital was purchased as a charitable gift. Treatment will cost around \$9500/month with some scholarships available. Residents posed questions regarding the facility location and proximity to available drugs in Montford, and the protocol for patients leaving the grounds.

### Montford/Soco/Cullowhee Intersection

There seemed to be as many questions as answers as MNA gave an update on work at the Montford/Soco/Cullowhee intersection project. Complaints about the use of concrete (as opposed to the required granite curbing) have led to site visits by HRC and the City to address concerns. HRC indicated that the curbing would need to be replaced.

There was much discussion and many complaints of continued illegal parking in front of the convenience store. It was agreed police enforcement is the answer. Residents are urged to call the non-emergency police number (252-1110) regarding this practice. Officer Brigman also indicated that he is working on more enforcement at the location.

President Brian Elston encouraged residents to get involved in pressing for the needed improvements at the intersection by contacting City Council and other City departments. A hand vote indicated that over 50 percent of residents were in favor of the yet-to-be-installed traffic signals. Other concerns were the width and lack of markings on the pedestrian crosswalks – one of the issues that initially prompted the request to reconfigure the intersection.

Traffic Engineering Director Ken Putnam and other City officials will be invited to future MNA meetings. MNA will follow up with inquiries to the City.

### Waneta Garden

The Montford Ave/Waneta garden project was discussed. See page 6 for an update.

### Hot August Night 5K Run

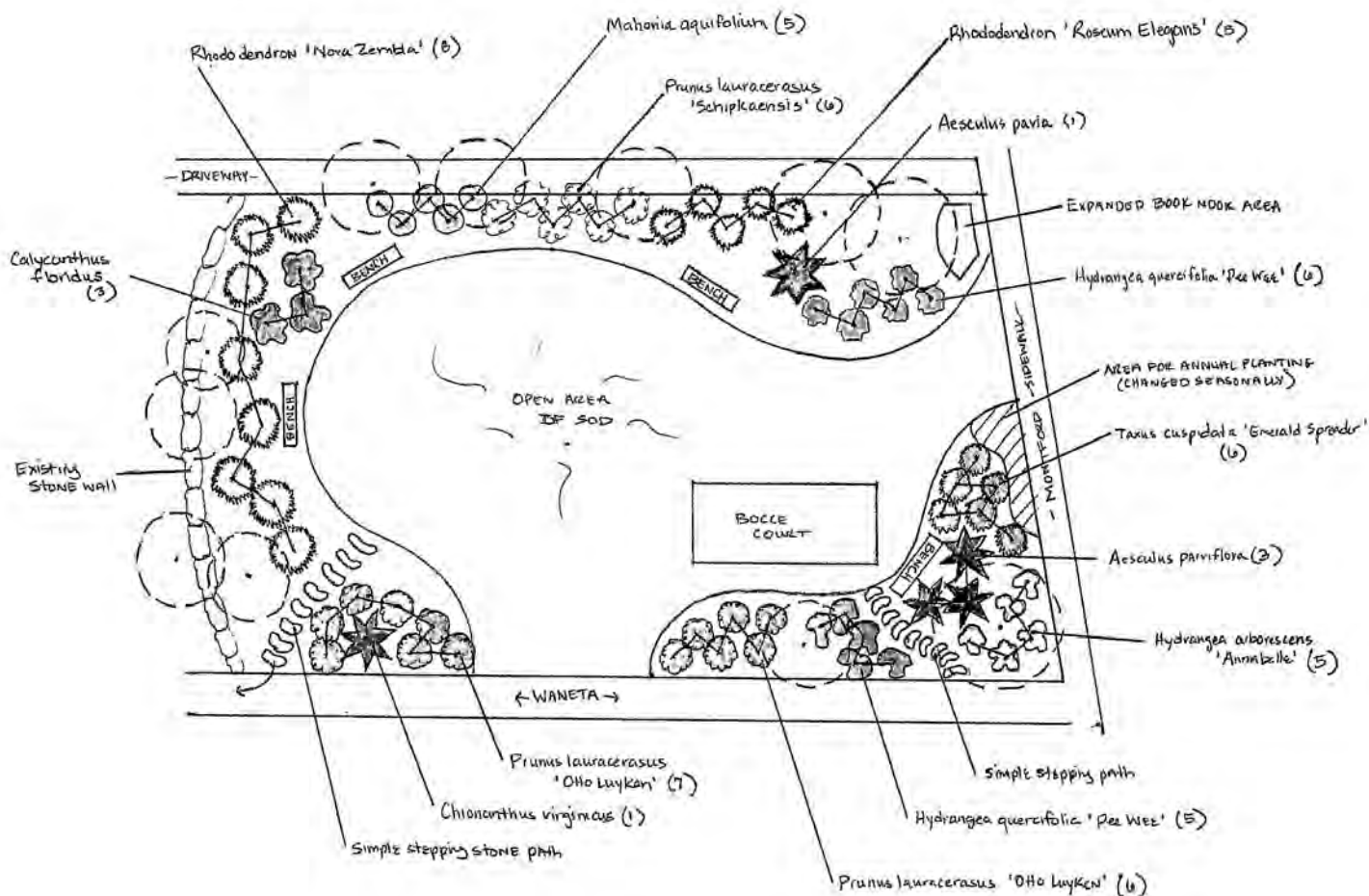
See page 1 for details.

### Duke Energy Substation

A quick update on the proposed Duke Energy substation west of the Visitor Center and north of Issac Dickson School: Duke is looking at alternative sites around the City and it will probably be three years before any decision about Montford is made.



**Montford Community Center  
has something for everybody.  
Check it out.**



## Waneta Garden Update

With part of the funds we've made at the Montford Music and Arts Festival and the Tour of Homes, the Montford Neighborhood Association Board has taken on the project of improving the small plot of land at Montford Ave and Waneta.

Mantis Gardens has drawn up a proposal for hard and softscape, including a bocce ball court. We plan to proceed with the proposed

plan (shown here). If approved by HRC (who owns the lot) work will start immediately. Initial work on Phase I will cost around \$3300 with a total projected amount of roughly \$7500 for all three phases:

- I. Remove invasives, tree pruning, mulching existing beds, defining new beds. By August 2015
- II. Install plantings & some hardscaping. By fall 2015
- III. Bocce ball, benches, more hardscaping. By spring 2016




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**Historic Resources Commission  
of Asheville and Buncombe  
County**

**Montford Action Agenda July 8, 2015**

Members present: Chair Brendan Ross, David Carpenter, William Eakins, Woodard Farmer, Richard Fast, Bryan Moffitt, David Nutter, Tracey Rizzo, Amanda Warren

Staff present: Stacy Merten, Alex Cole, Jannice Ashley

**Item And Summary and Action**

339 Cumberland Avenue – Construction of new driveway and retaining wall.....Approved with conditions

37 Rosewood Avenue – Replacement of existing garage doors.....Approved with conditions

254 Flint Street – Construction of new addition.....Approved with conditions

42 Soco Street – Construction of new 2-story residence.....Approved with conditions

Visit [ashevillenc.gov](http://ashevillenc.gov) for the full approved minutes after the following month's meeting.

**Montford Tentative Agenda, August 12, 2015, 4pm**

19 Birch Street —Construction of addition and replacement of garage doors on existing accessory garage

181 Flint Street—Construction of new one-story accessory building

230 Pearson Drive—Construction of addition on existing accessory building; modification of rear stair; modification of rear basement entry and installation of new door; construction of new stair along north elevation

23 Courtland Avenue—Amendment to enclose rear porches on first and second floors along rear elevation; construction of stair on east elevation



**Thank You  
Montford  
Neighbors  
and Friends!**

**Daphne Young**

My, my, my, what a wonderful surprise when I picked up the June/July issue of our Montford Newsletter. I sat down in my rocking chair on the front porch and began reading and I will admit that some tears did fall.

How can I thank you enough for the beautiful tributes?

When I returned to Asheville in 2005 after a 31-year absence, I was so excited and happy to be home. Becoming a part of this wonderful neighborhood was and continues to be such a blessing. Being involved and investing what I have to offer in our neighborhood gives me great joy. I was always taught that there is only one way to do anything and that is to be passionate about what you do and give it your all.

Again thank you my Montford Neighbors and Friends for all of your beautiful and kind tributes. . . .

Always looking forward to seeing you around the neighborhood as I embark on my next project.

**How to Contact the Asheville  
Police Department**

- For emergencies, call 911.
- For nonemergencies and to report suspicious activity, call 252-1110.
- For the Crime Prevention Division, call 259-5834.
- For Police Dispatch, call 259-5888.
- For Montford's Community Resource Officer, Todd Brigman, call 777-0455 or email [tbrigman@ashevillenc.gov](mailto:tbrigman@ashevillenc.gov)



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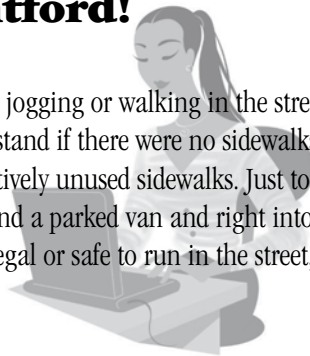
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## Ask Away Montford!

Dear Kelli,

Why do people seem to insist on jogging or walking in the street on Montford Ave? I could understand if there were no sidewalks, but Montford has nice, big, relatively unused sidewalks. Just today I almost hit a guy as he ran around a parked van and right into the driving lane. It surely can't be legal or safe to run in the street, can it?—Law Abiding Driver



### Law Abiding Driver,

Thank you for including the link to “ A Guide To North Carolina Biking and Pedestrian Laws” because it made this question SO easy to answer. As it turns out, pedestrians MUST use the sidewalk instead of walking on the roadway.

Go to [ncdot.gov/bikeped/download/bikeped\\_laws\\_guidebook-full.pdf](http://ncdot.gov/bikeped/download/bikeped_laws_guidebook-full.pdf), page 16. Maybe joggers think that because they are running instead of walking they are exempt from this law? Guys, I get it. You're on pace and then out of nowhere there's a family of four with a stroller and a dog all up in your path and it's just easier to use the street instead of slowing down for a second and cutting through some grass, right?? Look, I doubt you're running a marathon (I know, because the road's not closed). And even if you're training for a marathon, there are TONS of greenways and trails that you can run on to get a variety of elevation changes and the like. Please use the sidewalk for your safety AND mine.

A similar question that came of this: Why do people who are parked along Montford fling their car doors open without looking first? Answer: I have no idea. Personally, I slow down every time I approach the convenience store because I know that some crazy person is going to fling his/her door open on his/her way to Nine Mile and then give me the stink eye if I pass going the speed limit.

Also, I don't want to take off your door with my car, I really don't. So why do you do that? Yesterday I saw a person fling her door open and then not get out right away; it just was there, open all the way, waiting for a car to smash into it! Please be cautious. Yes, drivers need to be aware of their surroundings, but flinging a door into their direct path is a little unfair.

Are you a jogger? Do you have an opinion to add to the conversation? We'd love to hear it! Please submit feedback or questions for Ask Away, Montford! to [TheBandGeek@hotmail.com](mailto:TheBandGeek@hotmail.com) with “Montford Newsletter Question” in your subject line. Not all questions may be answered and are subject to Answerer's discretion. Thanks for reading!

## Thanks to our Newsletter Volunteers

Thanks to the following neighbors for delivering the Montford Newsletters, rain, snow, or shine. A particular thanks to William Saupe and Jim Parker for delivering the newsletter bundles to each deliverer, with sometimes help from Pamela Dupuis and Joe Murphy.

Ann Fergeson	Kia Baden	Helen and Lewis Merrill
David and Ellen Nutter	Susan Eggerton	Sharon Fahrer
E.V. vonSeldeneck	Delia Segovia	Renee Crain
Susan Piland	Judith Graham	Marissa Walkenstein
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Mary Beth Gwynn	Anne Lundbad	Katie Valeika
Kate Dilworth	Mary and Bob Thompson	Joe Newman
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Joan Miller	Jeane Anne Wheelock	Leslie and David Humphrey
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## Shakespeare's Birds

Marci Spencer

June 20, 2015

"Birds chant melody on every bush" ...*Shakespeare's Birds*

As North Carolina's longest running Shakespeare Festival, the Montford Park Players have presented the Bard's classic plays for 39 years. Reminiscent of their first 1973 production at a city park on Montford Avenue, and of their 1997 production celebrating Asheville's Bicentennial, the Montford Park Players are once again performing Shakespeare's pastoral comedy, *As You Like It*.

In 1983, after the US Navy Construction Battalion carved an amphitheater in a hillside in Montford, the Montford Park Players presented *Romeo and Juliet* in their new outdoor theatre. This season, they opened with *R and J*, a 2-person adaptation of that classic. Have you seen *Romeo and Juliet*? Did you hear Juliet refer to Romeo as her peregrine falcon, the handsome aviator who is the master of the skies in speed and maneuverability----trained for thousands of years to return on command to his falconer's voice?

"O' for a falc'ner's voice," Juliet pined, "to lure this tassel-gentle back again!" In Shakespeare's day, falconry was a popular sport. Only a prince, however, could own a male peregrine falcon, called a "tassel-gentle." Juliet longed to have the power of a prince to summon her proud, regal falcon back to her.

The numerous references to hawks and falcons in Shakespeare's writings were only part of the dozens of bird species that he mentioned. Naturalists first published a bird book in Latin in 1554 and another in 1570, but only about 150 of Britain's 600 species identified today, were known by the year 1600. In his works, Shakespeare introduced 50 of these to his literary audiences.

Throughout his lifetime, his journeys from London to Stratford passed through field and forest where surely, he became acquainted with a wide variety of feathered friends, believing that "the birds chant melody on every bush." (*Titus Andronicus*)



Illustrator: Matita Artista

In poem and play, he mentioned birds of open spaces, like pheasant, quail, snipe, lapwing and bunting. Habits and traits of aquatic birds, like swan, cormorant, kingfisher, goose and grebe offered figurative images. Commoners, like lark, jay, dove, owl, wren, robin, nightingale and swallow were familiar to the Brits; and except for

*King Lear and Hamlet*, majestic eagles graced all of his royal plays. Shakespeare wove avian music, habits and little quirks into his works, with an ingenious, natural rhythm.

Next time you see a Shakespeare play, listen for his avian imagery. When you watch the Montford Park Players perform *As You Like It*, first performed in Asheville on Valentine's Day, 1889, listen to Shakespeare express his love for the natural world, through the words of the banished Duke, living his life in the forests of Arden:

*And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.  
I would not change it.*

In Act V, Scene, III, listen to Touchstone, the clown, ridicule the song offered by the Pages: "There was no great matter in the ditty, yet the note was very untuneable."

First Page retorts, "You are deceived, sir---we lost not our time." "By my troth, yes; I count it," Touchstone replied, "but time lost to hear such a foolish song! God be wi' you! And, God mend your voices!"

Listen to the Pages. Don't you think it's one of Shakespeare's sweet birdsongs—one of the birds that will "chant melody on every bush?"

*It was a lover and his lass,  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,  
That o'er the green corn-field did pass  
In the spring time, the only ring time,  
When birds do sing, bey ding, a ding, ding.  
Sweet lovers love the spring.*

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 Think about it, and call or write Joan Miller, 650.966.1957 or  
 JoanAdrienne@gmail.com. The transition will be gentle.

## Hot August Night 5k

Continued from front page...

You can register online at active.com, at ashevollenc.gov/parks or drop off or mail a check to Montford Community Center, 34 Pearson Drive, Asheville 28801.



### Want to volunteer?

Contact Kim Kennedy at [kkennedy@ashevollenc.gov](mailto:kkennedy@ashevollenc.gov) or 253-3714.

### Where Can I Park?

Parking is available at the lower lots behind Montford Center. Do not park on Pearson Drive in front of the center.

### How Do I Get My Race Packet?

Packets are available for pickup Friday, August 14, 4-6pm and Saturday, August 15 starting at 5:30pm.

## Race Route

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. The start and finish line is in front of the Montford Center at 34 Pearson Drive. | 8. Right on Cumberland   |
| 2. Start at Chestnut traveling up Pearson Drive by the center.                       | 9. Left on Soco,   |
| 3. Left on Courtland, cross over Montford, and down Bearden                          | 10. Right on East Waneta                                       |
| 4. Right on Cumberland   | 11. Right on Montford Ave                                      |
| 5. Left on Starnes   | 12. Left on Santee   |
| 6. Left on Flint   | 13. Left on Pearson  |
| 7. Left on Magnolia  | 14. Right on to Birch.   |
|  | 15. Into Riverside Cemetery. Second left around the large loop |
|  | 16. Back to Birch.   |
|  | 17. Right on Pearson to the finish line near the Center        |

## Montford Hot August Night 5K Race Registration Form Saturday, August 15, 7:00 P.M.

Complete this form and return to:

Hot August Night Race/Montford Community Center, 34 Pearson Drive, Asheville, NC 28801

For more information contact Kim Kennedy at 253-3714 or [montfordr@ashevollenc.gov](mailto:montfordr@ashevollenc.gov)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:  Male  Female

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Entry:

City \_\_\_\_\_

By August 7

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

@\$15 per Adult  @\$10 per youth 12 & under

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

After August 8

Email \_\_\_\_\_

@\$20 per Adult  @\$15 per youth 12 & under

Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_

Adult T-shirt size (s):

Age as of 8/15/15 \_\_\_\_\_

S  M  L  XL

(Only first 150 get shirts-size not guaranteed)

### Waiver

In consideration of the acceptance of the entry, I for myself, my heirs, and assigns, hereby release the City of Asheville, sponsors, race workers, and officials of this race from any and all liability arising from illness and damages I may suffer as a result from participation in such event. I attest that I am physically fit and have sufficiently trained for this event and am aware that participation in any of these events could, in some circumstances, result in severe physical soreness or injury. I understand that the entry fee I pay is NON-REFUNDABLE. Should race officials feel that completion of the event would be injurious to my health, I consent to be removed from the course and treated

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Parent or guardian must sign for those under 18 years of age.)

## John Robinson

Continued from front page...

### Early Years

John was born in Stillwater, Minnesota, in 1923. He spent one year at the University of Washington, studying mathematics with a minor in physics and chemistry. He also played the bass drum in the marching band.

It was WWII, and after his year at U of W, he joined The Merchant Marines, where he worked off the shores of Alaska. He then finished his degree with a double major in physics and mathematics at the University of Minnesota. John moved to Arizona in the mid-50s, and there he met Hazel. They married and had three kids.

### Move to Asheville

The Robinsons moved to Asheville in 1971; John worked for the accounting department at Beacon Blankets, the largest employer in Swannanoa and the largest blanket manufacturer in the world. He proved a visionary in making computers more prevalent (at that time, huge IBM machines that were housed in a separate facility), though it was an uphill battle. He learned code on his own, at home.

Hazel calls him “tenacious and wonderful” about such matters and noted that if there was a way to improve anything, he would do it, through until his death.

### Montford Park Players

Hazel had seen a need for a Shakespeare company in Asheville, and John encouraged her to create one. Hazel said, “He thought it was worth doing.” Theater wasn’t his passion, but he loved Hazel, and Hazel had a vision.

Deborah Austin noted that he even acted in some plays when needed, and various people said he was very good—a natural. Deborah remembers his great sense of humor. “He was not a verbose storyteller,

but once in a while, he’d tell a story about the Merchant Marines or his years at the university.” He had a twinkle in his eye Deborah saw in a picture of John as a very young boy, and that twinkle never left.

John retired from Beacon Blankets in 1989 but continued to work as an accountant on a pro bono basis for The United Way, the Community Arts Council and Montford Park Players.

### A Young Kid’s Story

Kenn Kirby, current Special Projects Director for MPP, met the Robinsons in the 70s. Kenn had “emancipated himself at 16, moved to Asheville without resources, and heard that John Robinson might have an open mind toward someone like himself.”

Kenn knocked on the Robinson’s front door and was invited in. They gave him soup, a blanket, and vitamins. They were on their way out when he arrived, and asked Kenn to shut the door all the way when he was comfortable leaving—and then they left this boy, this stranger, in their home while they went out to run errands.

John followed through in their relationship, becoming a father figure for Kenn, who sometimes spent the night with the Robinson’s. He had only his bicycle for transportation, and weather or late nights became an issue at times. And then Kenn eventually moved in.

### From the Land of Misfits

“If you have no good example in your life, it’s easy to turn to the dark side,” Kenn says. John found these people. “He found misfits. Those people who can often turn to crime and misbehavior.” John showed Kenn “how to do things, how to work things out.”

Kenn says there are at least a hundred people easily whose lives were saved by John and Hazel. “They’d be dead or in jail otherwise.” Kenn said something I’ve heard more than once, “John would take anyone

in. If you were willing to put in the time, he would put in the time.” He was “a great man willing to take someone in until he could stand on his own.”

### The Theater in Context

John cared about theater, and mostly wanted it to go where Hazel wanted it to go. For John, he wanted to make the world a better place. This meant, Kenn says, wanting “people to express their creativity.”

The theater was “art for the community, and theatre equals making the community a better, safer place.” In MPP’s beginnings, the community *needed* an eye toward *better* and toward *safety*.

### Not a Small Success Story

Early on, Kenn was building stuff for MPP—anything that was needed. He proved resourceful, say his colleagues. Kenn is “doing great now.” He went to L.A. and worked for Universal Studios and was a success. He attributes it all to his start with Montford Park Players. He’s now back and helping turn the Hazel Robinson Amphitheatre into a Performing Arts Theatre.

When Ken was invited in to the Robinson’s that first day, and as he grew to know them, he knew he’d never seen people like them. He not only wanted to see them again; he wanted to *be* like them. That is a high tribute.



Asheville Citizen-Times stock photo

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