

## “The Devil’s Carol” Homegrown Musical

by Penny Eileen Martin

“The Devil’s Christmas Carol” is an original musical with book, music and lyrics by me, Penny Martin. The world premiere performance will be at the Capital Fringe Festival in July but it was born, nurtured and raised in Greenbelt.

The adventure was born with a poem called “Chains” that I wrote and brought to my voice teacher, Greenbelter Izolda Trakhtenberg. “Chains” was inspired by the chains weighted with money bags and cashboxes that Jacob Marley wears in Dicken’s “A Christmas Carol.” I was struck by the idea that people are weighed down by their inability to let go of their past actions and mistakes more than by money or possessions. Trakhtenberg encouraged me to set the poem to music.

I will never know whether it was the effect of having seen way too many performances of “A Christmas Carol” or too many theatrical “Hell Weeks” (the week before opening night when there can be rehearsals every night of the week, actors grow tired and tempers short) that inspired me most. Possibly, it was simply too much caffeine at four in the morning. In any case, the idea of a theatre company of lost souls performing “A Christmas Carol” endlessly in Hell seemed to grow naturally out of “Chains.”

When I realized that Tiny Tim could be someone who wasn’t a child and didn’t have a limp and that Scrooge could be a shy young woman rather than a cantankerous old man, I was off and running with what I hoped would be a new and exciting twist on an old story.

**SPOILER ALERT:** Although the play is about “A Christmas Carol” it isn’t a performance of “A Christmas Carol.”

As I continued to write the script, the Christmas Carol characters grew to become people I knew and I was eager to find out what they would do and say next.

“The Devil’s Christmas Carol” started with a song and as I continued to write the story of Tim and Scrooge, Bob Cratchit and the rest of

the “Christmas Carol” gang, I found that there were places where the actors could explain or express themselves more clearly through song, so I wrote lyrics to go with the developing script.

Eventually I had a script and some lyrics but I was more than a few musical numbers shy of a show. After approaching a number of people about putting my lyrics to music, I realized that it was time to put my musical background to work. With the aid of professional music writing software I had a digital orchestra at my fingertips. This turned out to be really useful when, due to working a fulltime job, I found myself composing music at two in the morning.

Armed with a script, a CD with some musical numbers, enthusiasm and a certain amount of straight up pigheaded stubbornness, I approached Betsy Marks Delaney, Artistic Director of OutOftheBlackBox Theatre Company (O2B2) and newly arrived Greenbelt citizen, with a proposal for performing the work at the 2009 Capital Fringe Festival.

Fortunately for me O2B2 was willing to sponsor the production and Betsy Delaney agreed to direct the show.

It’s been an amazing opportunity with a talented cast of actors, including local actors and Greenbelt residents Phil Brandis as Bob Cratchit, Candy Madigan as The Charitable Woman and Kindra Gresham as Belle.

We’ll be performing at The Mountain at Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church, 900 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington DC, 20001, on Saturday, July 11 at 5 p.m.; Sunday, July 12 at 8 p.m.; Sunday, July 19 at 3:45 p.m.; and Saturday, July 25 at 10 p.m. Tickets go on sale June 22 at [www.capitalfringe.org](http://www.capitalfringe.org) and will also be available by phone at 866-811-4111 and from the Fringe Festival Box Office on July 7 at Fort Fringe, 607 New York Ave NW, WDC. For more information visit O2B2’s website at [www.O2B2.org](http://www.O2B2.org).

Come and see us at the Fringe Fest. You’ll have a hell of a good time.

## Brian O’Neill’s “Mayor” Essay Is a GES Winner

The following essay from fourth-grade student Brian O’Neill was the winner of the “If I Were Mayor” contest at Greenbelt Elementary School.

Brian is interested in history and politics. He researched his entry by using the city’s website and articles in the News Review as sources. The Maryland Municipal League (MML) sponsors the annual contest for all fourth-graders in the state. Amarachi Ibe of St. Hugh’s School and Bella Juwita of Springhill Lake Elementary School were featured in last week’s issue. Their essays are among the finalists for Prince George’s County. The contest is geared to educate students about municipal government and the role of a mayor. There were 2,895 students statewide who submitted an essay.

Brian originally wrote a 475-word essay, which he gave to his teacher. Then he learned from the MML website that the contest limited the word count to 275. He revised his essay and found a way to convey his ideas within the shorter essay form. Here is Brian’s winning essay for his school:

### “If I Were Mayor”

by Brian O’Neill

If I were mayor, I would make Greenbelt a greener city. I would support The Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Act of 2009, which lowers Maryland’s greenhouse gas emissions by 25% between the years 2006-2020. As mayor of Greenbelt, I would ensure our city does its part to reduce greenhouse gases.

I would decrease auto emissions by encouraging walking, bicycling and the use of mass transit. A Greenbelt Circulator bus would connect all residential, recreational, shopping centers and the Metro. I would consider constructing additional bicycle lanes and safe pedestrian walkways. Any city vehicles purchased would be hybrid.

I would study the feasibility of using alternative power sources for city buildings. Perhaps grants from the federal government or ecological groups could be obtained for the installation of solar panels. City buildings would have energy efficient windows and lighting.

I would increase recycling by accepting a wider variety of materials and offering a city pick up of large recyclable electronics.

As mayor, I would encourage citizen involvement. Residents would assist city council by joining advisory committees including: recycling and environment, trees and forest preserves. To celebrate Earth Day, T-shirts would be designed and sold. The money raised would be used to purchase and plant trees. We would organize clean up events of parks, forest preserves and water systems. All participants would be recognized at a ceremony. Greenbelt would participate in Earth Hour, an annual event started in Sydney, Australia where cities have unnecessary lights turned off for one hour.

The Greenbelt mayor, other councilmembers, city residents and all Earth’s citizens must work together to ensure a greener planet for generations to come!



PHOTO BY JAMES GIESE

Visiting Greenbelt on Tuesday June 30 were the Peter Mayer family from Greenhills, Ohio, Greenbelt’s sister city. They stopped for lunch and a city tour on their way from sightseeing in Washington to visiting in Philadelphia. Mayer is employed in the city’s contract post office and also does layout and design for the Greenhills Journal, the volunteer staffed monthly newspaper for the village. His wife Jackie is a proofreader for the paper. They lunched with News Review Editor Mary Lou Williamson and Jim and Bernie Giese at the newly-opened Williams American Bistro at Beltway Plaza. Besides the volunteer newspapers and contract post offices, the group found many other commonalities such as old schools converted to community centers, once identical swimming pools, lakes and greenbelts. Following lunch the Mayers, with son Joey and Williamson displayed their respective newspapers for the camera. The Mayers then visited the Municipal Building and Greenbelt Museum and took a look about town.

## Mt. Calvert Open House Successful Despite Rain

by Virginia Beauchamp

What do the Greenbelt Library and Mount Calvert, a colonial mansion on the Patuxent River, have in common?

Answer: In a space of about one year, a two-room suite in the library and the second floor of the mansion have both been dedicated as facilities of the Prince George’s County Historical Society. Representing different centuries, the two are joined as significant venues in the timeline of our county’s history.

Greenbelters, of course, know the significance of our town as the first of three Depression-era planned communities created by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. But they may not know the history of Mount Calvert as the sole surviving structure of the 1697 first capital of our county. A few years later the colonial capital was moved to the larger, developing community of Upper Marlboro, where it has remained ever since.

### DeMarr Library

The Frederick S. DeMarr Library of Prince George’s County History was dedicated in Greenbelt on May 31 last year; this year, on June 4 an open house welcomed society members and friends to the newly repaired and rehabilitated colonial mansion, Mount Calvert, on the shores of the Patuxent River not far from Jug Bay. Members and guests were invited to browse through exhibits on the main floor of the structure, including early Indian artifacts.

Although guests had been promised an opportunity to see archeological digs in progress and to take pontoon boat rides, an all-day rain had forced the cancellation of both events. Luckily during the hour or so that guests were arriving, the rain held off and all present – including this reporter – could

enjoy a catered supper.

Two large double awnings had been erected on the lawn before the building to shelter the attendees and rows of chairs set up to accommodate them during the short program that followed. A vocal group, the Ship’s Company Chanteymen in 18th-century sailors’ garb provided a great variety of à capella nautical songs to enliven the proceedings.

In the near-darkness of the threatening storm and under the dark, overhead canvas – it had functioning microphones but no lights – officials of the historical society and representatives of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), owner of the facility, conducted a short, informal program of welcome to the society’s new home office. Society Director Elizabeth Dougherty served as master of ceremonies and long-time society member and Maryland Senate President Mike Miller offered greetings.

Dougherty also announced the placement of a commemorative bench on the grounds of Mount Calvert in honor of the late William Uber of Greenbelt who, together with his wife, Stella, ran the society’s gift shop at the Marietta Mansion for many years. Mr. Uber died on May 4, 2009.

The society vacated its former office at Marietta, which is now undergoing renovation by the M-NCPPC. The library, now in Greenbelt, had been established and was operated for many years at Marietta.

As the events at Mount Calvert concluded and the skies grew darker, we walked out from under the canvas shelter where the program had taken place. And then, as we hurried to our cars, the rains began again.



The Charitable Woman (Candy Madigan) and Mr. Fezziwig (BJ Mitchell) scold two urchins (Katie and Erin Delaney) in The Devil’s Christmas Carol.