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Damascus, Maryland 20872

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## **Damascus Heritage Society Newsletter**

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**THE DEVOTED CURATOR OF DAMASCUS HISTORY**

**SUMMER 2008**

**VOL. 2 No. 3**

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### **From the Editor**

Summer has arrived and the Heritage Society is busy, busy, busy. Our 2008 Membership Drive is under way, Celebrate Damascus has come and gone, our building project will soon be ready to break ground, and plans are being made for the Damascus Fair. We are very busy but at the same time we are making new friends and having lots of fun in the process. But always in the background our goal is the same – open a museum in Damascus before it's too late. Our farms are disappearing before our eyes, old buildings are being torn down in the name of progress, and our older residents are passing on. We need to get this museum open now. We cannot accomplish our goal, however, without the support of the community. You can do that in many different ways. We need volunteers to help with our numerous fund raising projects, we need your organizational and leadership skills for those projects, and of course, we need your financial support. In reality, we can use anything you have to offer. A schedule of future meetings appears at the end of this newsletter. We invite you to come to our meetings and work with us to build this museum to preserve the community heritage for our future generations. Do it now.

Linda Olsen, Editor

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### **Membership Drive**

The Society's annual membership drive is underway with high expectations of substantially increasing membership. Membership plays a very important role in the Society's effort to establish a museum to preserve the history of

Damascus. Not only is it a vital source of needed income but the membership is the back-bone of the Society's existence.

Our membership year is from July 1 until June 30. Recently, our membership application was updated to include several additional levels of membership, providing a wider range of opportunities to support the Heritage Society. On June 30, a letter with this revised application was mailed to each person or family in our database. If you have not done so already, please consider either joining for the first time or renewing your current membership by completing the application in this letter and returning it with a check for the level of dues that is right for you. We cannot make this museum a reality without your support. Damascus Heritage Society, Inc. is a 501(c)3 charitable organization, and your contribution is tax deductible.

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### **Construction Planning Moves Forward Slowly but Surely**

By Dan King & Jim Starcher

The final step before construction can begin at the temporary museum site on the Damascus Library grounds is the negotiation and signing of a License Agreement with Montgomery County. A draft agreement has been prepared by the County's Office of Real Estate, reviewed by the Damascus Heritage Society Board, and returned to the county for the final review and approval by the County Attorney.

Basically the agreement provides for the licensing of the site to the Heritage Society for a period of five years with two one-year renewals at \$1 per year. It states that the museum hours of operation will be the same as the hours of operation for the Library and Senior Center. The reason for this restriction is that there will be no public facilities in the museum but facilities will be available in the adjacent Library and Senior Center. The license agreement also specifies the level of insurance that the Heritage Society must carry and clearly makes the Heritage Society responsible to indemnify the county against any problems. Local Attorney Patricia McKenzie has graciously reviewed this and other documents for the Society, pro bono.

Once the license agreement is signed, work can move forward with the construction of the foundation for the temporary museum and the placement of the museum structure on the foundation. Bids and building permits have already been obtained so progress should be rapid once the license agreement is signed. The final stages of construction will be for handicapped ramps, electrical service, and interior renovations. Several scout troops have offered to assist with the latter work which will take place later in the summer or in the early fall of this year.

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### **Elvis Tribute Concert Big Success**

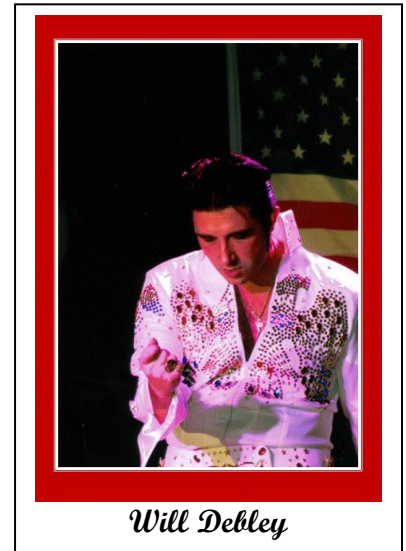
By Daria King

The Elvis Tribute Concert held on Saturday, May 17, 2008 in the Great Hall of the Damascus United Methodist Church was a great success with over \$4,600 being raised for the construction of the temporary museum of the Damascus Heritage Society. Of that total, approximately \$3,000 was raised from the attendance at the concert and another \$1,600 from the Silent Auction conducted before the concert. We thank everyone who attended and hope you enjoyed Elvis and we thank all of the business and individuals who contributed to the huge success of the auction.

The star of the show, Will Debley of Mt. Airy, is an Elvis Tribute Artist who appeared at no charge to benefit the museum. Will has performed at Graceland and was a finalist in the 2007 Images

of the King World Championships. We are very fortunate that Will was willing to do this for us.

A number of people made the concert possible including Linda Olsen who co-chaired the affair, Gretchen Debley who provided the background music, Bill and Cathy Miller who produced and managed the show, and a number of Heritage Society members including Nan Norton, Pat Williams, Sue Catron, Kay Thompson, Bernardine Beall, and Ray Olsen who handled tickets, refreshments, and other critical functions.



*Will Debley*

Particular thanks go to Walt Edmonds and the Damascus United Methodist Church for letting us use the hall at no charge. Finally, we thank the women and men (yes, men) who baked cookies for our refreshment table.

It really was a team effort for the benefit of the community.

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### **Celebrate Damascus was Fun for All**

The Heritage Society recently participated in the Saturday events at Celebrate Damascus for the second year in a row. Something was new this year, however, and that was the addition of the children's games that were willed to us by the Damascus Rotary which disbanded earlier in the year. The games were always a big hit when the Rotary ran them and we were glad to take them over and thank them for offering them to us. We also thank the businesses in the community who sponsored our games with their financial support. Because of the sponsors and the game participants, we raised about \$1300 for our museum project.

In addition to the Saturday events, we participated in the parade on Friday evening for the first time. What fun we had! We learned a few things about

“parading” and already have plans for next year. Join the Damascus Heritage Society and have fun with us in the parade in 2009.

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### **First Vendor Expo Was Well Received**

Thanks to the organizational efforts of Society member Nancy Lambros, the first Vendor Expo held in April was well received by the vendors and the community. We had a wide variety of vendors from jewelry to tea, in addition to a cake auction for two cakes baked by our local Food Network cook-off finalist, Eboni Williams. The comments from the vendors seemed to indicate that it will get bigger and better every year if we continue to sponsor this event. As with all of our events, the Society members had a great time and we hope that everyone involved enjoyed it as much as we did. And best of all, we raised about \$1400 for our museum project.

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### **A History Moment: The Wormweed Story**

By Nan Norton  
(Special thanks to Leonard Moxley  
and Karen Miller)

Have you ever heard of wormweed? Did you know that it was an important cash crop in our Damascus area and in Central Maryland and that we were the prime suppliers of the oil that was distilled from the seeds? Did you know that wormweed oil was used for medicinal purposes? The plant grew to 2 to 3 feet tall and was bushy with a small green fruit that contained a small black seed that was harvested in late September. Due to all the hard work, one farmer said “You had a mighty tired back when you got through harvesting wormweed!”

In the early days, the distilling process was done in vats where the seeds were placed in water, a fire was built under the vats, and the steaming process caused the oil and water to separate. The oil was then put in jars and shipped out for sale. The rest of the plant was returned to the fields to add organic matter to the soil. At the Browningsville still the dry wormweed was put into huge steel retorts and steam for the distillation came from a boiler the size of a small locomotive.

The bottom fell out of the market for the oil around the mid 1970s due to many synthetic drugs being formulated with lower production costs.



Local resident, Joe Linthicum, holds wormweed seeds. Photo by Ephraim Salins

The following is “A Recollection of Growing Wormweed” by Betty Moxley Jernigan:

“In our “growing up” years, my father, for a time, planted wormweed. I can remember the seed being in a “transplant” bed near the edge of our woods because the soil was rich in that area. When the new plants were ready to be transplanted, two of us would ride on the planter—one on each side, alternately dropping plants in the ground about a couple feet apart.

Wormweed was certainly not our favorite crop to help with because you had to be so careful in cultivating or hoeing the plants as to not knock the seeds off since that was where the oil that was the end product came from. Likewise, when it was time to cut the wormweed, it had to be done by hand either early in the morning or later in the evening when the dew was on the plant to protect the seeds. Then, it was left to cure in the fields for about a week before it was carefully loaded on the wagons. The wagons were taken to Mr. Raymond Moxley’s farm where Mr. Arthur Hardy ran the distillery. There always seemed to be a long line of wagons with seeds waiting to be distilled. The oil from the seeds was measured in pounds and was used as a remedy against intestinal parasites and later as a base for ship paint.

Wormweed always resembled what I thought sagebrush or tumbleweed looked like and the plant had a very pungent odor that seemed to stay on your hands forever. When the still was in operation, the odor from the distillery would follow the stream and the surrounding areas would smell of the wormweed. Even though it was a pungent odor, it always seemed to signal the beginning of fall and cooler weather.”

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### Future Meetings

We meet on the third Monday of the month, unless it falls on a holiday, in which case it will then be moved to the fourth Monday. All meetings are held in the large conference room at the Damascus Public Library unless noted otherwise. For 2008 the remaining meetings are as follows:

- July 21, 2008
- August 18, 2008
- September 15, 2008
- October 20, 2008
- November 17, 2008
- December 15, 2008

Mark your calendar now.

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