

"Federation Corner" column  
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**Celebrate rural Montgomery**  
*on the 25th anniversary of the Agricultural Reserve*  
By Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Today, a large consortium of civic groups and area businesses launched a website highlighting a year-long celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve, a rural area of more than 90,000 acres crowning the northwestern third of the county. "We are very excited to be celebrating and honoring Montgomery County farmers, their historic and productive farms, and the vision of the county planners who brought the Agricultural Reserve to fruition a quarter century ago," said Melanie Choukas-Bradley, a spokeswoman for the Celebration. The groups also acknowledge the elected officials, county employees and community leaders who continue to support Montgomery farming and open space.

The year-long effort is officially called, "CELEBRATE RURAL MONTGOMERY on the 25th Anniversary of the Agricultural Reserve" and will be publicly launched in April. Its new website ([www.ruralmontgomery.org](http://www.ruralmontgomery.org)) features artistic photographs of Montgomery County farmland through the seasons, a calendar of celebration events which will be held throughout the county during 2005, and information about how the Agricultural Reserve benefits all residents of the region. The inaugural "Celebrate Rural Montgomery" event is a family open house on Saturday, April 16th, 1:00-4:00, at Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary south of Poolesville. The open house is part of the countryside artisans' annual spring studio tour. A press conference is planned for 1:00 on April 14th at Poplar Spring.

The Agricultural Reserve is a nationally acclaimed farmland and open space preservation plan that was established in 1980. Anyone who has visited the Montgomery countryside for peaches in summer, pumpkins in autumn, or a freshly-cut tree at Christmastime, is familiar with the landscape that makes up the Agricultural Reserve. The towns of Poolesville, Barnesville, Comus, Hyattstown, Damascus, Laytonsville and Brookeville are all situated within the farmland that makes up the "Ag Reserve," as it is often called. The Ag Reserve stretches from the Potomac to the Patuxent and surrounds the base of Frederick County's Sugarloaf Mountain.

Although Montgomery County is best known for its attractive, livable suburbs, agriculture still prevails in nearly one-third of the county. The county's 577 farms (the majority of them family-run) and 350 horticultural enterprises contribute \$252 million to the county's annual economy. Montgomery is the number one pumpkin-growing county in the state and the number two berry-grower. The Agricultural Reserve provides countless benefits for all who live in Montgomery County and the greater Washington area, including clean air, clean water, stunning rural scenery, numerous recreational opportunities such as horseback riding, hiking, cycling, and canoeing, and a bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables available at pick-your-own orchards, farm stands and urban and suburban farmers markets. Historic sites, preserved throughout the Agricultural Reserve, give residents and visitors to the Reserve a strong sense of our rural past and the region's many contributions to the nation's history.

"Celebrate Rural Montgomery" festivities, and related educational events, will highlight the many ways the "Ag Reserve" enriches the lives of Montgomery County residents and all who live in the greater Washington-Baltimore region.

**April 2005 Program - "Special interests funded Montgomery County's 2002 election campaigns"**  
By Jim Humphrey, District 1 Vice President

The program for the MCCF meeting on Monday, April 11, will focus on how special interests funded the 2002 Montgomery County election campaigns. It will be presented by Dan Tuten of "Neighbors for a Better Montgomery", which is also known as "NeighborsPAC."

As we anticipate the 2006 county elections, it is worth studying how much and how special interests have funded the campaigns of our current elected officials. Dan Tuten will give a prepared talk accompanied by overhead projections that he has given to other civic groups in this county. The slides come from information available on the group's website, [www.NeighborsPAC.org](http://www.NeighborsPAC.org). The presentation will be followed by a question and answer session.

In his talk, Mr. Tuten asserts that when a special interest group contributes a majority of the funding to the campaigns of elected officials--as is the case with the development industry in our county--that group can exert significant influence across a wide range of public policy areas. Effects can be felt on issues such as affordable housing, zoning standards, taxes, and special legislation to enable or benefit specific building projects.

The program will begin about 8:00 p.m. and will take place in the first floor auditorium of the County Council Building, 100 Maryland Ave, Rockville. The public is invited to attend and participate.