

SENIOR LIVING

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



Marta Hill Gray, President of Culpepper Garden at annual ceremony honoring First Responders April 17.



Daniel Douglass, EMS Supervisor; Fire Chief Daniel Polvitz; William N. Flagler, Jr. Director Arlington County Department of Public Safety Communications and Emergency Management.



Peter Kant, Board Chair; Libby Garvey, outgoing Arlington County Board Chair; Melissa Andrews, CEO LeadingAge Virginia.

Culpepper Garden Honors First Responders

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Marta Hill Gray, President of Culpepper Garden, reaches into colorful bags lined up near the entrance of Culpepper Garden and hands each person entering the event April 17 a shiny first responders pin.

This is the third year for the Culpepper Garden special ceremony and luncheon honoring first responders. Gray says, “They are here all the time. I couldn’t think of a better group to honor. They really take care of us.” Culpepper Garden is a retirement community of care providing specialized assistance for vulnerable older adults living on fixed or low incomes.

One of the special guests, Andy Penn, Arlington County Police Chief, stands chatting with a member of the community while a number of his officers are scattered around the sidewalk waiting for the ceremony to begin. The smell of barbecue burgers wafts over the crowd as the culinary crew prepare the lunch available after the ceremony.

William Flagler Jr., Department of Public Safety Communications and Emergency Management Director arrives with umbrella in hand as Fire Chief David Polvitz and Daniel Douglass, EMS paramedic and EMS Supervisor wait for the ceremony to begin. Douglass has arrived in the buggy. “That’s what we call the red emergency vehicle over there. It goes back to when the fire emergency vehicles were a horse drawn buggy. A lot of the terms we use today go way back—the hook and ladder truck used to be just that—a ladder.”

Peter Kant, Board Chair, says he has been on the Board for six years. “I’ve lived in Arlington since 1997 and I wanted to be more engaged with the community. They wanted to add a different perspective and I’m a businessman. During the time I’ve been on the Board the renovation of the building was key but significantly I have seen Culpepper Garden put on a sustainable path for the next 10 years.”

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Arlington County Police Chief Andy Penn

Gray opens the ceremony by praising the first responders for their dedication, commitment, compassion and caring. She explains that in the early 60s a local pastor challenged his congregation to come up with a livable environment for seniors with limited resources. In 1975 Culpepper Garden was born with the building named for the first Board Chair. Today Culpepper Garden has grown to three buildings on beautiful grounds with 273 independent living apartments and 173 assisted living apartments.

Gray continues, “At the heart of our event is the planting of a redbud tree in honor of our courageous first responders. This tree stands as a living testament to their selfless dedication and unwavering commitment to our community’s safety and well-being. It will serve as a constant reminder of their bravery and sacrifice. Today we will plant a redbud tree that will signify the future for generations of growth”

Kant builds on the analogy of the redbud tree as a symbol of generations to come and a quality home. He equates the health and sustainability of the redbud tree to the future generations at Culpepper Garden.

Libby Garvey, a long time supporter of Cul-



Long line forms for BBQ lunch at first responders ceremony

pepper Garden and retiring Arlington County Board chair, says she thinks about how much this encapsulates Arlington. “It’s all about caring, being safe and cared for.” She remembers a Vonnegut quote that applies to the first responders in Arlington. “When someone asked him the meaning of life he said, ‘I can’t tell you that but I do know it is our job to help each other get through it.’”

Melissa Andrews, CEO of LeadingAge Virginia is the keynote speaker. She explains to the crowd she had lost four people in the last year. “I believe in signs. This morning Marta told me she had seen a flock of cardinals here. Cardinals have gone beyond and I believe they were coming back to say thank you to our first responders.” She said when a plant is taking root it takes gardening and when it blooms, it is for generations to come. “There’s no place like Culpepper.”

Gray concluded by citing one of the many examples of the first responders service when she put out a call to help plant bulbs last fall for their 30,000 daffodil garden. “Everyone showed up. Police Chief Andy Penn came with his crew. Will Flagler came in from a late business trip and showed up early in a business suit. He left with muddy



The planting of the Redbud tree symbolizes future generations at Culpepper Garden, and the commitment of the first responders to the community’s safety and well-being.

shoes but he said he would come, and he kept his word.”

“And Andy took off on his motorcycle with Culpepper dirt under his tires.”

The ceremony adjourned, and the crowd headed down the sidewalk to add a redbud tree to the extensive garden area at Culpepper.

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