

"Federation Corner" column
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Leggett to rename CountyStat Center in honor of Wayne Goldstein

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Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett and County Council Member Marc Elrich will unveil a plaque naming Montgomery County's CountyStat Meeting Center the "Wayne Goldstein Center for Responsible Government" on Monday, October 8, 2012 at 10 a.m. The plaque, which will hang on the wall in the CountyStat offices, honors civic activist and former Montgomery County Civic Federation President Wayne Goldstein, who passed away in April 2009.

It is fitting that the county make such a tribute because Wayne was instrumental in getting CountyStat established. He was an avid proponent of using the CountyStat program to measure results and performance in county government. But those of us who worked with Wayne remember him for so much more. Sometimes it seems that Wayne has been gone a really long time; at other times, it is hard to believe it has been three years already.

Even if you never met Wayne, if you ever testified at a Planning Board or County Council hearing, odds are that you saw him. He was the guy with a pony tail, wearing a hat. Wayne was, quite simply, the lynchpin of the civic activist community.

Whether you worked with him or never met him, he helped make your community (and, indeed, the county) a better place to live. He was actively involved in a host of issues: planning and land use, historic preservation, the school system, parks, and the environment. He wrote many of these Federation Corner columns published in The Montgomery Sentinel, typically seeking to expose the arrogance and foolishness of some people and institutions who are supposed to work for the citizens.

Wayne helped my neighborhood directly in our fight to save Rachel Carson Meadow. First he helped us get the support of the Montgomery County Civic Federation. Both Wayne and Jim Humphrey (chair of the Federation's Planning and Land Use Committee) testified in support of saving the meadow. Wayne arranged to get the black walnut tree growing in the meadow measured and its age estimated. He also connected us with other neighborhoods and activists with whom we could make common cause. We are still fighting to save the Meadow, and we dearly miss his ideas and enthusiasm.

But the main thing about Wayne was that you could depend on him. He was always there for us to share our triumphs and defeats, to strategize, to attend practically every meeting and hearing (sometimes more than one a night) and, most importantly, to actually do the work. He had mad research skills. You could tell him about an issue and, in a little while, up would pop an email chock full of pertinent facts and citations.

In his testimony, he was known for skewering the powerful with humor. (He once referred to the county's green building policy as "a paler shade of green.") He managed to be entertaining and passionate about the issues at the same time. Sometimes his hats were part of the show, chosen to make a point or relate to the hearing's theme. Yet he never came across as angry or a crank. He always kept it just under "over the top."

Wayne never seemed to burn out, and he always seemed to genuinely enjoy it all. The more information and outrage you gave him, the more he would smile and his eyes would twinkle ever brighter. This amazed me.

It is hard to measure the impact of involvement and activism. You tend to lose more battles than you win and, even when you do win, there's always another battle and another and another. The old boondoggle comes back with a new buzzword. The new legislation you fought so hard for is only as good as its implementation.

But those of us that worked with Wayne have no doubts as to his impact. We feel it every day. In his loss, we finally understood just how much of a difference he made.

The CountyStat Office is located at 255 Rockville Pike, Suite L-10, in Rockville, immediately inside the door of the Monroe Street entrance to the building. For more information on the October 8 ceremony or to RSVP that you plan to attend, call 240-777-2629 or send an email to countystat@montgomerycountymd.gov

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net