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BethesdaToday

Montgomery County's Trusted News Source

AN INSIDE LOOK

Greetings Members!

In 2024, nearly 130 newspapers across the U.S. shut down, according to the Medill School of Journalism's *State of Local News Report*. This isn't just a statistic—it's a threat to communities everywhere.

When local news disappears, so does our ability to ensure transparency in our communities. Without it, people are left uninformed, elected officials face less accountability, and civic engagement suffers—weakening democracy and leaving residents in the dark about the decisions that shape their daily lives.

That's why I'm so grateful for each and every one of you who supported our spring membership campaign. Thanks to your generosity, we exceeded our \$12,000 goal by 23%! This campaign wasn't just about hitting a fundraising target; it's a testament to the belief that local, independent journalism still has a place in our community. Your support keeps us here, keeping you informed.

In this issue, we're excited to share a behind-the-scenes look at the work of reporter Elia Griffin, whose stories range from food trends to public safety and local development. These diverse topics reflect the heart of our community, and we're proud to highlight how her work shapes the conversations that matter most in Montgomery County. We're also featuring some of the reasons why our members support Bethesda Today—your stories and your support are what make this newsroom truly community-driven.

Thank you again for everything you do. Your support truly makes a difference. Together, we're ensuring that Bethesda Today remains a trusted, independent voice for our community, now and for many years to come.



With gratitude,
Julie Rasicot
Editor

Behind the scenes with reporter Elia Griffin



Behind every local newsroom are reporters working hard to keep their communities informed and engaged. This month, we're highlighting Elia Griffin, a reporter who has been with Bethesda Today for nearly two years, covering everything from dining and development to public safety.

What inspired you to become a reporter, and how did you end up focusing on local news in Montgomery County?

It is hard to pinpoint what exactly inspired me to pursue a career in journalism. However, I believe that my natural curiosity and growing up in Montgomery County surrounded by discussions about politics, social justice and cultural diversity are key factors.

I also have always loved photojournalism and documentaries, especially those about animals, the environment and nature. I will also give credit to the Newseum, which used to be in Washington, D.C., until a few years ago. I always loved that museum as a child. When it came to focusing on local news, I felt that my hometown would be a good place to start my career and learn a lot.

You write about a wide range of topics, from food and drink to public safety and local development. How do you balance these diverse areas?

Balancing these three beats can be challenging at times, especially when events or meetings may overlap or there is a lot of breaking news. I keep an organized calendar, online notebook and spreadsheets that help me keep track of what is

coming up. My editors also help me a lot when it comes to prioritizing stories and making a “battle plan” when I have lots of things to cover.

For a good chunk of the 2023-2024 school year, I was also covering education in the county. In many ways, it was a challenging school year, and I think that also helped me improve at balancing my workflow.

Do you have a favorite beat?

While I don't have a favorite beat, I have really enjoyed writing dining stories. I find it fun to interact with the local and regional dining community, whether it be owners, chefs or employees at restaurants. I would also call myself a bit of a foodie and definitely a pizza snob, so I always love having dining recommendations to share in my back pocket.

Montgomery County has a rich and diverse food scene. What are some recent trends or standout stories you've come across in the local food and drink world?

Food halls have been popping up across the county, and soon Commas in downtown Silver Spring's Ellsworth Place is expected to join them with an opening slated for late April or early May. Commas Food Hall will be the second downtown Silver Spring food hall after Solaire Social.

While I'm not sure I would call it a trend, I have recently reported on two Washington, D.C.-based eateries opening locations in Montgomery County for the first time: Duke's Grocery in Potomac and Dacha Beer Garden coming to the former Denizen's space in downtown Silver Spring.

Bethesda Today is a vital source for local news. What sets it apart from other news outlets, and how does it contribute to the conversation in Montgomery County?

Going in-depth is the standard for us. We attend board meetings and community forums that other outlets may not cover. And we have our fingers on the pulse of MoCo. I know in this county, local journalism means a lot to our community and Bethesda Today aims to provide strong and impactful journalism to fill the void created by local newspapers and magazines that have shuttered over the years.

You've covered a lot of different topics within the county. Is there a specific story or report that has had a lasting impact on you or shaped your perspective on local issues?

It is hard to choose one story, but one of my favorites was about spotted lanternflies in the county last summer. I had a great time writing and researching the story and it came at a time that really met the moment when so many people were beginning to see the bugs fluttering about our communities.

On a more serious note, one story that has had a lasting impact on me was reporting on the Homes Not Borders nonprofit as it was helping to resettle some of the last refugees in the area in January. This story was fascinating to report on – watching the nonprofit and community members set up an entire apartment for families within a few hours – and eye-opening to the changes that would quickly come with the Trump administration.

What do you think is the biggest challenge for local journalism today, and how can readers and supporters help ensure that quality, community-driven reporting continues to thrive?

I think one of the biggest challenges for local journalism is competing with social media and trying to not only attract younger audiences but also help them understand the importance of local journalism and how it functions in their lives.

The solution may be meeting them where they are, which is mostly on social media, or helping younger generations understand the role and importance of traditional journalism. That could begin in the classroom at school or at home by reading the newspaper, watching movies or TV shows about journalism and having constructive conversations about the news.

Why our community stands behind Bethesda Today

We asked, and you told us why you choose to support Bethesda Today and why local news matters to you. Your reasons are thoughtful, honest and a reminder of why this work is so important.

Here are just a few of the comments you shared during our spring campaign:

- I want to support local journalism so I can be informed about what is happening in my community. Thanks!
- Local journalism is fundamental to democracy.
- The news crisis is real! I greatly value Bethesda Today's education and public safety reporting.
- I appreciate your attention to local news. So important. Thank you.
- I value your local news and politics reporting!
- I support local journalism. It's sad that it's disappearing in the U.S.
- Need to have trustworthy local news source.

In future newsletters, we'd love to highlight more of the people who make Bethesda Today what it is. If you're interested in being part of a "Meet the Member" feature and sharing a bit about why you support local news, let us know—we'd love to hear from you. [Click here to share.](#)

Thank YOU for your ongoing support!

The support of Montgomery County community members has been essential since the beginning—and members like you can play an instrumental role in sustaining the next 10 years of independent, local news. Thank you!

If you'd like to renew or make an additional contribution to the Bethesda Today newsroom, [please click here.](#)

If you have any questions about your membership, please reach out to membership@bethesdamagazine.com or reply to this email.

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