New Montgomery Parks Director

Miti Figueredo

Brings Excitement and Experience to the Job
features

18
MITI FIGUEREDO
The new director of Montgomery Parks brings experience, a vision and a love of the outdoors to her role.
BY SUSAN AHEARN

24
DIY HOME REPAIRS
Do-it-yourself tips and pitfalls to avoid when tackling projects at home.
BY DAVID MARK

28
CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH HOME REPAIR
Learn about a local nonprofit that works to empower women and build skills, confidence and community through home repair.
BY ROSANNE SKIRBLE

31
RETIRING IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY
A look at where to live and what to do.
BY MEGAN CONWAY

32
EMBARKING ON A NEW POST-RETIREMENT PATH
Read about local retirees who embarked on a new vocational journey later in life.
BY ELLEN BRAUNSTEIN

PEOPLE + PLACES
6 Datebook
8 On Stage
11 Getaways
13 Bookshelf

WELL + BEING
14 Spaces
16 Expert

FOOD + DRINK
36 Local Table

34
MENTAL HEALTH
We all feel stress at different times, for different reasons. Learn key tips on how to reduce stress and improve your physical and mental health.
BY DAVID MARK

MONTGOMERYMAG.COM • 3

On the cover: Miti Figueredo
Photo courtesy of Montgomery Parks
When Licia Galinsky bought an old wood frame house on Ritchie Avenue in Silver Spring in 2021, her plan was to develop the property and sell it for a handy profit. As the owner of Branches Realty, a realtor and broker herself, that idea made good business sense. Yet, within a year she had charted a new course. “It was an empty house and needed a lot of work that I didn’t want to do right then,” she says. Galinsky knew how to fix things and realized that many of the women in her life, including her wife and most of the women around her, did not. “It was a perfect opportunity to train women in basic home repair skills,” she says. “And I [loved] the thought of people who never had access to this kind of thing, to fix a toilet for not much money and do it themselves.”

In 2022 Galinsky co-founded Abodes Joy, a nonprofit dedicated to training and empowering “diverse learners – women, nonbinary people and transgender people – in home repair to build skills, confidence and community,” she says. Co-founder Saskia van Groningen, an architect and realtor with a history in historic preservation, is all in. “The multi-cultural, multi-racial, gender equality piece is at the very core of our organization and what leads us forward,” she says.

### House Reimagined as Training Workshop

The founders recruited help to tear down the house to its studs for an open workshop and went on to fill it with tools. Shelving, tables and rolling carts are packed with power drills, circular saws and containers filled with every conceivable type of nail and screw, and bins labeled for plumbing, carpentry, electrical and tiling.

Abodes Joy began to offer paid classes in electrical basics, plumbing, drywall and tiling. At the same time, the nonprofit started the Home Repair Training Program, targeting...
marginalized women, who in cohorts of 12 would study all the trades in six classes over one month. "We teach basic home skills, with hands-on experience, so women can fix things around the house," Galinsky says. "It was really the vision, how to lift people up, how to be that support and to spread it to friends and family."

**Do Your Own Toilet Repair**

On this evening, the topic is plumbing. Instructor Delaine Deer opens the session with a welcoming, "I love toilets," and spends the next hour in a show-and-tell of how a toilet works.

Deer honed her skills on job sites with her father as she was growing up, and by her early 20s had already become a master plumber. "These days she is a federal government construction consultant with a passion for teaching.

Her advice for tonight's novices is, "Don't be afraid. Demystify it. Look at it," referring to a diagram on the wall and a toilet float ball in her hand.

Deer divides the twelve women into three teams, and hands them each a box with toilet parts. Their task is to put together and later take apart the toilet, aided by an instruction sheet and their collective wisdom.

"Everything is common sense," she tells them encouragingly. "If you don't rush through it, you can do it!"

The parts spill quickly out of the boxes with Deer nearby to help sort out any confusion.

Sara Mindel, a homeowner, says she is all too familiar with the damage water can cause. "I [had] a toilet that overflowed for ten minutes. It was very alarming, [and] ended up destroying my entire first floor, and I had to re-floor it, and the basement ceiling collapsed because of it too," she says.

"I'm here to take away new knowledge, how to have plumbing not so daunting."

Mindel's friend Rachel Papantonakis agrees, plus she wants more confidence in her conversations with plumbers. " Plumbers come into the house and have this attitude [with women] and I want to not have to deal with their nonsense and be able to take care of some of these things myself," she says. "I have two children who used to like to flood things, and I wish I had taken this 10 years ago."

**Building Community**

Kelly Fuentes lives within walking distance of the Richie Avenue house and finished a cohort training program in February. She wanted to learn more and how to do it safely, which is why she says she joined the cohort.

"To have somebody right next to you, walking you through the steps, somebody to coach me through and show me you can do this, and we could help each other," she says. "I felt so empowered I could take on anything that I learned in the classes and apply
those we’ve trained, give back,” she says.
They stay connected. They help each other and came together last year to build a house for Habitat for Humanity in Takoma Park. They also volunteered on National Rebuilding Day, partnering with a team from Helping Hands Poolesville. “It was amazing to see them put their skills to work, tackling floor tiling, backsplash tiling, painting and installing blinds,” Galinsky says.
This is just a beginning for Abodes Joy, she adds, whose intent is to expand its paid classes and training cohorts, and eventually move to a larger space to accommodate the growing needs in the community. “We are working with our graduates to train to be trainers themselves,” she says. “We are building the world we want to see.”

that to different projects.”
Her to-do list for this spring is ambitious with plans to tackle her unfinished basement by installing a toilet, tiling the floor, putting up dry walls and painting, all projects she hopes to do with her two children, ages 10 and seven. “As I am learning, we can learn together,” she says.
Galinsky adds these are not the skills many women learn when they are younger.
“The idea is as we train people, they then would turn around and give back to the community collectively, jointly that we would as an organization with those we’ve trained, give back,” she says.

Delaine Deer’s 10 Practical DIY Home Repair Tips
Abodes Joy instructor Delaine Deer is a government construction consultant with decades of experience in leading multi-million-dollar construction, multi-family, infrastructure and maintenance projects. Here’s her advice for those among us who want to take home repair into our own hands.

1. Start with small projects: Begin with simple tasks like fixing a leaky faucet or replacing a door handle. This builds confidence for more complex repairs.
2. Educate yourself: Use online tutorials, books, or workshops to learn basic repair skills. Understanding the process reduces stress and increases confidence.
3. Invest in quality tools: Good tools make a job easier and safer. Start with a basic toolkit and add specialized tools as needed.
4. Safety first: Always prioritize safety by wearing protective gear and following safety guidelines for each project.
5. Plan and prepare: Before starting a project, gather all necessary materials and tools. Plan the steps to avoid mistakes and minimize stress.
6. Take your time: Rushing leads to mistakes and frustration. Approach each task patiently, focusing on doing it right rather than quickly.
7. Don’t be afraid to ask for help: If you’re unsure about a step or technique, seek advice from experienced DIYers or professionals.
8. Celebrate your successes: Acknowledge and celebrate each completed project, no matter how small. This boosts confidence and motivation for future repairs.
9. Learn from mistakes: Mistakes are part of the learning process. Analyze what went wrong and use it as a lesson for future projects.
10. Seek inspiration and stay motivated: Browse DIY websites, magazines, or social media for ideas and inspiration. Staying motivated can help you tackle projects with enthusiasm and confidence.