



SIGNS OF the Times

The post-World War II population explosion in Montgomery County rang in the era of commuting and general mobility of residents who no longer needed to shop, eat and recreate in their own communities.

The automobile made businesses from neighboring communities and around the county accessible to all. That meant establishments needed to change their marketing strategies and appeal not just to leisurely walkers who might have time to read a more complex sign, but to folks speeding by in cars who needed a message in one glance. That brought in a new era of signage to the county.

“The exuberant mid-century modern design of commercial signs captures the entrepreneurial spirit of mom and pop shops that thrived during the post-World War II population boom of Montgomery County,” says Clare Lise Kelly, architectural history specialist for the Montgomery County Planning Department. “With loud colors and catchy shapes, the quirky signs howled for the attention of passing motorists.”

Little remains of what is known as American Roadside Architecture, where signs became more colorful and flamboyant advertisements in contrast to the low-key signs intended for pedestrians on the sidewalk. But a few still dot the road around the county, even if they sometimes outlived the businesses they once touted.

THE ANCHOR INN WENT UP IN NO SMOKE

Intersection of Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard, Wheaton

For 50 years, from 1954 to 2004, Harry “Selby” Scaggs Sr. served fresh seafood from the Chesapeake Bay at his Anchor Inn restaurant. But much has happened in the last 12 years. Scaggs told *The Gazette* at the time he closed the restaurant that after the 2003 smoking ban in restaurants, he lost 40 percent of his Keno, beer, wine, liquor and food sales. He closed in August of 2004 and a developer planned to build a \$50 million, 600,000-square-foot residential and commercial project. But the real estate slump caused a change in plans. Now a simple strip mall sits on the property and the classic sign was changed from “Anchor Inn Seafood House & Lounge” to “Georgia Crossing at the Anchor Inn.”



YOU CAN CALL ME AL'S

Piney Branch Road west of University Boulevard, Silver Spring

No one is quite sure what happened to Al or his auto center but the sign still stands – probably more than a half-century after it was erected. But its once-bright boomerang-shaped red arrow now guides passersby to a vacant lot between the Polleria 3 Amigos Rotisserie Chicken stand and a beer and wine store. The block letters and simple black car and motorcycle on a white background told passersby everything they needed to know to bring their auto repair work to Al.





GLENMONT ARCADE

12345 Georgia Avenue, Wheaton

This was once a futuristic building, an indoor mall with 11 shops. But the storefronts were angled toward the door so shoppers could look in and see what was inside. The arcade hallway led to Tuffy Leemans' Glenmont Lanes, a local duck pin bowling institution that closed in 2002. Leemans was a Hall of Fame football player for the New York Giants (1936-43). He died in 1979 and his daughter, Diane Kelly, took over. The arcade may be demolished in a redevelopment plan for 700 acres around the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Randolph Road.



WELLER'S DRY CLEANING

8237 Fenton Street, Silver Spring

The death of Charles Weller at the age of 101 in June went largely unnoticed outside his family. But Weller Dry Cleaning, which he ran for 60 years and is still in business today, is a Silver Spring institution so well respected that President George H.W. Bush and members of his White House staff used its service. Residents of Silver Spring knew no one could remove a spot like Charlie Weller. The geometric sign includes a round clock, a yellow triangle and a black rectangle where the words "one hour" have been blacked out. Following a streetscape project on Fenton Street for which the sign had to be temporarily taken down, the project developers were required to return it to its original spot.



TALBERT'S ICE & BEVERAGE

5234 River Road, Bethesda

If you run out of ice on Christmas Day, no worries. Talbert's is there to serve 365 days a year. You'll find the simple little brick building on River Road, noticing first its simple mid-century sign with a pilsner glass of beer on a blue field behind red block letters that has been signaling to customers since 1955.



MONTGOMERY INDUSTRIAL PARK

Industrial Parkway and Columbia Pike, Silver Spring

Businesses in industrial parks aren't necessarily looking for roadside advertising, but the sign at the entrance of the Montgomery Industrial Park dates to 1961, its block letters and a light brick field and red directional arrow telltale signs of the era.

Photography by Clare Lise Kelly
montgomeryplanning.org/blog-design/tag/montgomery-modern



LEISURE WORLD GLOBE

Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring

The iconic Leisure World globe is a remnant from the early days of the space age, having been erected at the retirement community's Georgia Avenue entrance in the mid-1960s when the first homes were built there.