The Aaron Gross Award was created in 2002 in honor of its namesake, a VHCA President and NPU Chair who gave many years of service to this community. It recognizes exceptional dedication and enduring excellence in the performance of duties to both the neighborhood of Virginia-Highland and to the Virginia-Highland Civic Association. It is not given annually, but only when the Board believes that a citizen’s contributions merit such special recognition. With us today (and joining me in the presentation of this award) are previous recipients Winnie Currie – who more than any other person developed and shaped this Association’s processes and approaches to planning and zoning and who remains a walking authority on this challenging topic—and John Wolfinger, who more than any other person campaigned for and gave life to a neighborhood safety movement based on newsletter outreach and a street captain system, a model that has proven both practical and effective.

This year we are delighted to honor a citizen who was elected to the board in 2006, served one year as Secretary, and 5 years as President. Such tenure in those jobs alone is itself meritorious, but we today recognize some very special and particular achievements. Six years ago she became the chair of Summerfest, inheriting a model that we all regarded as satisfactory and successful. Our honoree saw an opportunity to expand that festival’s scope and reach, to engage more citizens and have more fun, and to markedly increase revenues in the process. And she had an idea of what this community could do with those revenues – prominent among them, purchase two lots and create a brand new park, a task that was very much beyond the capacity of the city.

Like Ms. Currie and Mr. Wolfinger, she will truthfully report that she had a ton of help along the way, and she did. But it was her vision and her will that inspired both the remaking of Summerfest into the event that we enjoy today and the purchase and creation of the new park. The added revenues she generated have not only financed New Highland Park; they have supported the renovations in Orme Park, the pending project in John Howell Park, sustained community grants to all our schools and non-profits, and made possible a level of planning sophistication that included—among many other parts—the creation of the NC zoning along North Highland (in which she also had a major role) and the Master Plan we are undertaking this fall.

It’s a remarkable list of accomplishments, all done with her trademark combination of hard work, persistence, diligence, humor, back-patting, volunteer arm-twisting, and – most importantly – an ability to create and share a vision of how this community can expand and protect the elements that have made it special for so many years. We are all the beneficiaries of what she has done.

For all these contributions – and many more – the VHCA is honored to present the Aaron Gross Award to Pamela Papner.
NEW HIGHLAND PARK
NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL ZONING

Photos courtesy of John Becker
THANKS!