April 15, 2003

BZA Case 16974

Testimony of Georgina Owen before the Board Of Zoning Adjustment

Good morning Mr. Chairman and and Members of the Board

My husband and I currently live at 1632 32nd Street, NW, directly across the street from Tudor Place. We have both lived in Georgetown for over 30 years and my husband's offices are also located in Georgetown.

Tudor Place is virtually unique in the world of house museums as it portrays a generational spectrum of an American family, the Peter family, which was closely connected to the founders of the Republic. The collections at Tudor Place include gardens, buildings, paintings, furniture, books, letters and textiles all belonging to the Peter family. Together these items represent an exceedingly valuable cross-section of family life and the social development of our country. Few properties of this stature can boast such a complete collection original to the family that built the house and inhabited it for 180 years.

A superb example of Federal architecture, Tudor Place is without question the most significant 19th century house in Washington. In its architectural simplicity, sophistication, and originality, so carefully maintained by the Peter family - and now the foundation -, Tudor Place merits the national stature attained by houses such as Mount Vernon and Gunston Hall. It is the only large Federal house in Georgetown designed by an architect, Dr. William Thornton, who also designed the Octagon at 18th and New York Avenue an the original U.S. Capitol.

In his time, Mr. Peter maintained Tudor Place to the high standards appropriate for such a structure, but the great expense of preservation is well beyond that for which his endowment provides. As time passes, more parts of the house need restoration, more pieces in the collection require conservation, more items in the archives need better storage facilities. These kind of services require craftsmen of the highest expertise, and the costs to provide these services continue to rise. The small staff at Tudor Place, led by Leslie Buhler, does a remarkable job of operating and maintaining the gardens, house and collection with limited funds, and has earned the respect and trust of the Georgetown community.

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I think the question before you today is one of balance. Are the essential needs of this most valuable and unique institution, and the permission it seeks to host occasional events, balanced with the needs of the surrounding neighborhood residents and their rights to enjoy their property? I believe that the current proposal submitted by Tudor Place does achieve such a balance. When compared to the bucolic silence which the five acres of Tudor Place provide, morning, day, evening, and night, spring, summer, fall and winter, to the dense surrounding neighborhood, the occasional sound of parties and non-amplified music seems certainly within reason. The inconvenience of event-night parking and congestion seems well in balance when compared to the year round availability, to residents, of 32 public parking spaces along the east side of the property.

There are those that will compare this proposal to other facilities in Georgetown, but Tudor Place is unique in what it contributes to the community and the city at large. The community should be be ready to give in return, and accommodate their reasonable request in this application.

The Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2-E voted unanimously to support the current Tudor Place application. I urge you to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration.