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Magazine

September 2016

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East Village Magazine

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Commentary Straight talk on the “straight ticket”

By *Paul Rozycki*

There are at least two ways to win an election.

Obviously, the best is to have a great candidate, put on the strongest campaign, sell your ideas to the voters and hope they support your views. At least that’s the classical democratic view of winning an election.

The other way is to massage the rules of the election so your party has a built-in edge. For the last decade or more the Republicans have been masterful at writing and rewriting the election rules to give them a great advantage.

Gerrymandering election districts

Perhaps most significant is the gerrymandering of election districts across the nation. In states where the Democrats have won the most votes for a particular office such as the state senate, state house or U.S. House, the Republicans have often claimed the most seats because of the way the election districts were drawn. Democrats aren’t exactly innocent in this gerrymandering game either. Given the opportunity, they have done the same to the Republicans.

Voter ID laws

Another technique is the voter ID requirement that has been passed in a number of states (though the courts have overturned several of those voter ID laws.) On the surface it seems reasonable to require a voter to have a legal identification card of some kind in order to cast a ballot – after all we need an ID to cash a check. Those who support those laws argue that they only want to protect the integrity of the ballot and prevent voter fraud. But most studies show that real voter fraud is very rare today and more the colorful lore of past corrupt political machines. The real reason behind these laws is that if voting becomes just a bit more difficult (not everyone has an ID and there can be some cost and effort to obtain one) some people will decide not to bother voting – and most of those would be Democrats.

So the nuts and bolts details of an election do matter.

Banning “straight-ticket” voting

In Michigan, the most recent tweaking of the rules has been the attempt to end what is commonly called “straight-ticket voting” – where one can vote for all the members of the Democratic or Republican Party by checking a single box.

On one level, it seems reasonable. After all, shouldn’t the voters take the time to learn about each and every candidate before they cast their ballots? Shouldn’t they know about the candidates for the Wayne State Board of Trustees as well as those running for president? Isn’t that what democracy is all about?

Yes, in the abstract that’s probably true. But one look at the motivation behind eliminating the straight ticket vote tells a different story. In Michigan most of those who use the straight-ticket vote are Democrats – often minorities in urban areas. Those who favored the legislative change were Republicans.

Straight-ticket effects

Eliminating the straight-ticket option would have several effects. First, it could hurt those candidates below the presidential level. The “down-ticket” offices – members of Congress, the state legislature, county officials and others would not benefit from the “coattail effect” from the top of the ticket. In particular, the education boards would be ignored. Usually there is little campaigning or information on the candidates running for the University of Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State boards, as well as the State Board of Education. Usually the party that does well at the top of the ticket carries the education boards. (In fact, the votes for the education boards are one of the best determinants of which party is doing well in a given election.)

Second, if the voters were required to pick their way through a long list of candidates, almost certainly the lines at the polls would be longer and voters might be discouraged from voting at all. Given the history in Michigan, the odds are that most of those discouraged voters would be Democrats – often those in urban areas. Worries about long lines and voting delays have caused many county clerks and election officials to support keeping the straight-ticket option.

Third, Michigan voters had the opportunity to vote on ending the straight-ticket ballot in 1964 and 2002 and they said no on both occasions. This current version included an appropriation of \$5 million to prevent the voters from repealing it by way of a referendum. Recently, the legis-

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Cover: For-Mar Treehouse



Photo of the Month: Crim speed

City infrastructure plan takes “holistic” approach, may cost \$2 billion

By Nic Custer

Rebuild Flint the Right Way, an ambitious plan released in August to repair, replace and upgrade the city’s infrastructure, outlines Mayor Karen Weaver’s vision for fixing the city in the wake of the water crisis. Implementing the plan might cost as much as \$2 billion, the document states.

The plan asserts Flint residents should not have to pay for the proposed infrastructure improvements because of citizens’ lack of choice in the initial drinking water switch to the Flint River.

Instead it lays out financing by a combination of state and federal grants – some of which already have been allocated, and some of which are pending – including support from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Block-to-Block Strategy preferred

Among its many proposals, Rebuild Flint calls into question replacing pipes house by house.

Instead, the plan suggests taking a block-by-block approach and recommends ways to potentially replace or add other infrastructure alongside pipe replacement including streetlights, bike lanes, demolitions, storm water management and utility cables.

It states, “Flint cannot restore clean drinking water citywide through a piece-

meal approach. The causes and instances of unsafe drinking water in Flint continue to be varied, dynamic and even unpredictable.”

The document, released by the Mayor’s office at her State of the City address this summer, suggests the work should also include:

- replacing exterior and interior infrastructure in occupied buildings;
- tearing down vacant structures;
- burying telecommunication and electrical cables;
- building new roads; and
- building green infrastructure to manage storm water in roadside rights of way.

It suggests Flint needs a new water infrastructure system to end its water crisis because lead and corrosion have been deposited throughout the entire water delivery system, not just in homes with lead service lines.

More than two-thirds of the houses with lead levels testing above the federal action limit of 15 parts per billion do not have lead or galvanized service lines, according to the plan. It also says that if the additional street infrastructure improvements are implemented while the city replaces service lines, that it will “present little to no increase in installation costs and offer long-term cost savings.”

How much it might cost

Estimates for replacing Flint’s infrastructure including water mains and service lines range from \$715.6 million to \$1.807

billion. The report states if all of the water line replacement involves excavation, then rebuilding roads, sidewalks and greenways, it may cost as much as \$2.446 billion.

Replacement of interior plumbing in buildings, which owners would otherwise be responsible for, could cost as much as \$310 million citywide. An additional estimate to demolish approximately 2,000 vacant buildings will cost another \$112 million.

The plan states that a block-by-block replacement approach would make water service line replacement cheaper at each home, replace water mains and sewer lines, as well as guarantee clean water delivery to homes.

The report suggests that replacing infrastructure house-by-house may improve water quality but does not guarantee contamination issues will be resolved. It would also still require long-term replacement of water and sewer mains and roads that would be damaged during replacement of water lines to each home. This approach also aligns with the city’s 2013 master plan goals and the new zoning codes being ratified, according to the plan.

State supports “holistic” approach

Rich Baird, who serves as the governor’s senior advisor and “transformation manager” in Flint, said that the state agrees that there needs to be a holistic approach to replacing water infrastructure

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Essay: For-Mar treehouse a childhood fantasy brought to life

By Robert R. Thomas

Camping out is an honorable Michigan tradition. I have a photo of me at 3 years old in the wilds of West Branch holding a hatchet while standing in front of my father's Marine Corps pup tent that always smelled of tropical mold, that made it all that more exotic as a camp. And it was very mobile.

Spending much of my boyhood in the Genesee County countryside creating "camps," which we kids also called "forts," was always great fun.

Location was critical. The farther from home and the deeper into the woods the better because what we were creating were "hideouts" with their glorious intimations of unsupervised privacy. No adults hung out in kid camps. It just wasn't done.

That universal fantasy

But of all the kid camps I have known, including the tent that smelled of the South Pacific in WWII, the universal fantasy of the kids in my circle was to someday have a real treehouse. We had plenty of woods, so a treehouse was not much of an imaginative stretch.

But none of us ever did, as far as I know. Nailing a couple of barn wood planks between a couple of maple tree branches was hardly the edifice conjured by the grandeur of a real treehouse. The closest I'd come was a friend who once lived in a treehouse in the Hollywood Hills, but I never did visit her there, which I have always regretted.

A stranger walked into Cork

Treehouses recently returned to my fantasy life when a stranger walked into the Cork where my wife and I were dining with a few friends. Ingrid rose from her chair and excused herself by saying, "I know that man. I know who he is." She headed for the stranger, introduced herself and was quickly deep in conversation with him.

"That's who I thought it was," she said upon her return. "He is The Treemaster. His name is Pete Nelson. Pete builds treehouses all over the country and has a TV show about doing just that."

Ingrid had recognized him because she is a fan of his show, "Treehouse Masters," on the Animal Planet Network. When she asked Pete what he was doing in Flint, he



Photograph by Ingrid Halling

Robert Thomas at his fantasy digs

said, "Building a treehouse in For-Mar."

The For-Mar Nature Preserve and Arboretum is a 383-acre preserve operated by the Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission. Its focus is environmental education. I could not imagine a better location in the county for my dream treehouse.

For-Mar is sacred ground

For-Mar will always be sacred ground for me. A few miles upstream from the For-Mar treehouse is where I did most of my boyhood camping and hunting. My father built a house on a hill bordered by Kearsley Creek. The creek was our trail into and out of the woods where we had our camps. The terrain then was very much like For-Mar's acreage.

For-Mar was originally a dairy farm owned by Forbes and Martha Merkle. In 1970 FORbes & MARtha donated the acreage to be preserved and available for environmental education as an arboretum and wildlife sanctuary, which is exactly what it is today. It is also the very environment in which I spent the most pleasurable years of my youth camping with Mother Earth.

On Pete's invitation, we visited the construction site several times. Accessibility could not be better. Located just a few paces down the trail from the visitor center parking lot, the site is on a wooded bluff above Kearsley Creek.

Our first visit was a Sunday and no one was at the site, but the work had begun. After gawking at the beginnings of a real treehouse, we ambled over to the visitor center to get the story.

Nicole Ferguson, the head naturalist at For-Mar, answered our many questions about how this project came to be.

In 2014, a program at For-Mar challenged

the kids in the program to conjure up and draw their dream treehouse. The kids then created a presentation to pitch the idea to Genesee County Parks Director Amy McMillan.

So impressed was the director that the Genesee County Parks Commission inaugurated a treehouse fund and applied to Treehouse Masters to have them build it. Six months ago Nelson Treehouse and Supply accepted the application to design, build and install the treehouse.

During one of our trailside supervisory visits to the site, we chuckled over the signs along the site. "Don't bother the carpenters!" "Don't feed the carpenters!"

Despite such warnings, the carpenters and crew were a friendly group, thoroughly enjoying their fine communal creation in a Michigan woods. I thought at some point they would all break into "Whistle while you work."

Treetops are for wheelchairs, too

During another visit, when the ramps were weaving their ways through the trees and the house was rising, we encountered Kevin, one of Pete's crew, whom Ingrid asked about the educational focus of the treehouse.

"This treehouse is definitely focused on accessible environmental education." He added, "How cool is it to be able to ride your bike up into the trees with the birds?"

"Or wheelchair," I added. The treehouse is universally accessible, featuring an ADA-compliant ramp.

I turned around to recalibrate what was rising before me. The genius of the ramping through and around existing trees, for example. The substance, the wood of the ramps and beams and house structure, made me grin and shake my

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... Straight

(Continued from Page 3.)

lature has often used the addition of a small appropriation to prevent the voters from undoing laws they have passed.

Fourth, party labels can be a pretty decent “brand” to decide who you like or don’t like. Today, if you are a conservative and favor a smaller government you will most likely prefer the Republican brand. If you are a liberal and prefer a more activist government you would likely prefer the Democratic brand. It’s not perfect, but in an age of ideologically divided parties, the party labels can tell the voters a lot.

Finally, the straight ticket is only an option. Voters are always free to go through the whole ballot and cast their votes for individual candidates as they choose.

Now it’s true that we are only one of 10 states to still allow for the straight-ticket vote. But Michigan has had it since 1892, and it’s worked pretty well.

It’s also true in some abstract, pure democracy voters ought to be fully informed of every candidate on the ballot – from president to dog catcher. But the world rarely works that way, and this proposal was clearly aimed more at aiding Republicans than encouraging a fully informed electorate.

As things now stand a federal judge has blocked the law, citing its discriminatory impact on minority voters. A federal appeals panel agreed.

More last-minute appeals are possible before the November election, but for now, it looks like we still will have the option of voting a “straight-ticket” this fall.

Paul Rozycki is a retired professor of political science from Mott Community College. He has lived in Flint since 1969 and has been involved with and observed Flint politics for many years. He is author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College. He can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

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... Treehouse

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head in awe.

Pete and his crew are truly tree masters. To watch them do their magic over three weeks was watching art take place at the hands of artists whose media is dreams and wood and cooperation.

When I asked Kevin when I could move in, he said, “As soon as the job is finished. Anytime after that, the place is yours.”

With Kevin’s assurances, I have come to calling the treehouse “My House.”

But no matter what the house is called, it will always be my dream treehouse. It is open to the public every day, as is For-Mar. That I can visit it daily is like stepping into a time machine to my childhood where I climb up into the trees to take in the observations of a crow.

I invite all to come on up to the house for a visit.

The For-Mar treehouse will appear on the “Treehouse Masters” TV show in January.

Robert R. Thomas can be reached at captzero@sbcglobal.net.



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... City

(Continued from Page 4.)

instead of taking a piecemeal approach.

Baird said the state has been in support of Weaver's plan to remove lead service lines and any galvanized lines that are also trapping corrosion. But he has several questions about how the cost estimates were determined that he had yet to ask city officials. He said the estimates to replace interior plumbing and demolish vacant buildings across the city seem higher than he would expect. In Detroit, for example, he said demolitions average around \$7,000 per home.

The city of Flint's 2015 report, Beyond Blight: Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework, estimated the average cost of residential demolition at \$10,000 and the average cost of commercial demolition at \$50,000. At these average costs, the price for 8,000 demolitions (7,500 residential and 500 commercial) would cost closer to \$100 million, but this figure is an average and does not take into account potential additional costs such as removing old water infrastructure to vacant lots.

Outside funds required to move ahead

While the city's Fast Start program has replaced more than 33 service lines, the city has not received enough infrastructure replacement funds to meet the projected costs of replacing the entire system. According to the plan, the state of Michigan has committed \$2 million in Fast Start funds to replace pipes for at least 250 homes.

Another \$2 million has been committed by the MDEQ toward improving storm and waste water systems. The U.S. Department of Transportation awarded \$20 million to rebuild roads and replace adjacent water mains on Atherton Road between Dort Highway and Grand Traverse Street and on Dupont Street between Stewart Avenue and Flushing Road. Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) has awarded \$13.9 million to the Land Bank for at least 1,000 residential demolitions in a final round of Hardest Hit demolition funds.

Pending funding requests are also listed in the report including an additional \$25 million from state of Michigan for service line replacement. A \$146 million request in Drinking Water State Revolving Funds is pending from the EPA to upgrade the Flint water treatment plant and replace water mains and service lines. HUD has a pending appropriation for \$151 million in Community Development Block grants to rebuild water and sewer mains, replace water and sewer service lines, "replace compromised in-home infrastructure, and rebuild above ground infrastructure." An additional \$1 million is pending from

MSHDA for owner-occupied housing renovation.

Roadway upgrades, underground cables planned

The plan calls for upgrading electrical and fiber-optic telecommunications cables by burying them underground alongside new pipes. It states Consumers Energy spends up to \$8.6 million per year repairing and maintaining aerial power lines. It also calls for repair of the city's 592 miles of roadways, replacement of curbs to improve storm water management, the development of bike lanes, low-maintenance plants in greenways and a LED streetlight replacement program that could save the city \$1.5 million annually in power costs.

Baird said his purpose in working in Flint is to coordinate state, local and federal responses to help stabilize the water system. But it is also to coordinate medical responses and to improve longer term quality of life issues including safety, jobs and education. He said his immediate concern is getting the water stabilized and then once that occurs he can work on excavation and the necessary transformation of the water system.

"My hope is we will be successful working with state and federal government to help Flint get what it needs to have confidence in its water system," Baird said.

Detailed maps included in the plan show the percentage of occupied properties with lead or galvanized service lines per block and the percentage of properties that tested above the federal lead action level. This data is based on MDEQ water samples from 10,985 occupied properties in Flint – one out of every three buildings.

Replacement over recoating

While the plan identifies recoating the pipes and not replacing them as a viable alternative, it advocates for service line replacement that uses the master plan principles to shrink parts of the water delivery system and would potentially create a reconnection fund for 500 vacant properties that can be reoccupied in the future.

It also identifies components that contribute to lead contamination and affect water quality which includes water mains, and both the city and homeowner portions of the service lines. Inside the home, water heaters, internal plumbing and faucets or fixtures such as shower heads can all lead to poor water quality, once they have been compromised by corrosive water.

The Rebuild Flint plan and blight elimination framework are available for download on imagineflint.com.


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"The new Jim Crow is the old Jim Crow," FPL speaker asserts

By Robert R. Thomas

With an engaged group of 25 in the basement of Flint Public Library recently, Hubert Roberts led a conversation about "The New Jim Crow," both Michelle Alexander's eponymous book and the reality.

The conversation was part of the Tendaji Talks series, sponsored by Neighborhoods Without Borders, whose focus is systemic racism.

Roberts, a Flint educator, mentor and minister, opened the conversation with the proposition that the American justice system is not broken, as many critics suggest; instead, he said, it works exactly as designed by our founding fathers.

He backed his claim by reading from the Declaration of Independence. When he finished reading, the group confirmed through vocal feedback Roberts' assertion that the focus of the founding fathers was on property and white men who owned it. The few controlled the many, he said.

"America is a business," said Roberts, "and the business is white and male." White landowners took precedence over people without property. Women could not vote. Slaves were property, not people. So much for "all are created equal" and equally protected by government.

"We live in a culture of lying," said Roberts. "History is critical to understanding American culture."

He then laid out some American history.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, Roberts explained, slaves may have been freed, but there was no equality, no compensation of any sort, nor any jobs. After Reconstruction, from 1877 until the mid-1960s, Jim Crow laws and customs prevailed to legitimize anti-black racism.

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court helped undermine the Constitutional protections of blacks with its infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that legitimized the Jim Crow laws and the Jim Crow way of American life. Its foundation rests on the premise that whites are superior and discrimination against blacks is acceptable.

Roberts continued his history lesson by noting the derivation of the term Jim Crow.

"Jump Jim Crow" is a song and dance from the early 19th century performed in blackface by a white comedian who performed all over the country as "Daddy Jim Crow."

The song may have been inspired by the song and dance of a physically disabled African slave named Jim Cuff or Jim Crow.

However it all came to be, the fact is that by 1838 the term "Jim Crow" and the

mockery of blackfaced minstrel shows presented African Americans in the less-than-equal light lie of "separate but equal." Segregation reigned.

Another needed historical enlightenment, according to Roberts, is that the New Jim Crow is the Old Jim Crow.

"They just changed the names in the New Jim Crow," he said. "No matter the Crow, the reality remains segregation de jure."

Roberts then ran a litany of systemic New Jim Crow operations that he suggested parallel the Old Jim Crow caste system:

- law and order
- get tough
- war on drugs
- disposable people
- dividing the poor and the working class via fear and resentment
- mass incarcerations



He pursued the topic by playing a video of part of a conversation between Bill Moyers and Michelle Alexander about her book *The New Jim Crow – Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

"To fully understand what's happened in this country," said Alexander, "look back at least 40 years to the law and order movement that was born in the midst of the civil rights movement.

"Civil rights activists were beginning to violate segregation laws, laws they felt were unjust Segregationists said this was leading to the breakdown of respect

for law. But then this law and order movement began to take on a life of its own The Get Tough movement and the War on Drugs were a backlash against gains of black Americans in the Civil Rights movement."

Alexander said that a major result of such policies has been mass incarceration of a scale unknown in human history. She added that the majority of those incarcerated in America are impoverished people of color who, once they are swept into this justice system, lose whatever gains persons of color had made during the Civil Rights Movement. She noted that there are more people incarcerated today than the four million slaves emancipated after the Civil War.

"Today there are over seven million people in this country under some form of the justice system," added Roberts.

"Why are we in this caste system today?" he asked at the conclusion of the video.

"Mitch McConnell done said, 'We gonna do all we can to make sure Barack Obama will be a one-term president.'

"In the interests of this country, even if you are from many different political parties, you should not want your president to fail. That's insane," Roberts asserted.

What is fueling the New Jim Crow caste system is what fueled the Old Jim Crow system, he contended.

"Back to what I said earlier, America is a business," he said. "This country was founded, and was taken from people that were already here to develop business. It's always a commodity. How can I exploit it? The concept of capitalism, guys, is I can exploit those that have no power."

He emphasized that the few who have power control those other people in that environment, as evidenced currently by the mounting police shootings of unarmed black men and mass incarcerations of people of color.

Roberts concluded with a briefing on prison labor, the contemporary plantation producing product for private companies.

"The prison systems today are on the Fortune 500. Michael Jordan has stock in prisons. And all you guys who have 401Ks, many of your pension funds are in stock in prisons Right now you have prisons across America that are making products for IBM, Motorola, Compac, Honeywell, Microsoft, Boeing, Nieman Marcus, Victoria's Secret, Whole Foods, Sears, Walmart and more.

"So what's happening is you have people in prison that are working making less than 25 cents a day that are producing products that could be jobs for people that

(Continued on Page 10)

Water crisis writer Anna Clark puts EVM in national spotlight, probes many Flint stories

By Jan Worth-Nelson

In a surprise outcome related to the Flint water crisis, *East Village Magazine* (EVM) last month was featured in a standard-bearing national journal, *The Columbia Journalism Review*.

In an article titled “In Flint, a new era for one of the oldest community outlets in the U.S.,” Detroit freelance writer Anna Clark described the magazine as “an uncommon source of community news — not an alt-weekly, not a tabloid, not a metro-region luxury magazine, not a neighborhood newsletter, but a beautifully printed publication that is part news-magazine, part literary journal.”

She delved into the history of EVM, a non-profit and almost all-volunteer operation that is celebrating its 40th year (See ad in this issue detailing the EVM observance open to the public at the Flint Farmers’ Market Sept. 24) including some of the story of the magazine’s founder Gary Custer, relating that he “founded the nonprofit magazine in 1976 and delivered it door-to-door, free to residents, whether they requested it or not. Custer carried the magazine (both literally and figuratively) for nearly four decades — editing, writing, soliciting ads, training writers, choosing photographs, laying it out, launching the website— until his death in January 2015 about a month after he accepted the magazine’s second-ever grant: \$79,000 over three years from the C.S. Mott Foundation.”

Flint book in the making

Clark, 36, is currently at work on a book about the Flint water crisis for Metropolitan Books, a division of Henry Holt. She is a Knight-Wallace journalism fellow at the University of Michigan this year, and her work has appeared in *ELLE Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Next City* and of course *The Columbia Journalism Review*, for which she has been the correspondent for Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Her attention to *East Village Magazine*, while an unanticipated outgrowth of the water crisis, was not accidental. She has stayed in my house on Maxine Street several times recently while researching her book, keeping my bird feeders full when I’m gone and even sitting in on a long Sunday afternoon meeting of the EVM staff.

She kayaked on the Flint River and attended the “watch party” for Claressa Shields’ gold medal Olympic bout at Berston Field House.

So she has been seeing firsthand who we are as Flint residents and how EVM works.

Clark thus knew to describe the EVM

staff as it has evolved since Gary Custer’s death as a crew of 16 with a “core team” that is “intergenerational and diverse,” along with a distribution staff of nearly 50.

Getting to know EVM crew

The core crew, she rightly detailed, includes, “a former priest who spent decades working on the San Francisco cable cars (Robert Thomas), a Slavist from California who studied Polish literature and became a history professor (Teddy Robertson), a 91-year-old who used to be an arts reviewer for the *Flint Journal*, (Grayce Scholt), a Vietnam veteran who became a ceramacist, painter, and the photographer who shot nearly every single *East Village* cover image.”

Photograph by Michelle & Chris Gerard



Anna Clark

That last staff member is Ed Custer, Gary’s brother, the EVM board president and, in fact, the photographer for nearly every cover in the magazine’s long history.

The article features a pastiche of the last year’s cover photos by Ed Custer, along with shots of Gary Custer and his workspace at the Second Street office he occupied almost around the clock before he died.

Clark shaped her 2,200-word piece around not just *East Village Magazine*’s

history but also its relationship to the water crisis and to the challenges of local journalism as many media outlets falter.

As she put it, EVM faces a “formidable task” of “reshaping its identity beyond the influential founder, and doing so at a time when an unfathomable water crisis brings new urgency in Flint.”

EVM Managing Editor Nic Custer, now 28, who has been involved with the magazine since he was a teenager, offered some of his views.

Clark wrote, “At a time when ‘there was so much mystery locally’ about the water, the *East Village* crew did its best to report the facts, says Nic Custer. But, he adds, ‘I realize how some of the stuff I put down, that was given to me by people at the city or state level, were just plain lies. It just wasn’t reality. In that sense I have a little bit of regret that (as a volunteer) I don’t have a position like the ACLU journalist to do days, weeks, months on this stuff.’”

Covering Flint a “daunting task”

Clark says she understands that challenge, concluding, “It’s a daunting task to write a book about Flint, not least with the water crisis still playing out in real time. *East Village Magazine* has a lot to teach me about how to approach this story — its grounding in community; its spirit of service; its attention to both the political and the personal; its capacity for self-reflection; and, most importantly, its commitment to the beauty, power, and worth of everyday life in the City of Flint.”

In a follow-up email conversation about why she finds herself increasingly embedded in Flint, she wrote, “As a journalist, I’ve always been drawn to exploring the spaces in between, looking for untold stories in underreported cities. That’s why I focus on the rich stories of cities in the Upper Midwest...”

A die-hard reporter, Clark falls naturally into posing complicated questions.

Underfunded cities under stress

“I’m especially interested in how the chronic underfunding of American cities imperils residents,” she says. “How can distressed cities provide the services and liberties that citizens deserve, while at the same time building a prosperous future? What can vulnerable communities do to protect themselves from those in a position to exploit them?”

“At a time when local journalism is more limited than ever in its role as accountability watchdogs,” she asserts, “it feels especially important to dig into these questions in cities that are outside the national media’s radar.”

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... Spotlight

(Continued from Page 9.)

Clark says she wrote articles about Flint before the water crisis, and has enjoyed visiting the city over the years. But now, reporting for the book has given her the opportunity to spend more time here and meet more of the people of Flint.

"It is their voices and stories that are driving this book forward," she says, "and my role right now is to be a listener and simply pay attention."

The whole *Columbia Journalism Review* article can be found at http://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/flint_michigan_water_east_village_magazine.php.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

... Jim Crow

(Continued from Page 8.)

are out in the community. The answer to this prison industrial complex is to close the prisons."

Roberts wrapped up his presentation by stating: "Basically, Jim Crow law means white people have maintained their power by any means. And history – one thing about history, it does show us how, unless we are committed to work together to change some things, things will be repeated."

The Tendaji Talks continue this month on the first Tuesday and third Thursday 6 p.m. at the Flint Public Library.

Robert R. Thomas can be reached at captzero@sbcglobal.net.

Step Forward Loan Rescue program reinvigorates help for Flint homeowners

By Jan Worth-Nelson

A six-year-old program of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority called "Step Forward" to help prevent foreclosures in Michigan is stepping up approaches to Flint residents affected by the water crisis or other financial troubles.

Troy Thelen of MSHDA reminded members of the Flint Water Recovery Group at a recent meeting that the Step Forward Loan Rescue program using federal Hardest Hit Fund dollars offers no-interest loan assistance to sustain home ownership.

The target population, Thelen said, are homeowners currently delinquent on property taxes, neighborhood association/condo fees, or, in the case of Flint residents, those who may have a lien on their property because of delinquent water and sewer fees.

Applicants also may qualify if they are unemployed or receiving unemployment benefits, are underemployed and can document a 20% reduction in gross income, are underwater and owe more than 115% of the property value.

He said the applicant must be the homeowner of record and live in the house.

Thelen said residents in Flint already have received \$5.3 million through the loan rescue program – \$3.4 million directed toward mortgage issues and \$1.9 million toward property tax delinquencies. He and his staff reported that 1,564 Flint residents have received help so far.

Thelen and his staff present at the meeting said the agency has not noticed a spike in applications from Flint since the water crisis, but attributed that to the fact that the program had been winding down as funds had been depleted.

But a February influx in new funds from the federal government has given the Step Forward program new life and reason to advertise.

Thelen is manager of transactions in the assets management division of MSHDA, a position in which he oversees the troubled properties section of the agency's financed portfolio.

More information on the Step Forward program is available at StepForwardMichigan.org or at 866-946-7432.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

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Invitation from the Editor

Dear neighbors, readers, advertisers, friends and supporters: *East Village Magazine* has always been about neighbors and neighborhoods, so this party is for you, to say thanks for sticking with us for 40 years. Or if you're new to Flint or to EVM, this would be a great way to get to know us and share our Flinty spirit! Please come and celebrate community journalism for Flint and help us raise funds for many more years of stunning photography and good writing by and about you.



... Chemist

(Continued from Page 12.)

homes in the city whose water has been intensely studied – in the month following “Flush for Flint” there was a positive jump – from 71 to 93 percent “at or below the action level” – that is good news and a dramatic change. They weren’t sure how to explain it, and as scientists, they knew that correlation isn’t necessarily causation. But, working backwards from “back of the envelope calculations,” as Dumo put it, they began to cautiously speculate that enough people had complied to make a difference.

“My opinion is that Flush for Flint did have an impact,” Dumo said. “We surveyed our residents and 70 percent participated.” The researchers had determined that a 6 percent increase in usage would be enough to effect change – and “we got it,” he said.

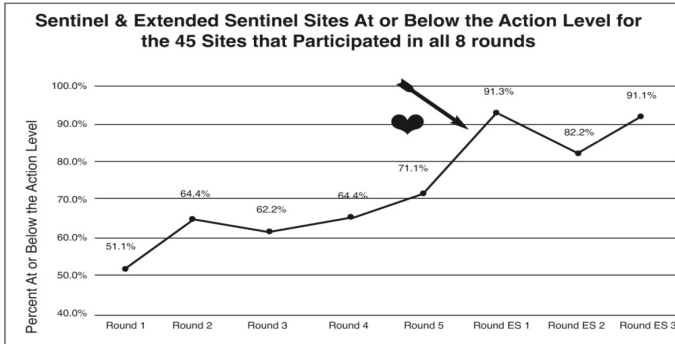
To understand the evidence for what we did, we had to read a chart. I love that chart. After all the emotion and politics, the chart tells a story of one thing, of many, the community did together for our recovery.

Sitting there under the dome that day, trying to figure out the “x” and “y” axes, I kept thinking about Lee Ann Walters. In a November 2015 interview with East Village

Magazine, Walters, the now-celebrated and powerful water activist who graduated from Kearsley High School, said she had learned a lot of chemistry during the water crisis.

At the early water meetings, she said, officials from the MDEQ and emergency manager Jerry Ambrose “called me a liar and they called me stupid.

“I am neither of those things,” Walters told our reporter Ashley O’Brien, “so I decided to go with the science. You can’t argue with science.”



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The chart Worth-Nelson loves (arrow & heart by EVM)

If there is ever a final exam, or even a midterm in this chemistry class, we don’t know when it will be, and we don’t know when the semester will be over. In fact, it’s our teachers who are on the line.

The final exam of the chemistry class we’re all in will be the kind I used to hate – the kind you can’t write your way out of, the kind where you have to show what you know. In this case, the test is to apply all the theories and hypotheses and methods.

The final exam for these teachers – Dumo and Krisztian and Mayor Weaver and Gov. Snyder and all the others, will be clean drinking water.

And in the meantime, this town so often seen as a swamp of trouble, sometimes characterized with the condescension of privileged outsiders – oh, those poor, poor souls of Flint – that town of beleaguered dim bulbs has turned into a think tank.

We are not stupid. Over the past two years, the people of Flint have learned to pay attention in class. It’s the most important class: the class of our own experience.

We’ve found out sometimes science actually helps you understand how to live.

We’ve found out sometimes you go to class because it’s a way to save your own life – and it’s a way

stop the fakers who are telling you lies.

Jan Worth-Nelson is the editor of East Village Magazine. She can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

2016-17 MUSIC EVENTS

OCTOBER

Flute Concert - 10/9, 4pm
Townes Osborn Miller, flute
Carl Angelo, piano

MARCH

Organ Concert - 3/26, 4pm
Carl Angelo, organ

NOVEMBER

Chamber Music - 11/11, 7:30pm
Brad DeRoche, guitar

APRIL

Handbell Concert - 4/30, 4pm
Classical Bells of Detroit

DECEMBER

Feast of Carols - 12/11, 4pm
First Presbyterian Choirs
Chamber Orchestra

MAY

Festival of Choirs - 5/7 4pm
First Presbyterian Choirs
Chamber Orchestra

FEBRUARY

Hymn Festival - 2/12, 4pm
Michael Burkhardt, organist
First Presbyterian Choirs

All concerts are free
to the public

First Presbyterian Church 746 S. Saginaw St., Flint 810.234.8673 fpcf.org

Village Life

Strike a Flintoid these days, you'll get a chemist

By Jan Worth-Nelson

One Thursday in August, as Virginia Tech researcher Marc Edwards was presenting his most recent findings to the cameras and lights nearby, another less glamorous group of us – me a lone reporter in the third row – were sitting restlessly in a chemistry class at City Hall.

It was actually a meeting of the Flint Water Recovery Group (FWRG), an ongoing consortium of social service agencies and residents. Every week this group convenes to share information, coordinate water supplies and other commodities, and ask questions of relevant outsiders.

This day's "teachers" were Mark Durno a supervisory engineer and on-scene coordinator from the Environmental Protection Agency and George Krisztian, Flint action plan coordinator from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

We didn't exactly sign up for this class, but there we were – that day, in the dim light under the dome.

The two men were, it seemed to me,

exceptionally careful, straight-forward, and respectful, taking pains not to claim too much.

They were trying to explain to us how things were going. To do so, they presented a PowerPoint with charts. In a way, they were the ones being tested.

"There's no mistake, none of us with acronyms on our shirts are completely trusted," Durno said. He was talking about the importance of Edwards, whose data provided not just a scientifically necessary objective third source of scrutiny, but a psychological one as well.

That day's presentation was a continuation of a class we've all been in for more than two years. And I don't mean just this stalwart group of about 80, from the Red Cross and United Way and Christ Enrichment Center and a dozen other agencies, but almost everybody in the city.

"I just wish I'd paid better attention in chemistry class," Tony Lasher, executive director of the Red Cross and the moderator of the FWRG meetings, said with a rueful smile at a recent meeting.

We've all been learning chemistry. Hundreds – thousands – of us have been turned by the reality of our crisis into students and mini-researchers.

And some of us, it seems, have been conducting our own little independent studies.

All in the name of the water we drink.

Remember when none of us knew what TTHMs meant? Now we do, though maybe we can't spell it – (total trihalomethanes) and why it matters. We can toss around terms like "sequential sampling," "action levels of parts per billion," "micrograms per deciliter" and "chemical parameters."

And oh yeah, we can talk orthophosphates and chlorine like a bunch of high school geniuses on Quiz Bowl.

In my case, I looked at the periodic table of elements for the first time in about 50 years and spotted Pb – the chemical symbol for lead, also called plumbum. And I reminded myself the word "plumber" – praise be to those who've helped us – comes from the Middle English for a person working with lead.

Durno and Krisztian said Flint has gone from being the "worst" to the "best monitored water system in the country." Much of that data has come from Flint residents ourselves – as we've filled thousands of plastic bottles and turned them in for testing, as we've let numerous rounds of researchers into our homes, as we've talked to them over and over again.

We've learned how to understand and interpret their jargon. And we've become scientists on our own.

It appears, Durno and Krisztian said, many people are conducting their own mini-studies when turning in water-testing kits. When see-

ing two kits from the same day and time – with differences in the results – lab workers concluded people were testing both their filtered and unfiltered water.

Flint residents' curiosity and initiative, in other words, is extending beyond the formal

Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson



Mark Durno

protocols – maybe because there's a lot at stake for us. Maybe we're fascinated by the hope of seeing change in the making.

Almost everybody I know has followed their home testing results with intense interest – tracking their "parts per billion" in both lead and copper (Mine: 2 ppb lead, 6 ppb copper – phew.)

Then there was the matter of the May "Flush for Flint" campaign, when we were instructed to run our taps five minutes a day.

Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson



George Krisztian

Originally, Steve Branch, Mayor Weaver's chief of staff, suggested to the Thursday group that the "Flush for Flint" campaign hadn't done much good. I remember feeling chastised, as if I hadn't done my part.

But within a few weeks, Durno and Krisztian noticed something in their examination of results from their "Sentinel" and "Extended Sentinel" sites – two groups of

(Continued on Page 11.)

"September" By Helen Hunt Jackson As Recited In Miss Werth's Fourth Grade

By Grayce Scholt (Age 9)

"The golden rod is yellow,
the corn is turning brown,
The trees in apple orchards
with fruit are bending down."

I'd memorized it perfectly
to say on Parents' Day, and
spoke real loud so all could hear
and got an A.

But I wondered about those golden rods?
They make you sneeze, some say.
But only in September?
I'd sneezed a lot in May.

And apple trees are bending down.
Was that what the lady saw?
Our apple tree wasn't bent at all,
is that what she thought was fall?

Although the rhymes still fill my ears
I learned to think that day:
Be wary of a writer's words,
even if it means an A.

Grayce Scholt is a retired English professor from Mott College who wrote art reviews for the *Flint Journal*. Her book of poetry, *Bang! Go All the Porch Swings*, is available online from Amazon. A personal narrative of the poet's life in Europe in the early 1950s, *Vienna, Only You*, is available at gscholt09@comcast.net. The author's new book of poems, *Night Song*, is available from Friesen Press (www.friesenpress.com) and Amazon.