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Magazine

February 2017

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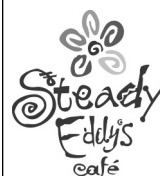
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Commentary

Goodbye Barnum & Bailey, welcome circus politics

By Paul Rozycki

It's probably just a coincidence that in the same week that the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus announced they were folding up their tent after 146 years, Donald Trump was sworn in as our next president.

But in light of last year's events, it's understandable that the distinction between the circus and real life has become entirely too blurred and the competition too intense for heirs of P.T. Barnum. In an age of "alternative facts," fake news and bombastic blowhards, the average high-wire walker, lion tamer or car full of clowns doesn't really have a chance.

Even with the demise of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, politics should provide us with at least three rings of entertainment, thrills and chills (maybe more chills than thrills), as well as a few side show acts. These may not be as enjoyable as the travelling road show, but they will probably have a longer lasting impact. Here are a few of the major acts to look for in the upcoming year.

In the first ring: The Nation

President Trump has clearly emerged as the ringmaster in this year's circus act and he's likely to generate a long list of things to watch for in the year to come. A few of the more important are:

The Wall: Will he really build the wall with Mexico? Is there any serious chance that Mexico will pay for it? Is there any practical way that Congress will? In the end, will it make any real difference or help deal with the immigration issue?

Obamacare: Like nearly all Republicans, Trump has promised to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. The problem is that while they are pretty well set to repeal the law, they are having a difficult time agreeing on a workable replacement. Keeping the parts of the law that most people like, such as the protection for preexisting conditions and keeping children on parent's health care until they are 26, will most likely require keeping parts that many don't like, such as the mandate to purchase insurance. This has been an easy campaign slogan, but may prove to be much more difficult to put into practice. It's going to be a high-wire balancing act to pull it off.

Infrastructure: Trump has promised to rebuild roads, bridges, airports (and maybe water systems?) around the country. This is one of his proposals that might find support from Democrats. But will the Republicans be willing and able to find the money to pay for all of it?

Protectionism and trade deals: Trump pulled in much of his working class support

by denouncing U.S. trade agreements such as NAFTA and the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He also threatened corporations with high tariffs for those goods not made in the U.S. A few corporations have already announced plans to move or keep some jobs and production in the U.S. But, how long will globally oriented businesses support such protectionist measures? How long will the Republican Party support these measures? Will it be a wise move for the U.S. and the world economy?

Beyond that (among many other things) it will be worth watching to see how the anti-Trump protests that followed the inauguration develop. Will they become an organized force to oppose him for the next four years, or simply a one-day event?

In the second ring: Michigan's State of the State

Governor Snyder kicked off the second ring with his State of the State speech in January. As is typical for the governor, it was a long list of accomplishments backed up by numbers and percentages. In contrast to last year's Flint apology speech, there was only a brief mention of Flint's water crisis in his 2017 presentation. Yet the speech did give us several signs of what to watch for this year.

Infrastructure: Will there be money for infrastructure repairs in Michigan? Obviously, Flint will need much for its new pipes and water system, as will the city of Fraser, where collapsing pipes have destroyed several homes. The worry is that there are a lot more Flints and Frasers out there and no huge pot of money. Michigan's roads also have a long way to go to be safe and sound. Snyder's chilly relations with the Trump White House may not help to bring in federal funds.

Pension reform: The legislature almost tackled reforms of both the teacher and municipal worker's pension systems during the lame duck session at the end of 2016. Protests and lack of time forced them to back off, but it will likely be on the agenda this year and will be one of the truly hot-button issues of the year.

Income tax: There have been proposals to repeal the state income tax over the next several decades, but no clear plans on how to replace the lost revenue, which is a major part of the state budget. It probably will be a campaign slogan, but has little realistic chance of passing.

Criminal justice reforms: The governor suggested several reforms to reduce
(Continued on Page 9.)

Cover: Montclair



Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Photo of the Month: A Flint entry in Zehnder's SnowFest in Frankenmuth won "People's Choice Award."

MTA expanding routes, accessibility and cleaner rides

By Nic Custer

The Flint Mass Transportation Authority is working to increase routes, make bus stops more accessible, integrate scheduling apps and electronic payment and replace 160 of its 280 vehicles over the next decade.

These are essential priorities offered in the MTA's recently released 2016-2017 Strategic Plan. It was informed by community feedback from rider surveys and advisory councils made up of riders and stakeholders.

MTA officials report the system provides 5.5 million rides a year using 145 buses and 138 Your Ride vehicles.

Noting that in Genesee County more than 80,000 people "are affected by some form of disability," MTA Board Chair Paul D. Newman wrote in a forward to the Strategic Plan document, "a full family of services that provide the highest level of independence is a priority."

The organization plans to be responsive to customer needs by focusing on innovation, accessibility and sustainability over the next decade, according to Harmony Lloyd, director of planning, innovation and external affairs.

Federal grant funds natural gas

In January, the system got a major boost when it received \$12.8 million in federal funds to replace 32 diesel buses with compressed natural gas buses.

Lloyd said, "The new buses will provide a more comfortable, reliable experience for our riders while also utilizing a cleaner, sustainable fuel source."

MTA will purchase more compressed natural gas buses as they replace old vehicles in the next few years. Lloyd said they are also investigating electric buses but the infrastructure is not developed enough yet in the region to be a practical solution.

Lloyd said the MTA aims to employ more technology-based solutions to improve quality of ridership. This could include phone apps or text notifications on whether a bus will be late or when Your Ride has arrived. She said there still are many questions to solve about what will benefit the largest number of users and what will be the best use of resources.

According to Lloyd, one priority is to establish electronic fare payments within the next five years. But this will require a substantial investment in retrofitting MTA vehicles.

Meeting needs of aging population

Lloyd said more residents are now aging in place at home and rely on transportation services to remain independent. MTA officials see an opportunity to offer specialized services that connect riders with medical transportation, grocery rides

and other necessary trips, she said.

In addition to serving 4 million rides annually on regular bus routes, MTA has introduced specialized services such as Rides to Wellness, which offers trips to various Hurley and downtown medical facilities for \$1.75 per ride. Ride to Groceries is a specialized service to address grocery deserts in the city. The route travels to Walmart and Kroger from the downtown station in order to provide all passengers with access to area grocery stores. Ride to Groceries costs 85 cents per ride. Countywide residents can schedule a Ride to Groceries trip with the nearest Your Ride Service Center for \$3.50 each way. Persons 65 years or older or with a disability pay \$2.25 each way.

A shuttle service for UM-Flint students is another specialized service in response to more college students living in Central Park and East Court Street area. She said the route has seen a huge jump in ridership since its launch.

Door-to-door service

MTA is currently piloting an expanded Ride to Wellness program, featuring a door-to-door, same-day service through a partnership with the Genesee County Department of Health and Human Services and through Valley Agency on Aging. The program is

(Continued on Page 5.)

... MTA

(Continued from Page 4.)

being implemented on a limited basis with several partner agencies. For this expanded pilot project, Lloyd said MTA will blend aspects of current non-emergency medical transportation with “a robust mobility management program.” The service will include same-day service to multiple locations such as the doctor, pharmacy and grocery store. It will also use online or phone app-based notification and scheduling options.

This service will include a transit navigator who passengers can call in order to help secure a ride or help find service agencies that can provide transportation. The Federal Transit Administration funded the pilot program and chose Flint because it is a leader in non-emergency medical transportation, according to Lloyd.

MTA worked with the Disability Network to conduct a bus stop accessibility study as part of its strategic planning process. The MTA was provided with best practices so all bus stops are Americans with Disability Act compliant. Lloyd said the MTA is making sure new shelters are designed and placed to be as accessible as possible. Lloyd said they began to systematically assess each of Flint’s hundreds of bus stops and prioritize making highest traffic areas more user friendly. She said this included examining shelter placement and concrete pad size to better connect to sidewalks.

Expanding regional commuting routes

The MTA also has been expanding regional routes taking passengers to work in other counties. These routes line up with work shifts trav-

elling to metro Detroit, Livingston County and Lansing. MTA has seen the biggest ridership growth in Livingston County. More than 10,000 passengers a month use the route to travel to manufacturing companies in Livingston, which has a low unemployment rate and needs employees from elsewhere. She said

many of the regional companies will even purchase bus passes for their workers to ensure they can get there.

“I get calls at least once a week from companies down there that are

wanting to hire workers from this area but need to have transportation,” Lloyd said. She said it is not just people without a car that use the route but also passengers who don’t want to add wear to their own vehicles. Most commuter routes will drop employees off at companies that are clustered near each other.

Since November 2015, MTA has provided 85,000 bus passes through a partnership with the United Way, which distributes them to non-profit community agencies for their clients.

CEO sees outreach to old, new users

Edgar Benning, general manager and CEO, explained the strategic plan’s vision through email. He wrote, “Throughout our community we face many challenges that require unique approaches to meet the transportation needs of our residents, today and into the future. As people age in place we must provide transportation options that limit isolation, provide access to medical services and groceries, and to meet basic life needs.

“At the same time,” he continued, “we have a new generation that may not choose to obtain a driver’s license or own a car. Therefore, we have the opportunity to provide transportation options that serve this population as well. As the des-

ignated public transportation provider for our community, it is incumbent upon us to provide a service that works for all in a safe, efficient, effective and sustainable manner. The strategic planning process sets the course we will follow to carry out these important public needs.”

Converting to alternate fuels

In 2012, MTA began to convert its fleet to alternative fuels for fuel cost savings and environmental benefits. Your Ride has already replaced 98% of its vehicles with propane-powered models. Lloyd said they will use propane to replace YOUR Ride vehicles in the immediate future.

MTA has experimented with several fuel types for replacing traditional buses including diesel-electric, hydrogen fuel cell and compressed natural gas, which is being used for many of the larger regional buses.

MTA makes its own hydrogen fuel at its Grand Blanc facility. It has three hydrogen-powered buses but the production technology is not advanced enough to be used across the entire fleet because many traditional buses are on the road for up to nine hours a day and the hydrogen technology doesn’t have enough capacity to manage that length of time, Lloyd explained.

EVM Managing Editor Nic Custer can be reached at NicEastvillage@gmail.com.



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson



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Review: Flint's "Women of a New Tribe" show inspires at the FIA

By Harold C. Ford

*I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.*

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

—from "Phenomenal Woman" and "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou, 1978

American literary giant Angelou, who died in 2014, last graced Flint in 2002 during a spoken word performance to a standing-room-only audience at Whiting Auditorium. Fifteen years later, the spirit from her two most identifiable poems has crossed Kearsley Street in the Flint Cultural Center, re-emerging in the Flint Institute of Arts' new exhibit, *Women of a New Tribe*.



Photo by Jerry Taliaferro
Dr. Sharon A. Simeon

It's likely that Michigan's second largest art museum has never hosted an exhibit quite like *Women of a New Tribe* in its nearly 90-year history. Tracee J. Glab, FIA Curator of Collections and exhibitions, agrees. "Not to my knowledge ... was there such a focus on the Flint community as being subjects of the artwork," she told *East Village Magazine (EVM)*.

The exhibit features 49 black-and-white photographic portraits, larger than life at 50 inches by 40 inches, of women from Flint's

African American community by North Carolina artist Jerry Taliaferro. The 49 were randomly picked from 110 nominations.

Larger-than-life images and inspirational biographies of 49 African American women might provide Flint-area residents with a joyful shot of community pride — as it did this writer — so badly needed after decades of abandonment by General Motors, high unemployment, a shrinking city with a steep crime rate, and a shameful water crisis.

In the catalog accompanying the exhibit, FIA Executive Director John Henry said the criteria to be nominated as a photographic subject for the project included "1) have a positive impact on individuals; 2) help those around them in the neighborhood; and/or 3) create positive change on important issues in the community." The wonderful bonus is that the exhibit itself, as a whole, satisfies those criteria.

Some critics contend the FIA has too infrequently used its 25,000 square feet of gallery space to connect with its hometown population in the way that *Women of a New Tribe* has the potential to do. Fifty women were chosen as subjects for the *Tribe* project in a random drawing from among 110 initially nominated by members of the Flint community. Eventually, the images of 49 women became part of the exhibit. FIA's Glab lauded community involvement in the nomination process as "a much more energetic and kinetic kind of experience." She recalled, "Here we were asking people to nominate the subjects and ... that was a unique part of the (*Tribe*) exhibition process."

The "process," nearly four years in the making, began in 2013-2014 when Glab and Henry were drawn to Taliaferro. "We heard about Jerry through his marketing," recalled Glab. According to Henry, "Taliaferro was inspired to title the project after hearing author Toni Morrison use the term 'New World Africans.'"

On the opening night of the Flint exhibit Jan.20, Taliaferro told a group of FIA docents that his interest in photography began when he was in the U.S. Army Special Forces in the early 1980s. While serving in Germany, he honed his photographic skills and was published for the first time. Returning to civilian life in 1985, he pursued a career in commercial photography. With exhibits in several American cities, *Women of a New Tribe* is one of his latest projects.

Taliaferro explains his preference for black and white photography in his video essay now showing at the FIA's *Tribe* exhibit: "I think

black and white cuts to the essence of the picture ... It allows you to see what's important without being distracted (by color)."

Taliaferro also explains his artistic goal is to capture the "photographic spray of the spiritual and physical beauty of African American women." His poetic introductions to earlier *Tribe* exhibits expands on this goal:

*If you seek the soul of a people
look to its women.*

*For it is at their bosoms
that the seeds of love, compassion
and courage are first planted and
nourished. Look into their faces
and see what was and what
will be.*



Photo by Jerry Taliaferro
Lula L. Pea

The subjects of the *Tribe* project were strongly affected, not just by seeing their own images, but by considering their wider implications. *Tribe* subject Kenyetta Dotson, founder of local nonprofit WOW Outreach and community liaison for Genesee Health Systems, told *EVM*, "Black women carry an extra layer of endurance dating back to memories of discrimination, racism, oppression ... The exhibit speaks strength, determination ..."

Nominator Kimberly Turner praised her nominee, Candice Mushatt, as a "strong female role model for women young and old." Mushatt told *EVM*, "We are often put in positions where we have to be strong."

In her article "The Truth Behind the 'Strong Black Woman' Stereotype," Tamara

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... Tribe

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Winfrey Harris addresses the caricature of the strong black woman: “We are the women with the sharp tongues and hands firmly on hips. We are the ride-or-die women. We are the women who have, like Sojourner Truth, ‘plowed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head us.’ We are the sassy chicks. We are the mothers who make a way out of no way. On TV, we are the no-nonsense police chiefs and judges. We are the first ladies with the impressive guns.”

“Marginalized people have to be strong to survive,” says Heidi R. Lewis, assistant professor of feminist and gender studies at Colorado College and associate editor at *The Feminist Wire*. “There are times when I assume that black woman resilience – the kind that allow you to face racism and sexism and heterosexism on a daily basis and still maintain your sanity and your health. I love that part of the strength that black women have had to have. That strength is real.”

Harris argues for a more nuanced role for black women: “Many African American women are increasingly ambivalent about the ‘strong’ label, and not solely because of how we look through society’s eyes. The label also distorts how we view ourselves and, more important, how we take care of – or fail to take care of – ourselves.”

She goes on: “Black women are more likely to suffer from chronic health problems that may be alleviated by self-care, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stress. One in four black women over the age of 55 has diabetes. We are more likely to die of heart disease than any other group in the United States. Black women have a rate of depression 50 percent higher than that of white women, but in 2003 the California Black Women’s Health Project found that only 7 percent of black women with symptoms of mental illness seek treatment.”

However, that was hardly the image seen by *Tribe* subject Dr. Brenda Rogers-Gray during the community opening of the *Tribe* exhibit Jan.21. “I was just ecstatic at the joy and elation of women from all walks of life ... I was drawn to tears, overwhelmed for the women I had the opportunity to meet,” she told *EVM*. “I’ve received many, many awards on a local, state, national and international level and this had to be one of the most beautiful ones,” she said.

Dotson agrees with Rogers-Gray’s perception. “While walking through the exhibit, I could feel the positive energy in the room (which) inspired me to new heights,” she said.

Author Harris concludes her piece: “I am not sure that the ‘strong black woman’ is dead. But she should be. And it is black women who must kill her. Others are far too invested in her survival. For black women, the most radical



Photo by Jerry Taliaferro
Theresa A. Stephens-Lock

thing we can do is to throw off the shackles forged by the stereotype and regain our full and complex humanity – one that allows us to be capable, strong, and independent, but also to be carried and cared for ourselves. Allowing for physical and emotional vulnerability is not weakness; it is humanness. More, it is a revolutionary act in the face of a society eager to mold us into hard, unbreakable things.”

Tribe subject Mushatt endorses the more nuanced view of African American women. “While you read our bios and you see that there is strength there, it also shows humanity ... that we are still women, and so with that strength there is also a delicacy that comes with it,” she said. “Sometimes that strength is taken as maybe a bit overbearing but I think it’s been a survival mechanism for quite some time.”

Another *Tribe* subject, Phyllis Sykes, founder of International Center of Greater Flint (ICGF), agrees with Mushatt. “We are women like anyone else, and there is this image that there is not a vulnerable side, that there is not a side that we want to be loved like anybody else, like any other woman,” she said. “We’re very complex and you can’t put us in a category.”

According to museum curator Glab, “When you read those stories and you look at those photos, I think you really start to see a really positive message of hope and inspiration for the next generation. That is what’s needed right now, not just in Flint, but all over America.”

The *Tribe* exhibit represents a bold step forward for a museum already noted as a “hidden

jewel” by many Flint residents and well-regarded outside the city’s boundaries. An Oregonian left this impression on Yelp after an October 2016 visit: “What a great find in Flint. This museum has a surprising collection of great art.” A Detroit native wrote: “While this museum ... is on the smallish size ... it’s a high quality venue housing an excellent and extensive collection ...”

The “smallish size” of the FIA is about to get a \$17.5 million boost. A new Contemporary and Craft Wing will add 8,000 square feet to the east side of the museum’s galleries. The interior courtyard at the art school will be converted into 3,960 square feet of additional classroom space. Construction is scheduled to wrap up in fall 2017.

According to its website, “Each year more than 160,000 people visit the FIA’s galleries and participate in FIA programs and services.” The museum’s permanent collection now exceeds 8,000 objects.

And as the FIA expands its physical capacities, the *Women of the New Tribe* exhibit invites an expansive and inclusive consideration of the role of art and the artist.

The role of the artist, according to novelist Joseph Conrad, is “to snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life ...” Visual artist and writer Peter Hilaire Bloch writes in a piece titled “Does Art Reflect Culture?”: “Revealing a sliver of life, even if it is only a shifting and flashing glance, to the audience is the substance and beginning of art. This is the job, the role, of the artist in society: to capture the momentary and transform it into something static and monumental.”

Does art reflect culture? Does *Women of a New Tribe* reflect the culture of Flint or, more broadly, the African American woman in America? Or does *Tribe* reveal a narrower “sliver of life”?

By all accounts – including FIA officials, the artist himself, and the 49 women subjects – the images displayed on the walls of the current *Tribe* exhibit at the FIA represent the best of the best: educated, accomplished and strong women. If that is our culture, it shines on the walls of the FIA.

Flint needs a win. Flint needs some winners. And you’ll find them at the *Women of a New Tribe* exhibit at the Flint Institute of Arts through April 15.

“God gave me wings. I can fly.”

–Audrey Dismond to photographer Jerry Taliaferro during photo shoot

EVM staff writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

Masonic Temple future uncertain as membership, income decline

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Downtown Flint's Masonic Temple is not for sale, according to Judy Jones, the Temple manager. "We'd like to squelch those rumors," she said in late January.

But John Porritt, president of the Flint Masonic Temple Association board, said while the longtime downtown landmark is not for sale "at this time," the matter has been under consideration because "our income is less than our expenses."

And sources who asked not to be named said at least one realtor had turned down a chance to represent the building, and several tentatively interested parties have done walk-throughs of the historic building at the corner of Saginaw and East Fourth streets.

Members of the one remaining lodge providing coordinating activities and income to the building, Fellowship Lodge 236, are hoping a fundraising drive this spring might buy them at least another year.

Lodge 236 "Master Mason" Todd Lamb

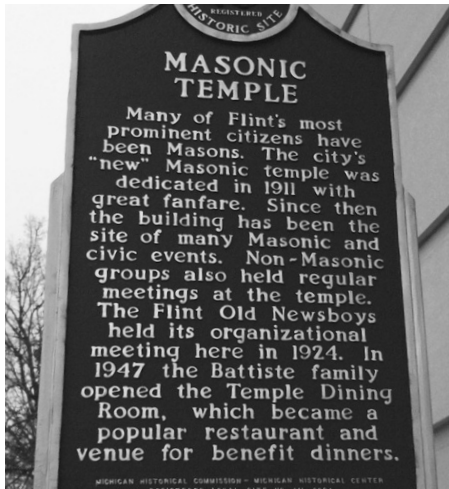


Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

Temple a Michigan historic site

of Flint is leading the fundraising drive, and says the group, which has about 225 members, will try to galvanize around hiring a full-time marketing manager to promote use of the space for weddings, receptions and other public community uses.

It costs about \$120,000 a year to keep the doors open, Lamb said. Members pay annual dues of \$125 each. Since the Masons are a charitable organization, their ability to contribute to the community could be compromised by increasing difficulty covering the overhead on the property.

Lamb, a regional sales manager for Emerson Electric, said the decline of membership and financial support has been hit with a triple whammy in Flint: the slow slide of General Motors out of town, the related decrease in the city's population, and the movement of membership-rich lodges to the suburbs.

At its peak in the Sixties, upwards of 5,000 members in a dozen Masons organizations made use of the Temple, he said. Members

have included Walter Chrysler, J. Dallas Dort, C.S. Mott, James Whiting and many others

He said the latest blow to the building's future came when Fellowship Lodge 23, the oldest lodge in Genesee County and one of only two regularly meeting and contributing income to the Temple, disbanded in December. Flint 23 formed in 1855, he said, the same year the City of Flint incorporated.

The only active remaining lodge is Fellowship Lodge 236.

These unsettled prospects leave Larry Battiste, owner of the legendary Temple Dining Room, uncertain about his future and the future of his staff and the restaurant, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

Battiste, whose grandfather started the dining room in 1947, leases his space in the basement eatery. Asked if he would consider going with the Lodge if they go elsewhere, he said it would depend on what they offered.

"They will have to do what's right just for them," Battiste said, coming off a busy 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekday lunch shift in the basement eatery. Asked if he would consider going with the Lodge if they go elsewhere, he said it would depend on what they offered.

Acknowledging that his business has dropped off over the years as downtown traffic and tastes have changed and his customer base has aged and passed on, he said he also is limited by the outdated aspects of the kitchen.

"We're running an inefficient operation down here," he said, "it's old and inefficient but ... it's what we know."

His catering business continues to bring in sustaining income, and he has considered doing that full-time if the Temple is sold, but as for change, Battiste, who is 63, said, "I'm older now and I don't have the energy I once did."

He is assisted in the dining room by his daughter, Christine O'Brien, who said she sees the temple facility as an economical and attractive locale for weddings and other events. Both she and her brother had their wedding receptions there.

Battiste, whose grandparents ran a popular restaurant named Courtavon – at Court and Avon streets – before coming to the Temple, remembers his grandfather sitting him up on a stool as a little boy to make donuts.

He took over management of the dining room in the mid-70s and it's been his life's work ever since. Regardless of what happens, Battiste said, putting his hand to his heart, the Temple "has given me a good life." Lamb noted the difficult decision-making swirling around the Temple now "speaks to a broader concern" – the decline of fraternal organizations in general, and the consequent loss of their benefits to the community.

He noted the Masons regionally have contributed about \$120,000 to Flint community causes in the last four years – the largest

chunk, \$100,000, donated to the Community Foundation of Greater Flint fund for the Flint Child Health and Development Fund in response to the water crisis.

In addition, Flint Masons have contributed \$2,500 a year to the Flint Public Library in support of literacy development, noting that historically the Masons were among early and ongoing supporters of literacy and of public education in the country.

"When you lose something like that, it has



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

Edifice dedicated in 1911

a ripple effect on the community, particularly a community in decline," Lamb said. "That removes value in a lot of different ways – not to mention the building itself has been a fixture of the downtown landscape for its entire life."

Building of the current Temple began in 1908 and the four-story edifice was dedicated in 1911. Lamb said he is interested in historic preservation issues and hopes to explore funding in that direction.

He said some Masons think the battle already has been lost, but he's not ready to give up.

"We gotta exercise this plan and if in doing it, we fail, we'll have to take other actions. Those actions could result in us staying in the building and could result in other players in the downtown landscapes participating with us."

Lamb issued an appeal on behalf of the building, asking anyone interested in helping preserve the building and keeping it available for the community's benefit to contact him at toddlamb@emerson.com.

The Masons, also called the Freemasons, are a worldwide fraternal organization with medieval roots. Some say Freemasonry began as a guild for actual stonemasons, but over time, according to Wikipedia, it evolved into a social organization, sometimes based on Christian texts and sometimes more secular – for centuries banning women from its meetings and cultivating secret rituals.

(Continued on Page 11.)

... Circus

(Continued from Page 3.)

both the number of prisoners in the Michigan system and the nearly \$40,000 a year cost of incarceration. Proposals are in the works to offer more mental health assistance to those in the system, also as a cost-saving measure. This might be one area where both Republicans and Democrats can find common ground.

Gubernatorial election: As if just surviving one election wasn't enough, the players for the 2018 gubernatorial contest are already getting in the game. At the moment, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer has announced her candidacy and Dan Kildee is considered a serious prospect as well. Among Republicans, Attorney General Bill Schuette is an all but certain candidate, as is Lt. Governor Brian Calley. Republican Jim Hines has already announced his intention to run. Before the year is out, other candidates will likely toss their hats in the ring.

In the third ring: Flint

Three years of water crisis: As Flint's water crisis moves beyond the thousand-day mark, we're sure to face continuing problems over the water issue. Will Mayor Weaver's Fast Start program pick up speed to replace our pipes in the foreseeable future? Will we still be the recipient of national attention, and funds, as other cities find that they also have similar water issues? Will there be more indictments of Flint officials who were involved with decision to switch to Flint River water? When we finally hear the "all clear" sign on Flint's water, will anyone really trust that it's safe to drink?

City council elections: The city council is up for election this year. What impact will the water crisis have on Flint's city council races? Will any more members of the council be arrested and removed for disrupting meetings? Will Mayor Weaver support a slate of candidates who are more amenable than the current council? Will her opponents do the same?

The side show: The World

It's certainly wrong to call it a side show, but the rise of Trump's nationalistic appeal has been echoed by similar movements in Europe. This year, Germany, France and the Netherlands will have major elections and nationalistic, protectionist and right-wing parties are all expected to be contenders. All of this points to an unsettled international picture for some time to come.

All in all, with the potential perils in this year's politics, I'd rather leave the circus to the professionals and have Barnum and Bailey's clowns, high-wire walkers, lion tamers and ringmasters back in the center ring.

They are a lot more entertaining than the politicians, and a lot less disturbing.

Political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

Free food for Flint families

Nutritious food that can limit the effects of lead exposure will be available free for Flint families on 13 dates in February via mobile food pantry stops at locations throughout the city, according to an announcement from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

The Food Bank of Eastern Michigan and the MDHHS are coordinating the program, providing foods rich in calcium, vitamin C and iron, according to Bob Wheaton, MDHHS communications manager and public information officer. Each family will receive nutritional food such as tuna, baked beans, potatoes, cereal and carrots. The food is free and no proof of income is required to receive it, Wheaton said.

The program began in February 2016 as part of the State of Michigan's \$28 million supplemental budget allocations for Flint in response to the water crisis, and is continuing with state funding in the fiscal year 2017 budget. Program coordinators said Flint families have received more than 2 million pounds of food through the project.

Food distribution sites remain open while supplies last. Upcoming dates for the rest of February are:

- **Saturday, Feb. 11, at 1 p.m.** – Salem Lutheran Church, 2610 Martin Luther King Ave.
- **Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 10 a.m.** – Hispanic Tech Center, 2101 Lewis St.
- **Friday, Feb. 17, at noon** – St. Luke's New Life Center, 3115 Lawndale St.
- **Friday, Feb. 17, at noon** – United Methodist Community Center, 4601 Clio Rd.
- **Saturday, Feb. 18, at 10 a.m.** – Flint Muslim Food Pantry, 4400 S. Saginaw St.
- **Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 11 a.m.** – North End

Soup Kitchen, 735 E. Stewart Ave.

- **Tuesday, Feb. 21, at noon** – St. Michael Catholic Church, 609 E. Fifth Ave.
- **Friday, Feb. 24, at 10 a.m.** – My Brother's Keeper, 101 N. Grand Traverse St.
- **Saturday, Feb. 25, at 1 p.m.** – Salem Lutheran Church, 2610 Martin Luther King Ave.

Information about additional food distribution dates will be announced as they are scheduled. For more information, visit the Food Bank website at www.FBEM.org or call 810-239-4441.

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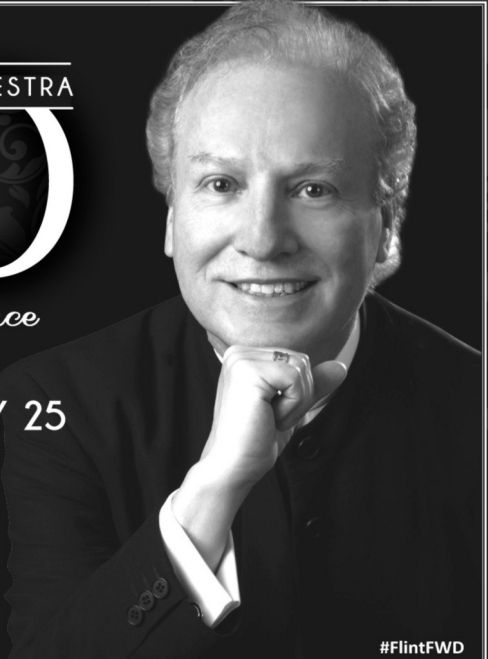
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Residents air concerns about Central High School demolition, replacement

By Nic Custer and Jan Worth-Nelson

Although an expected discussion on demolishing Flint Central High School and Whittier Middle School did not appear on the Flint Board of Education agenda Feb. 1, residents shared their concerns about the plan during public comment.

Last year the board released renderings by THA Architects Engineers for building a new \$78.5 million building at the site on Crapo Street proposed as the district's only remaining high school.

Questions about security, cost

The proposal has drawn questions, concerns and opposition from neighbors near the boarded-up 1923 structure and from historic preservation advocates.

Central Park resident Ingrid Halling said although she applauds the effort to give students new facilities, she has questions regarding the decision-making process and the effects she predicted the change would have on her neighborhood.

She offered five questions to the board, provided in full to *EVM*:

1. At almost twice the land size, with Interstate-69 access and better athletic facilities, why was not Southwestern strongly considered?

2. What kinds of increased security would be provided in and near the school property with the library, Cultural Center and residential neighborhood?

3. Given past problems, what controls would be placed on leaving the campus during and after school? The Central Park neighbors have said when Central and Whittier were open they experienced repeated incidents of vandalism, fights, speeding cars and teens "streaming" through the neighborhood.

4. How much and where is the funding coming from for the demolition and what environmental safeguards would be put into place during the demolition?

5. How much and where is the money coming from for new construction?

Nigel Tate, a Grand Blanc high school student, asked the board during public comment if they would let a group of preservationists photograph the interior of the school before it is torn down.

Peggy Lawrence, vice president of the Genesee County Historical Society and Flint Central alumni, said after the meeting, "We are opposed to any demolition of Flint Central High School. We support preservation and repurposing."

She said the historical society worked



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

Central High School

with former Flint Mayor Dayne Walling's administration to develop a site plan to preserve the school and find funding but those plans ended when the city was placed under state receivership in 2011.

The board is not required to respond to statements or questions made during public comment, and did not respond to the comments made about the demolition and proposed new high school. However, a presentation from the firm designing the proposed new high school seemed to argue for it.

Many schools need upgrades

Jeff Bennett from THA presented the results of a general facilities study the district commissioned in August. The study examined the district's remaining nine elementary schools, two high schools and the administration building.

Bennett said since the district hired THA to study its facilities in 2000, when the improvement needs were \$500 million, it has since closed most of its 50 buildings. The school buildings still open – nine elementary schools and two high schools – were in the best condition, he said.

But even the remaining open buildings need work, he said. The two high schools – Northwestern and Southwestern – need \$30 million in improvements. He said building a new single high school for the city would allow the district to use that \$30 million toward construction, which won't need substantial improvements for many years.

The administration building on Kearsley Street needs \$5.5 million in improvements. Bennett suggested the new high school could also house the administration and save those funds.

The nine remaining elementary schools need an estimated \$58 million in physical

improvements. He said only \$46 million of the improvements are priorities. This includes electrical and heating improvements and asbestos abatement. He added that the students are not in danger currently, but with these improvements the schools could be top rated.

There are currently 5,000 students in the district, down from 46,000 when the city had a population of 200,000.

Neighbors want district outreach

Halling said all the planning at the district level "has been going on without anybody reaching out to the (Central Park) neighborhood.

"For them not to reach out to us is egregious," she said. "The people who are making these decisions don't live here. When Central and Whittier were still open there were so many incidents I had the truancy officer and the safety patrol on speed dial."

The Central Park neighborhood, made up mostly of houses built in the late 1800s and early 1900s and populated by many UM-Flint students as well as a group of longtime live-in homeowners, is bounded by E. Court Street, northbound



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

Chavez Drive, Longway Boulevard and Gilkey Creek. Its residents have been outspoken on many issues affecting their environs.

In 1998-99, a series of cul-de-sacs – closing off Second Street to through traffic downtown, as well as cross traffic on Avon street between Kearsley and Court streets – were built in the Central Park neighborhood using federal grant funds. Halling said the cul-de-sacs are maintained by the neighborhood association and have "greatly improved" the neighborhood's quality of life.

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... Madness

(Continued from Page 12.)

writing and phone-calling campaigns, impassioned sermons and pastoral proclamations, grassroots organizing, and social media skirmishes.

And among ourselves more quietly, we've asked questions that carry the shoulder-shrug of disorientation and despair: Is this enough? Will any of this make a difference? What else can we do? What's next? Who's next?

It all seems too much, doesn't it? And yet who among the resisting class feels we can afford to look away, as one day — even one hour — gives way to another fresh hell? We must be vigilant against the next executive overreach.

Our hearts need a break

And yet, as a pastor in the neighborhood, I care deeply about your well-being. You need, I need, we need a break from all of this. We need to put a "closed until further notice" sign on the doors of our hearts and use this time in an intentional and systematic way to take care of ourselves.

I'm not calling for a resistance stoppage. I'm not asking for a multi-week moratorium on protests and marches and phone calls. We've got too much to lose. But I am inviting you to find a room in your home, if you're so lucky to have the space, or a time in your day, to create a madness-free zone; a place you go where you commit not to take your newspaper or your device with you, where you turn off NPR and think about something other than the latest outrage, or nothing at all.

Write a letter to a friend, pet your dog, make a peanut butter sandwich, pick up a deck of cards and play solitaire, or Crazy Eights if you have a partner. Pray, if that's what you do, but I'll just end up praying about the mess, so for me prayer isn't my madness-free zone.

Give yourself five or ten minutes or a half hour where you disconnect — reorder your priorities and your time — so you'll have the reserve and the resolve to keep on resisting. I fear this winter is going to be a long one.

The Rev. Dan Scheid can be reached at dsjscheid@gmail.com

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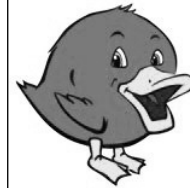
... Central

(Continued from Page 8.)

Often seemingly shrouded in secrecy, the organization has removed or modified many of its restrictions, Lamb said, concentrating primarily on charitable giving and activities.

"We are not a secret society. We're a society with secrets," Lamb said, most involving handshakes and passwords.

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



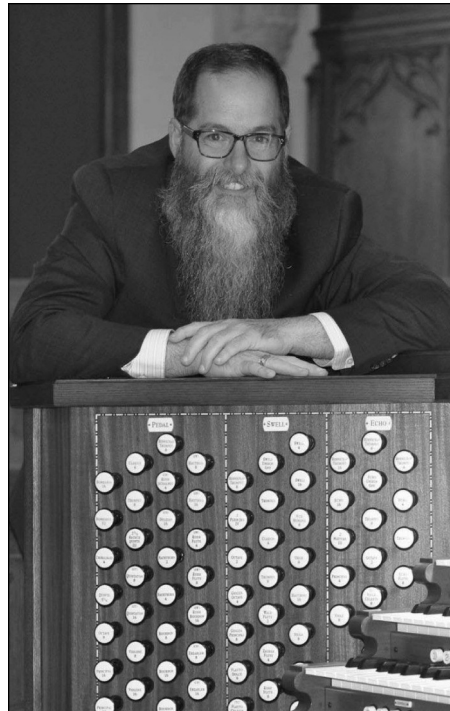
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Village Life

We all need a “madness-free zone”

By *The Rev. Dan Scheid*

Closing St. Paul’s every-Tuesday lunch ministry for the end of November and all of December last year was one of the more frustrating calls I’ve had to make as parish priest.

I had been noticing, along with volunteers and lunch guests, that tension and tempers in the parish hall were rising all year, and on consecutive weeks in November, scuffles broke out. The first was over an accusation of a stolen cell phone and the second was a lovers’ triangle gone predictably wrong.

LITTLE DUTCH BOY By Grayce Scholt

A little Dutch boy,
so the old story goes,
bullied in school,
books on his back,
walked by the dike,
heard the drip, drip, drip
that bored through the wall
that held back the rush,
the crush,
the rage;

how was it that
with just one finger
one small boy
stopped the flood
and saved the world?

Then there’s young David
who with sling
and one small stone
brought old Goliath down and
severed his gigantic head
with his own sword?

Today the Dutch boys are but
paper labels on the cans of paint
that line the shelves of
Sherwin Williams stores--
and David’s tightly bound
in that Old Book,
that precious lore
that told of faith and hope--

the dike still leaks,
and David’s old.

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.

I was away both times, and after the second incident, the parishioner who leads the program sent me a text message and asked that we take a break and close, at least for the next week and likely longer. She had consulted with volunteers and guests, and while opinions were mixed — who wants to shut church doors to hungry people between Thanksgiving and Christmas? — I took her advice and I played Ebenezer Scrooge, putting a “closed until further notice” sign on the door. Bah, humbug!

It was important to me that we not see these Tuesdays as pre-Christmas free time. Shutting our doors to scores of hungry neighbors because of the behavior of a few ought to have consequences for the parish, too. I asked parishioners to meet with me to talk about the ministry, to use our time in an intentional and systematic way.

Pausing to ponder and reassess

At our first meeting, I wanted to know how they were feeling about the tensions, the fights and about closing for a time. As their pastor, I care deeply about their well-being. At our second meeting we talked about the purpose of the lunch ministry; what is it exactly that we’re doing and why. During our third meeting we looked at what we do best, and we talked about some changes we could make to reclaim the sacredness of the space, to make sure we’re holy and wholly hospitable.

At the end of the third meeting, it was clear that we had spent our time well and that we would be ready to reopen the first Tuesday in January. My parishioners asked me if I would take on a larger role in the program, offering a ministry of peace and presence by being in the parish hall from 10:30 a.m. when we open until 1 p.m. when we close, rather than checking in and out and often being away on other pastoral duties, so I reordered my priorities and my time.

I do my best to stay out of the way of the folks in the kitchen, lending a hand only if needed. Instead, I drink coffee and swap stories with our guests, keep an eye out for people who may be troubled or troubling, lead a non-compulsory communion service, and line up for lunch with everyone.

Now I’m glad I made that frustrating call to close. I learned a lot about my parishioners, our guests and the Tuesday lunch

ministry by taking time to pause, to ponder and to pray. At the time I really hated stopping what we were doing and closing our doors in what turned out to be an unusually cold and snowy December. But in hindsight we needed the break to reassess the ministry and renew our spirits.

Winter came for real Jan. 20

Despite December’s calendar-claim on the first day of winter, winter came for real in a January 20 capitol-city, blow-hard blizzard, inaugurating not a snow-storm but a storm of another four letter “s” word.

Tempers and tension in the nation had been rising throughout the previous year; I don’t need to rehearse the litany of political improbabilities gone unpredictably right for the one who more than half the electorate deemed impossibly wrong.

The outcry from this majority has been swift and the resistance relentless against the now-incumbent and his swampy cabinet appointees, his executive orders, his end-arounds, his gag orders, his racism, sexism and xenophobia, his Orwellian “alternate facts,” his travel ban, and his Bannon.

We’ve seen post-election protests decrying the mismatch between the popular and electoral vote, pussy-hatted women marches, airport rallies, letter-

(Continued on Page 11.)



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

Guest columnist The Rev. Dan Scheid lives on Blanchard Avenue and is the rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in downtown Flint. He can be reached at djscheid@gmail.com.