

East Village

Magazine

August 2018



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 — Robin D.G. Kelley, Historian




Photography courtesy of Wing Young Huie.

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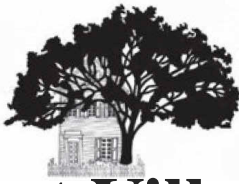
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East Village Magazine

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Commentary *Judicial elections: Often invisible, confusing, but important*

By Paul Rozycki

What is it that makes us trust our judges?

Their independence in office and manner of appointment.

— John Marshall

Last month, Genesee County witnessed a rather unusual event — a judicial forum for the candidates running to fill three slots on the 7th Circuit Court. In a forum hosted by the League of Women Voters and the Genesee County Bar Association, eight candidates had an opportunity to introduce themselves to the voters, and offer their views on the role of the courts in the county. While most elections present a parade of candidate forums, from governor to city council, judicial forums are rather rare. For as important as they are, the election of judges often gets little attention from voters.

Little attention to judicial elections

There are several reasons for this.

Most of the time there is little competition for judicial seats. Incumbents have long terms — eight years for the Michigan Supreme Court and six years for all the other judges — and often run unopposed, or have nominal opposition, and are rarely defeated.

A second reason is the nature of the job of being a judge. Unlike other candidates, judges cannot promise a five-point plan to lower taxes, create jobs, fix the roads, bring world peace, make America great again, or cure the heartbreak of psoriasis. As judges, they should not express opinions on cases that might come before them. So most judicial candidates tend to sound rather similar. Typically they are in favor of “equal justice for all,” more efficient courts and a fair application of the law.

With those limits, a judicial forum gives candidates a chance to meet the voters, present their personal and legal backgrounds, and highlight their commitment to various groups in the community. The

heated exchanges that sometimes take place in other candidate debates are unlikely in a judicial forum.

Genesee County Circuit Court elections

Yet, in spite of the fact that judicial forums are rare and rather low key, the judicial elections are just as important as anything else on the ballot this year. In November, Genesee County will be electing three Circuit Court judges. Two of those will fill the seats being vacated by retiring Judges Judith Fullerton and Geoffrey Neithercut, who are prevented from running by the Michigan Constitution’s 70-year age limit. In November, the four candidates who were selected in the August primary will face off. Incumbent Judge Celeste Bell is also facing a challenge from Tabitha Marsh in the fall election. Because of the two open seats, campaigning has been more intense and visible than in most years.

The importance of the local courts can’t be overstated. On the local level they are the first line in the administration of justice in both the criminal and civil courts. For most citizens they are where most serious cases begin and end.

But this year we’ll also be choosing two justices for the Michigan Supreme Court. And the process for nominating and selecting those judges highlights one of the strangest and perhaps most confusing things about Michigan judicial elections.

Officially, in Michigan, we elect all judges on a non-partisan ballot — they don’t run as Republicans or Democrats, as most other candidates do. Electing judges is not unusual; more than two-thirds of the states use an election process to select or retain judges, but our “non-partisan election” is a bit of an odd fiction.

The governor’s appointment power

Yes, we do elect our judges. But when a judge retires, resigns, or dies in the middle of his or her term, the governor can appoint

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Photo of the Month: Greg Ellis Band at Tunes at Noon

City Council okays \$133 million for water work

By Meghan Christian

A plan for eight water-related projects totalling \$132.9 million for the city of Flint was approved following a public hearing July 23 by the Flint City Council (FCC).

But the council, along with several members of the audience of about 30 residents, expressed displeasure that the presentation on the proposal came almost two months later than expected, that a promised public forum on the plan never happened, and that the estimates for the work to be done are millions of dollars more than funds available.

Ed Thorp, representing AECOM (Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations, and Maintenance), a global engineering design firm coordinating the city's pipe replacement project since January, described the following projects:

1. Water meter replacement totaling \$18.4 million
2. Reservoir and pumping station improvements for \$10.1 million
3. Creation of a secondary water supply for \$9.1 million
4. Changing the Northwest transmis-

sion water main from a 24" pipe to a 16" diameter pipe for \$12.3 million

5. Water quality monitoring for \$612,000

6. Water main replacement for \$68.9 million

7. A new chemical feed building for \$3.4 million

8. Service line replacement contingency for \$10 million

According to Thorp, with back up by Director of Public Works Robert Bincsik, \$80 million from the federal Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) grant funds — which were approved by Former President Obama in late 2016 — will go toward these projects. When pressed on where the rest of the funding would come from, however, neither Thorp nor Bincsik had a direct answer.

"The reason why we put forth \$132 million in projects is because we are not entirely sure what the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] is going to approve, so they may not approve some of those projects, and we may be able to build some of those projects cheaper than estimated,"

Bincsik said.

Seventh Ward Councilwoman Monica Galloway said in her view the presentation came a few months too late, as the engineering company pledged during an introductory community forum at Mott Community College Feb. 1 that they would hold another forum for the residents on May 31. That forum was not held.

"The meeting that was held at the Mott Event Center, when you all rolled out your introduction to the community, the ending of that meeting was under the impression ... that you would come before the community again in May," Galloway said.

"And I can say for the record, I know that you guys have come and done a presentation in the committee room, but I am wondering, based on what's been said, if you guys are not going to follow up like you said and do the same caliber of a meeting ... to answer the questions that are being discussed," Galloway added.

Residents who spoke were equally concerned about the cost of AECOM's proposed projects. Jeff Shelley, a resident of the Eighth Ward, asked, "Where's the

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... Council

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money coming from?” One resident, Shirley Taylor, suggested Michigan Governor Rick Snyder should be the one to have to pay the costs of fixing the water system, not the residents of Flint.

“This is Snyder’s doing and we’re paying the price,” Taylor said. “He should have to pay for everything he’s caused in Flint, Mich.”

Addressing AECOM’s Thorp, Eric Mays said, “I’m tripping that y’all would come to us on the last day, \$40 million or \$50 million short and the whole time we’ve been looking at this project plan, we didn’t know that.”

Cost was not the only concern residents had. Quincy Murphy, a regular at FCC meetings, touched on the lack of communication and access to materials with the residents on this topic. “This council should be packed. Had people known this public hearing ... I just think we not doing a great job,” Murphy said.

Another resident, Beth Stephens, said she was concerned with what chemicals would be added to the water to treat it at the new proposed chemical feed building.

“When he said chlorine added to the water, I kind of got stuck. I’m scared of chlorine in Flint water,” Stephens said. “I just hope they’re safer with our water than they were in the beginning,” Stephens added.

Ultimately, FCC approved AECOM’s proposed project plan application by a vote of five in favor, one opposed, and one abstention. Those in favor were Maurice Davis, Fifth Ward Councilwoman Jerri Winfrey-Carter, Sixth Ward Councilman and Council President Herb Winfrey, Eighth Ward Councilman Allan Griggs, and Ninth Ward Councilwoman Eva Worthing.

Galloway voted “no” due to her wanting to move the discussion back to the finance committee. Mays said he abstained for the same reason, and also because of the concerns raised by his colleagues.

Third Ward Councilman Santino Guerra and Fourth Ward Councilwoman Kate Fields were absent.

Appointments, hires, continued employment

FCC approved five appointments, hired Martin Frelich as an inventory control consultant for the city’s water pollution control division until June 30, 2020, and continued the employment of Steven Hauger as a facilities technical consultant for the utilities department until June 30, 2020. Both positions are for \$35 an hour, not exceeding \$35,000 in one year, with no fringe benefits. Other appointments included Loyst Fletcher, George Hamo, Chia Morgan, and Karen Lopez, all to serve seven-year terms expiring June 28, 2025, for the Local Officers Compensation Commission (LOCC); Linda Pylypiw for reappointment to the Flint District Library Board for a three-year term; and Amanda Trujillo as deputy city treasurer.

While most of the appointments and hires passed with little-to-no opposition, some council members raised concerns regarding some of the candidates for the LOCC. About Chia Morgan, Worthing stated, “I just don’t think she has the experience necessary for this board and so my vote will be no.”

Mays abstained from voting on the appointments of Fletcher, Hamo, and Morgan due to Mays not having had the opportunity to speak with the candidates before the vote. He said he felt comfort-

able voting for Lopez due to a phone call he had with her.

Crim “Safe Routes” grant

The council passed seven additional resolutions on Monday covering a variety of the city’s needs, including fire insurance for some of the city’s Genesee County Land Bank properties.

Another resolution approved the Crim Fitness Foundation to act as agent for the city to apply for \$752,000 in Safe Routes to School funding to improve sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, and more at Neithercut (Eighth Ward), Freeman (Ninth Ward), Pierce (Seventh Ward), and Doyle/Ryder (Fifth Ward) elementary schools in Flint.

According to Cade Surface, Crim’s representative at the meeting, the grant also would fund “safety programming such as walking clubs, biking clubs, and student safety patrols at all four of the schools.”

Marijuana facility rubrics approved

Council passed the merit review scoring rubric to rate medical marijuana facility applicants that will have the opportunity to apply during a 45-day window set by the city’s medical marijuana ordinance enacted May 14.

Collective bargaining with firefighters

FCC approved a collective bargaining agreement with the Flint Firefighters
(Continued on Page 6.)

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... Council

(Continued from Page 5.)

Union. According to Fire Chief Barton, while he believes the city's firefighters deserve more, his staff is understanding of the financial struggles Flint faces. "We tried to restructure the contract where everybody was able to receive something and not hurt the city," Barton said.

Barton then added the fire department was aware of its status as a "training hub," its inability to keep younger firefighters on staff, and how they used this agreement to remedy that. "I have ... my treasurer and vice president here, they have seniority, so they were willing to take less pay to pay these younger firefighters so we can keep them," he said.

Tensions, lack of respect addressed in council

In the aftermath of a disagreement between Davis and Mays that occurred in a committee meeting before the regular meeting, some council members used their final comments to place blame where they thought it was due.

"There is something going on with Mr. Mays to have that many complaints, not just from council," Worthing said, adding

that she was in support of Galloway, chair of the committee meeting when Davis and Mays argued.

"We see a man that cannot control himself and then throws a fit, so when we talk about respect there are people who are capable of respecting others and there are some that will never respect another human being a day in their life," Worthing added.

Others used their final comments to address how they interact with one another and the need to follow council rules. "We have to protect one another by the respect we give and when a person is out of order, the person that is chairing, don't get into the melee with that out-of-order person," Winfrey said.

Davis, chairman of the rules committee, called a rules committee meeting at 11 a.m. Monday, July 30, so that council can go over their rules and make any changes needed. "Once we look at those rules and have some robust debate on them, then let's follow them to the letter of the law," Winfrey said. "When you have the rules, you don't have to argue with anybody," he added.

EVM Managing Editor Meghan Christian can be reached at meghan.christian22@gmail.com.



... Judicial

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someone to the position. And once they are appointed, and run for reelection, the appointed judges are highly likely to be reelected, since they are listed as incumbents on the ballot. One recent study shows that almost half of Michigan's judges first got to the bench by being appointed. So, yes, there are elections, but governors do a lot of appointing. A lot of judges begin their judicial careers by being appointed by a governor, usually of their own party. Some judges will even plan their retirement or resignation to give the governor the opportunity to appoint a replacement.

Not quite non-partisan elections

It is also true that judicial elections are officially non-partisan. However, later this month, both the Democrats and Republicans will hold their regular state conventions. On Aug. 25-26, the Democrats will meet at the Breslin Center

in East Lansing, and the Republicans will meet in the Lansing Center in Lansing, on the 25th. Both parties will nominate candidates for the governing boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, the State Board of Education, the secretary of state, attorney general, and the lieutenant governor.

At those Democratic and Republican conventions the delegates will also choose "non-partisan" candidates to run for the Michigan Supreme Court. On the ballot, none of the Supreme Court candidates will have a party label behind his or her name, but they will be there because they have been nominated by their party and their party will work for their election.

Don't overlook the judicial elections

Because of these confusing factors, many voters overlook the judicial part of the ballot. Because they are officially non-partisan, voters who vote a straight-party ticket must make the extra

effort to vote on the judges.

Yet the courts are obviously a critical part of the government. On the local level, they decide who goes to jail and who doesn't, and who can sue or be sued. On the Supreme Court level, they increasingly are involved in critical policy decisions, when the legislature or the governor are deadlocked or in conflict. Often a disappointed party in a legislative dispute or petition drive takes their case to court. Most recently, after a series of legal challenges, the Michigan Supreme Court decided on the whether or not the proposal to create a non-partisan commission for drawing election districts could appear on the November ballot.

Don't ignore the judges this election year. They are just as important as everything else on your ballot. The League of Women Voters offers more detailed information on all the candidates at Vote411.org.

EVM political commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

Masters of the macabre bring love of scary

By Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.

As a kid Paul Counelis was obsessed with the book *Christine* by Stephen King. He liked the atmosphere, the characters, and how much he could relate to King's obsession.

"It made me want to be a writer," he said.



Flint Horror Collective logo

Years later, Counelis, now a father of nine, started writing horror fiction because of a scary bedtime story he told his kids about a girl named Kendall Kingsley. His kids liked it. "They urged me to put it in a book, and now Kendall is in three books," he said.

He may have inherited the "scary" gene. He says his own parents were influential in his affection for horror. He recalls watching Universal films with his dad and said his mother used to get a kick out of scaring people.

"She was good at it, so I know that played a big part for me," Counelis added.

Like Counelis, fiction writer Chris Ringler of Flint credits family influences for his love of horror. When he was only six years old, he recalls, his cousin took him and his sister to the drive-in to watch the movie *Friday the 13th*. It was the start of something.

Originally from Linden, Ringler said, "I started writing as a teen and was always drawn to darker stories. I don't know that I write horror or dark fiction, but what I write lives in those border-

lands because that is where I find I have the most to say."

And now Counelis and Ringler have become leading lights of a robust local "horror" scene. Since 2011 the Flint Horror Collective's "Ghoul Crew" have been behind an array of events lovingly devoted to the macabre. One of the biggest is the Flint Fright FilmFest, which since it started in 2011 has grown an international following, with films coming in from around the world like *The Lightdancer* directed by Andra Fembriarto of Indonesia and *In the Park*, directed by Darlene Joanna Young of the Philippines.

"Many of us have actually been together working on the 'Con' -- the Flint Horror Convention -- and events since the first year," Counelis said. "Our day jobs are boring, though it is kind of funny and notable that we have among our group a social worker and a librarian."

The "crew" are comprised of Flintstones Counelis, Ringler, Glen Birdsall, Lucifer David Fulci, Jennifer Roe, Krystle Holleman, Mandie Ringler — Chris's wife — and Amy Warner.



Counelis (left) and Ringler
(photo by Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.)

"I am from Flint," stated Counelis. He attended nine different schools in Flint, Swartz Creek, and Clio growing up. His wife, Crystal, also is from Flint and a big fan of the films *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Halloween*.

"Our wives are cool with the horror stuff," he said.

While they have their own individual

projects, Counelis, Ringler, and the rest of the Ghoul Crew still collaborate with one another. "One of my favorite things that we do as a group," Counelis said, "is our podcast, *The GhoulCast*. We get several of us together and yap about a variety of horror-related topics."

Counelis and Ringler are in the midst of planning for the upcoming Flint Fright FilmFest, to be held Oct. 27 at Mott Community College. The one-day film festival, started in 2011, is a showcase for short, indie horror and sci-fi films. Ghoul Crew members said they had a great first year and have been building on that success.

The film submission fee is two dollars and submissions could win any of five awards:

- **Grand Ghoul Award** — Best overall film. \$100
- **Bradbury Award** — Best Writing. \$75
- **Chaney Award** — Best Special Makeup Effects \$75
- **Jon Cockerill Memorial Award** — Best Student Film (must be a Flint/Genesee County student). \$50
- **Charles Shaver Memorial Award** — Best Michigan-made Film (must be a Michigan-based filmmaker).

• There will be a five dollar charge to get in, but Mott students can get in free.

"We're just over 120 entries now," Ringler said, "so we'll probably get around 200." The Flint Horror Collective will take submissions of short films through Aug. 31. Films are generally about 10 minutes long.

Outside of the Flint Fright FilmFest, the Ghoul Crew host an annual April Ghoul's Day horror fiction authors' event and the Ghoulcast podcast — a fun critique of horror past and present. "This past event was our second April Ghoul's Day," Counelis said, "and was held on April 7 at the Flint Farmers' Market."

He said they decided on the April Ghoul's Day event because they always like to do a few different fun events during the year.

"We know a lot of great area horror authors that we feel deserve some kind of spotlight," Counelis said. "It also made a lot

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Commentary: celebrate our parks, our gems, at 50

By James Woolcock

The Genesee County Parks are celebrating their 50th anniversary in 2018 and our parks are certainly worth celebrating. Did you know that Genesee County has the largest county park system in the state of Michigan, measured by acreage?

While congratulations are certainly in order for the Parks Commission, a recent story on our county parks in *My City Magazine* (July, 2018) told only part of the story. Just a brief reference to our parks prior to 1968 is mentioned, when the Road Commission ran them.

As with the 100-year centennial of our national parks celebrated in 2016, our own county's 50-year milestone represents the years under the current administrative structure. Just like there were national parks established before 1916 (e.g., Yellowstone, Yosemite), there were county parks as we now view them before 1968. Their story is noteworthy.

I got into this history with a seemingly innocent reading of the Genesee County Parks Master Plan for the years 2013-18. In that document, they set a goal for Richfield County Park in achieving "CCC/WPA designation". I'm old enough to know what those initials mean and that goal sparked my interest. Having grown up with a New Dealer parent didn't hurt either. So, off I went into some research and a real history lesson.

First, the basics may be helpful for those not raised under the notion that FDR stood at the right hand of God. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a key component of FDR's National Recovery Act, per his administration's economic recovery plan in the wake of the 1929 Stock Market crash. They were organized by camps, run like military operations, employed thousands of the "greatest generation," and built/repared infrastructure all over our country. Many of those projects still stand today.

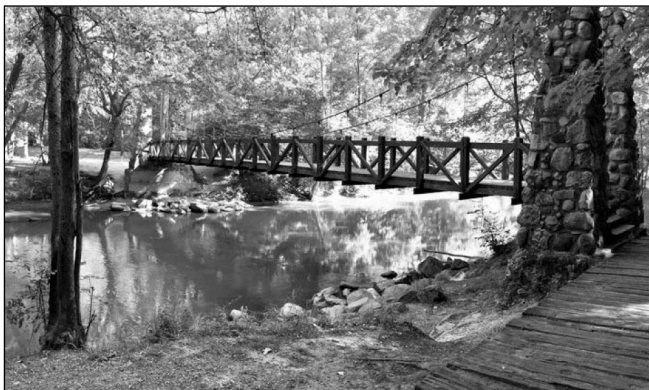
I learned that the Genesee County area

never had a CCC camp, with most or all located in the Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula.



Richfield County Park Shelter as it looks today
(photo by James Woolcock)

So, that left the WPA, or Works Progress Administration. Like the CCC, it sought to put the unemployed back to work, although not organized around a camp structure. On that front, I hit pay dirt. With the cooperation of both Barry June at the Parks office and Corey Jarbeau at the Road Commission, I found a WPA project number on the bottom of a Richfield County Park Shelter schemata, WPA # 7423/25-3-1899.



Richfield County Park suspension bridge today
(photo by James Woolcock)

Please allow me to tell "the rest of the story", with my apologies to the late Paul Harvey. Our county commissioners first went on record as seeing the need for a county park system in April 1929, transferring a sum of \$10,000 from the maintenance fund to the parks fund. Wow, that pre-dated the stock market crash by six months.

The first park to be established was what we now know as Richfield County Park. It would be known as the Richfield Park Unit of the Genesee Recreation Area as it evolved. The first tract of land there was acquired on Oct. 10, 1935, launching our county park system. Two other tracts of land were acquired in that area, including 257 acres from the city of Flint on what is now the north side of Richfield County Park.

A Genesee County Road Commission-sponsored WPA project was implemented almost immediately. They leveled off rough areas, built both vehicle and foot bridges over the Flint River to join the north and south sides of the park, built picnic shelters, tennis courts, and park stoves. Work in both the Flushing and Linden parks also progressed.

They built everything from scratch. In perusing the Road Commission records (thank you, Barry and Corey), I found blueprints and schemata for the Richfield walking bridge (dated March, 1938), the shelters, picnic tables, teeter totters, swing sets, and even a schemata for a croquet court.

Oh, did you also know that they had Keeper Cottages? A staff member at the Road Commission told me that Flushing's keeper cottage may still be standing. I wonder if a "Keeper" model could be considered again? I know of a retiree in the Richfield area who loves that particular park, knows every square inch of it, and would gladly volunteer for the job.

Of course, a closer look at these structures in the park should tell you something about their age. How many picnic shelters do you find these days that have tree trunks and branches for their supports? How many 90-foot walking bridge spans are suspended from field-stone towers? When you get your high school graduation picture taken there, do you realize that 80 years ago, the WPA used unemployed individuals ravaged by

(Continued on Page 9.)

... Parks

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the Great Depression to build that gem? Likewise, do you realize that when you don't clean up your dog's excrement on that bridge, you are literally "crapping" on their memories and hard work?

So, the next time you are in our parks, take a look around at the great work being done today, as well as the work that still stands now 80 years on. The older shelters need restoration and I'm confident that will be addressed. In the meantime, treat them kindly, like you would your grandparents.

As for me, I will use this 50th anniversary to celebrate the great work of both our Parks and Road Commissions. And, should I still be above ground in 2025, I will spend that year reveling in the 90th anniversary of the Richfield County Park. If I'm especially blessed, I'll be around for the 100th.

James Woolcock of Davison retired from a career as a mental health professional to a life of hiking in county, state and national parks. He and his wife Robyn enjoy spending time with their adult children and grandchildren. He can be reached at reader516@charter.net.

... Horror

(Continued from Page 7.)

of sense for us, because several of us in the Flint Horror Collective are also writers."

The authors' event hosted 18 authors, musician Mike Roland from the band Mercy Beach, and the EFX/makeup group Kreature of the Night. With the Flint Farmers' Market booked for the third annual event, the Ghouls Crew are planning a couple of surprises along with the authors in the years to come.

Both Counelis and Ringler continue their own prolific writing. To date, Counelis has written or co-written over 35 books, all available on Lulu.com or Amazon.com. He also keeps a blog called Halloween Machine, which is the name of a seasonal book-style magazine that he co-writes, edits, and publishes.

From among all his works he says, "I have two favorites. One is called Marshall's Gully — it's a nonfiction account of a very strange experience that some friends and I had when we were teens.

"It's very personal to me," he says, "because one of the boys passed away tragically, and it's about a paranormal experience on the surface, but the underlying theme is really the enduring friend-

ship of these five kids who met as strangers and had an instant kinship." The second of his favorites is called *Something We Could Never Be*.

Currently, Counelis is working on a novel called *Evil World Outside*. He also writes a monthly column for *Flint Comix and Entertainment*, as well as features and the "Monster Kid Corner" column for *Rue Morgue* magazine, pens the articles for the *Fear Finder* newspaper available around Flint during the Halloween season, and is the singer in the band Lords of October.

Ringler is the author of 14 books and has been published in five other collaborative works and one magazine.

"I don't really have a favorite," Ringler said of his work. "I love them all in different ways and for different reasons." His books can be found on the website spooky-chris.com where he also keeps a blog.

Asked if there was anything about Flint that specifically nurtures "horror," Counelis responded, "The downfall and subsequent 'true life horrors' of Flint are not a conscious influence like some might think. I just feel drawn to the magical nature of horror and Halloween."

EVM staff writer Jeffery L Carey Jr. can be reached at jlcareyrj@hotmail.com.

Flint named "Tree City USA" 18th year in a row

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Flint is one of 3,400 city nationwide to be named a 2018 "Tree City USA" by the Arbor Day Foundation. It was the 18th year in a row for the city to receive the designation.

To celebrate, staff of the Genesee Conservation District (GCD), managers of the city's urban treescape, planted 300 seedlings this spring, distributed in four locations: Longway Park, Atherton Park, Cronin Park and the Haskell Center.

Angela Warren, GCD administrator, said the plantings occurred in collaboration with a donor, the Flint-based Genesee Eyewear, who contributed mulch and labor for the planting. Warren said seedlings selected covered many varieties — hardwoods like river birch, black gum, sugar maple, red oak, swamp white oak and sycamore — and conifers like cedar, concolor fir, red pine, white pine and Norway spruce.



One of 12 new signs

There is no monetary award for the designation but, Warren said, "It's a good news story — it's a point of pride for a city that endures so much bad news so much of the time."

Part of the designation allows the city to post signs provided by the Arbor Day Foundation for \$65 each. This year the GCD purchased 12 signs and city workers installed them in central locations where

people come and go to "celebrate the distinction and raise awareness," Warren said.

To qualify to be a "Tree City USA," a city must meet four criteria: to have a tree board or department, a tree care ordinance, a community forestry budget of at least two dollars per capita, and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.

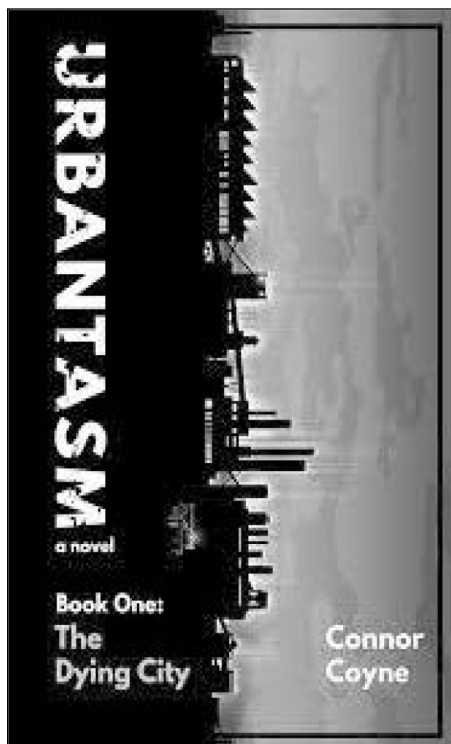
The GCD plays a central role in keeping track of the city's trees, while City of Flint Street Maintenance takes care of downed or dangerous tree removals in consultation with the GCD foresters. For help with downed or dangerous trees, call City of Flint Street Maintenance at 810-766-7343. City of Flint officials can do some immediate tree removal, while assessment for follow-up needs goes through the city to the GCD.

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

Urbantasm Book One: The Dying City by Connor Coyne

Review by Robert R. Thomas

Connor Coyne's *Urbantasm* is the most original take on Flint I have read to date. Set in the fictional Rust Belt city of Akawe, Michigan, "an hour's drive north of Detroit," Coyne's allegorical tale is a serial novel of four volumes the author says has taken 22 years to create.



Book One: The Dying City will be published in September. The jacket of my pre-publication copy describes *Urbantasm* as "a magical teen noir serial novel inspired by the author's experience growing up in and around Flint, Michigan."

As a Flint tribal elder whose teen years are buried in 60 years of dusty, shifting memories, "a magical teen noir serial novel" would not be on my usual readerly radar, especially one set in a dying city. But being a book reviewer brings me books which surprise me. Coyne's first volume of his serial novel surprised me.

It is 1993 in Akawe. The novel's narrator is 13-year-old John Bridge. He and his young tribe believe that Akawe is "the center of the universe. It's where we are." He describes his tribe: "Our posturing was so generic that it was

tough to tell us apart." All posturing aside, the characters nevertheless come alive. Coyne deftly defines the characters via rhythmic runs of dialogue augmented by telling descriptive details.

Blues, ghosts, a tribe of damaged goods

An essential element in Book One is a young teen's fears of the vagaries of life and death. Bridge describes his tribe as "all damaged goods" for whom "each morning began with a mystery that only we could solve."

The blues — the state of mind, not the musical genre — and a pair of magical blue-bottle sunglasses that John steals from a homeless person infuse the novel with noir magic dust that includes for Bridge apparitions of blue ghosts and a mysterious man with a knife.

"I knew that the things around me had turned blue," Bridge says. "I knew that I was seeing the world in a new way. Seeing old things made new again, so new that they glowed blue. The blues told me that life is in motion. Time is travel. Loss is learning. It all felt like so much — this blue shivering — and I felt so dizzy that I had to lie down."

For him and his crew, a gothic gloom consisting of nothing-remains-the-same permeates their daily scene. But the tribe keeps on keeping on. It may be a jungle out there, but it's their jungle and it is what they are trying to understand. The journey is the plot which challenges their understanding of life's mysterious ways and means in the homes, schools and neighborhoods of Akawe.

Frighteningly formidable young lives

The circumstances of 1993 Akawe were far more disturbing than mine when I was 13 in and around Akawe, but the uncertainties of life and death were as frighteningly formidable. Those blues I have never forgotten.

"Akawe did make national news that summer when a man threw his brother's severed head into a reflecting pool right

as the opening night of *Madame Butterfly* was letting out next door," Bridge reports. "But over all, our poorness, our violence, our confusion wasn't high on anyone's list of priorities. America was watching TV and discovering a brave new world of denim and flannel and bomber jackets and gypsy tops. Most kids I knew wanted to be rapping Angelinos or dirty Seattlites. They worshipped the sun and the rain, respectively. That was 1993.

"We forget the little things. The bulbous cars, the posturing raps, the global calm or 'calm,' but these little things, moment by moment—that's what made it what it was. 1993 is still too close, too recent, for me to really say that I understand it. Maybe in a few years, in the new millenium, I'll be able to tie these strands together and hang some meaning on them. But right now I still don't know what they are all about."

What they are all about is the story Bridge narrates.

Wrestling with God

Book One of Urbantasm begins with this sentence: "I have to become the Antichrist." Two brief paragraphs follow describing the narrator's depressing urban setting as he ponders how God had abandoned a character named Drake, as well as the narrator himself and his tribe. The narrator ends page one with: "If I wanted to save my friends, I would have to murder God."

"This is mostly my story," the narrator continues, "but I'm gonna start out by telling you about what happened to Drake. Just so you know — just so you can see right off the bat — what a bastard God could be and why a lot of us had it out for him."

His story of what happened to Drake is a Rust Belt phantasm of shock and awe which finds five teens flying off the roof of an abandoned hospital and nose-diving into the parking lot below, apparently while under the influence of the latest unknown street drug O-Sugar. Four die, but Drake survives as a broken being,

(Continued on Page 11.)

... Coyne

(Continued from Page 10.)

physically and spiritually. He had supplied the new drug to his friends for their communal test flight off the roof.

Fluid prose propels the story

While I appreciate the universal chords in *Urbantasm*, it is the delivery, the writing style, that engaged me. The writing propels this story. So do the characters as they reveal themselves through the writing. Coyne's fluid prose is the perfect vehicle to carry an epic allegory. The wordsmith in me particularly enjoyed the stylistic change-ups he would throw.

Two favorite examples are rolling runs of straight dialogue delineating authentic characters and the word play of a single kaleidoscopic sentence describing the smells of the American ghetto that rolls along on a crest of commas for an entire page. Both read like jazz to me, so it came as no surprise to learn of John's interest in jazz, an affection he picked up from his factory-worker father.

The plot is secondary to the characters who bring the plot to life, but it is not inconsequential. Human concerns regarding inscrutabilities like life and death can hardly be considered inconsequential.

A teen tribe's search for meaning

The quest of this tribe's journey is a search for meaning. Religion is but one of their paths of inquiry.

While walking with John, Selby Demnescu reads him a poem she has written titled "Meaning." She ends the reading by spontaneously adding another ending: "And the beauty is the truth, and truth is the beauty, and when I find truth and beauty, then I will tell thee!"

She further comments: "So I don't know. Does it matter what we say? What we do? What if we die? If we die does it matter? I know it sounds weird, but I think these things all the time. I think deep things."

So did I at her age, and so do I now. While my circumstances were nowhere

as dire in 1953 Akawe as Bridge's Akawe of 1993, the concerns were every bit as confusing and scary for this young teen. What's it all about? is a question I still ask at 74.

Long nights of being lost

The noir element of this tale has an enlightening side. During a long night of being lost walking through Akawe's dark streets in the midst of a drug war between two gangs, John muses about the night.

"That night felt like the negative mirror image of a drug. Not a proliferation of sense but its reduction to essentials. Night subtracts the number of colors, divides the volume of sounds, and what remains takes on a heightened importance. A secret energy, still in motion, fills the dark spaces separating things we are able to see and touch. Walking all those miles, all those blocks—feeling a dull pain in my feet and the sting of the air on my face—I felt sleepy and wide-awake at the same time. It was soothing and electrifying."



Connor Coyne

(photo by Shane Gramling)

Book One concludes with a question to John.

"Was it nice?" Lucy asked. "Being lost for a while? I mean, not having to go where someone else wanted you to? Not even having them know where you were?"

"It was perfect," John replies. "But anyway, it's over now."

Well, not exactly. *Book Two: The Empty Room* will be published in May of 2019. Frankly, this old reader is looking forward to more *Urbantasm* now that I know the

dying city is not dead.

About Connor Coyne

Connor Coyne's first novel, *Hungry Rats*, was praised by Heartland prize-winner Jeffery Renard Allen as "an emotional and aesthetic tour de force." Gordon Young, author of *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City* called his second novel, *Shattering Glass*, "a hypnotic tale that is at once universal and otherworldly." His essay "Bathtime" was included in the Picador anthology *Voices from the Rust Belt*. He is on the planning committee for the Flint Literary Festival.

Coyne's work has been published in *Vox.com*, *Belt Magazine*, *Santa Clara Review*, *East Village Magazine*, and elsewhere. He lives with his wife, two daughters, and an adopted rabbit in Flint's College Cultural Neighborhood less than a mile from the house where he grew up. More at connorcoyne.com.

EVM reviewer and board member Robert R. Thomas can be reached at capnz13prod@gmail.com.

COLLEGE CULTURAL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net

Neighborhood Watch meets Thurs., Aug. 16, 7-9 pm, MCC's RTC Auditorium
Members meet Thurs., Sept. 20, 2018 7-9 pm in MCC's RTC Auditorium

Volunteer Distributors Wanted

The East Village Magazine is looking for volunteer distributors in some of the residential blocks bounded by E. Court, Franklin, Tuscola and Meade streets. Spend less than one hour a month getting exercise and insuring your neighbors get the magazine. Contact ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write to 720 E. Second St. Flint, MI 48503.

Unclassified ads

For Rent. Studio apartment. Clean, partially furnished, washer & dryer, all bills paid. Walking distance to UM-F & MCC. \$450 per month. Call 810-235-0021. Leave message.
Apartment for Lease. Spacious one-bedroom apartment in historic Central Park on cul-de-sac Avon St. near Kearsley St. Walk three blocks or less to UM-Flint & MCC campuses, Cultural Center, Downtown, Farmers' Market, four parks, bike paths, Applewood horticultural gardens and easy freeway access. Deck onto large backyard, laundry, off-street parking. References and credit check requested. On-site management. \$545 per month plus electricity. Heat and water included. No pets. Write: Apartment Box 1A, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503 or E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net.

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of interesting events available to our readers – beginning after our publication date of August 2. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our September issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at meghan.christian22@gmail.com by August 28.

The Great Sticker Experiment

Every day in August

Mon.: Closed

Tues. - Sat.: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sun.: Noon to 4 p.m.

Flint Children’s Museum,
1602 W. University Ave.
810-767-5437

Admission: \$6 per person, children under 1 get in free. Extra stickers are \$2.

Interactive art project. Young visitor will receive stickers to decorate a totally white room. By September, there will be approximately 50,000 stickers from all of the museum’s guests.

From Lens to Eye to Hand: Photorealism 1969 to today

Aug. 2 - 12

Noon - 5 p.m.

Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
810-234-1695

Admission: \$7

A reexamination of photorealism and the use of the camera as a foundation of expression, as well as the groundbreaking artists of the time.

Surreal to Sublime

Aug. 2 - 4

Noon - 5:30 p.m.

Buckham Gallery,
134 1/2 W. 2nd St.
810-239-6233

Admission: Free

Five area artists displayed, including photographer Tracie Hilder and painter Susan Hagen.

Happy Hour Patio Nights - Giant Games

Every Friday in August, 5 p.m.-9 p.m.

Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31

Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
810-234-1695

Admission: Free

Drink specials and games, including Giant Connect Four, Giant Jenga, Cornhole, and more. on the FIA patio. Free samples available of Angry Orchard Rosé and Truly Spiked and Sparkling.

Sacred Circle - Open Spiritual Discussion Group

Every Friday in August

Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31

Sacred Elements,
5353 Fenton Rd.
810-422-9125

Admission: Free

An open spirituality group open to all faiths and belief systems. Donations accepted. If possible, bring snack or beverage to share.

Summer Shorts 2: Medusa

Aug. 4

10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Flint Youth Theatre,
1221 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-1530

Admission: Free

Morning performance of Medusa, with workshop on lawn of Flint Youth Theatre. Be sure to bring blanket to sit on.

Literacy Wednesdays

Aug. 8

4 - 6 p.m.

Brennan Center and Park,
1301 Pinegreet
810-280-6776

Admission: Free

All ages welcome under the pavilion at Brennan Park for this literacy event.

PRIMARY ELECTION

Aug. 7

7 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Admission: Free!

VOTE!

Screwnomics: How Our Economy Hurts Women

Aug. 9

6 p.m.

Totem Books, 620 W. Court St.
810-407-6402

Admission: Free

A reading and discussion about the book Screwnomics: How Our Economy Works Against Women and Real Ways to Make Lasting Change. Investigative journalist Ricky Gard Diamond will join radio host Tom Sumner. The book explores the theory that women are expected to work essentially for free.

Canvassing Training

Aug. 11 and 18

9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Flint Public Library,
1026 E. Kearsley St.
616-227-0576

Admission: Free

Put on by Voters Not Politicians, learn how to get involved with the group in their fight against gerrymandering.

Flint Drop Fest

Aug. 11

Noon

Downtown

Admission: Free

A one-day music festival in Buckham Alley. Four open-air stages where 40+ DJs and performers can be heard. Art, street vendors, and more.

Redistricting Reform Town Hall

Aug. 14

5:30 - 7 p.m.

Flint Public Library,
1026 E. Kearsley St.
616-227-0576

Admission Free, but RSVP at <https://www.votersnotpoliticians.com/flint0814>

Put on by Voters Not Politicians, learn how to get involved with the group in their fight against gerrymandering.

Disenfranchisement, Racism, and Midterm Elections

Aug. 14

6 p.m.

Flint Public Library,
1026 E. Kearsley St.
810-845-1767

Admission: Free

Learn about voter disenfranchisement and how you can become an engaged voter.

Back to the Bricks - Bricks Flicks

Aug. 14

4 p.m.

US-23 Drive In,
5200 Fenton Rd., 48507

See “Tucker: The Man and His Dream,” starring Jeff Bridges. Follows Preston Tucker (Bridges) as he tries to invent a futuristic car. Before the film, there will be games, music, and food. Back to the Bricks memorabilia will be available for purchase.

Back to the Bricks - Rolling Cruise

Aug. 15 and 16

Along Saginaw St., starting downtown

Admission: Free

Owners of collector cars cruise past the Mott Mansion and from the bricks of Saginaw Street in downtown Grand Blanc.

Back to the Bricks: Saturday Car Show

Aug. 18

8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Along Saginaw St. and UM-Flint lot at Saginaw St. and 5th Ave.

Admission: Free

Stroll along the bricks of Saginaw Street and look at classic cars, buy souvenirs, take photos, and more.

Flint Handmade Quilting Bee:

Radical Women Quilt

Aug. 18

10 a.m. - noon

Whaley's Historic House Museum, 624 E. Kearsley St.

810-471-4714

Admission: Free, donations accepted

Learn to hand quilt using the English Paper Piecing method. Your efforts will help support two area nonprofits working to make positive change in the community. All skill levels and men also welcome. If you have any questions, message Flint Handmade on Facebook or contact the Whaley House at (810) 471-4714 or director@whaleyhouse.com

Flint Youth Theatre Season

Announcement Party

Aug. 22

6:30 - 9:30 p.m.

Flint Youth Theatre, 1220 E. Kearsley St.

810-237-1560

Admission: Free

Hear what the FYT plans to put on during the 2018/2019 season. Food and drink will be available.

Movies Under the Stars: Moana

Aug. 24

7:30 - 11 p.m.

City of Flint City Hall Lawn, 1101 S. Saginaw St.

Admission: Free

Come see Disney's Moana as the next installment of Movies Under the Stars, hosted by Flint City Hall.

Tea Rex at Sloan Courtland Center

Aug. 26

10 a.m. - noon

Sloan Museum at Courtland Center, 4190 E. Court St., Burton, 48509

810-237-3427

Admission: ages 2-11 \$9, adults \$12, seniors \$11, members \$5

A dinosaur-themed prehistoric tea at the Courtland Center Sloan location. An assortment of teas, snacks, and more will be available. Admission to Dinosaurs Unearthed is also included with Tea Rex admission.

Support community journalism!

Donations to *East Village Magazine* are tax deductible. For easy giving, go to: eastvillagemagazine.org

VOTE

Pipes replaced so far in Flint:

6,725+

Source: July 20 press conference by Mayor Karen Weaver with Congressional delegation

Though weekly pipe replacement reports have not been issued in 2018 since AECOM, the national engineering firm has taken over the pipe replacement program, Weaver announced updated numbers during the July 20 visit of a Congressional delegation to a pipe replacement site on Milbourne Avenue. The total, she said, is 6,725, with 496 completed this year. She said there are about 7,000 to go.

The city aims to have all of Flint's lead-tainted service lines replaced by 2020.

Chevy Commons "greening" enters Phase IV

By Jan Worth-Nelson

The former "Chevy in the Hole" is rapidly shedding its old life as a brownfield GM manufacturing site and taking on its new life as a growing mid-town park with completion of Phase III and launching of Phase IV of the Chevy Commons project.

Janet Van de Winkle, project manager of the Flint Riverfront Restoration Project and Barry M. June, acting director of the Genesee Parks and Recreation Commission, said in a July 24 press release the nine acres of Phase III are finished and work is proceeding on next steps.

Phase III, the area along Kearsley Street between Stevenson Street, Swartz Creek and the planned Genesee Valley Trail connection featured new sidewalks a hundred-plus new trees, a new parking lot, and green grass.

The work was funded through the U.S. Forest Service and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with local match dollars from the C.S. Mott Foundation. Work on the 24 acres of Phase IV began in May, covering both sides of Stevenson Street up to the Flint River. That work, funded through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Surface Water Quality Initiative Fund, will feature more trails, trees, active green space, and views of Atwood Stadium.

Work continues on construction of the non-motorized Genesee Valley Trail, starting on Chevrolet Avenue, continuing through Chevy Commons, across the Flint River/Swartz Creek confluence, across Grand Traverse and ending at the Carriage Town Plaza. The trail will be paved and the bridges over the confluence will be finished later this fall, officials said.

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



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ARTS EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ENRICHMENT MILLAGE

****FIND IT AT THE BOTTOM OF YOUR BALLOT****

WHAT IS THE MILLAGE ABOUT?

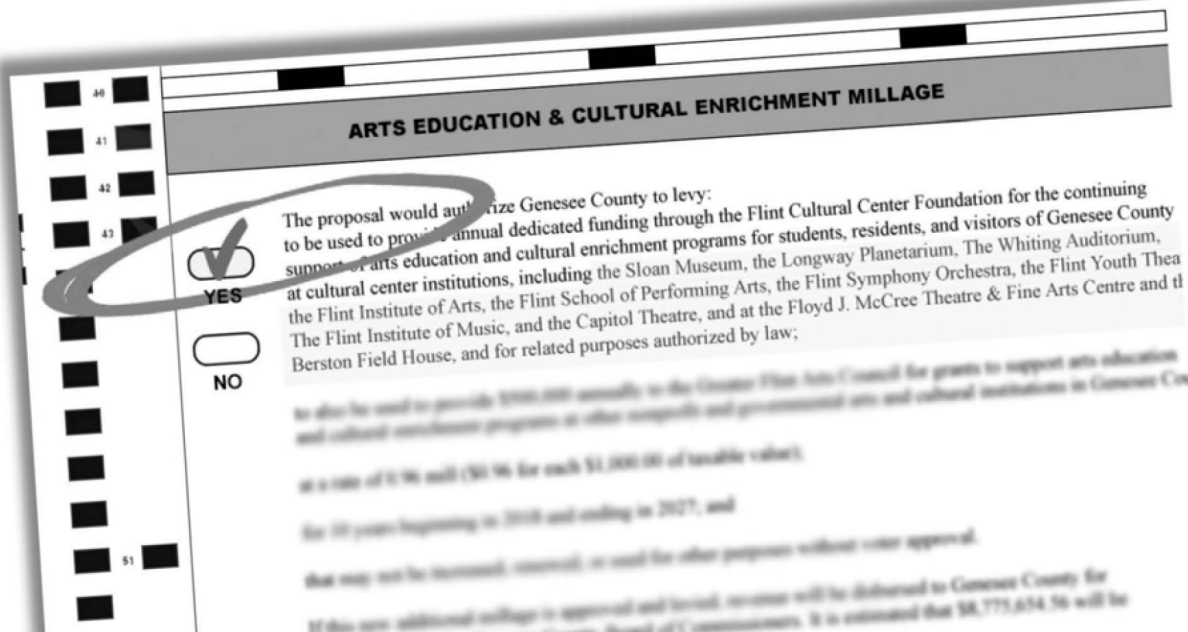
It is specifically an Arts millage which supports these amazing institutions:

Sloan Museum
Flint Institute of Arts
Flint Youth Theatre
Flint School of Performing Arts

Longway Planetarium
Flint Institute of Music
Flint Symphony Orchestra
Friends of Berston Entities

Whiting Auditorium
The Capitol Theatre
New McCree Theatre
Greater Flint Arts Council

PLUS \$500,000 in annual support for Arts organizations all over Genesee County.



The cost of the millage to the average homeowner is only \$48 per year (based on \$1.00 per \$1000 of State Equalized Value). At this rate, each homeowner would nearly recoup their cost of the millage in just one visit to any of the institutions above for a family of four. This is a millage that offers something back to families, seniors and county residents ONLY!

Help Make Genesee County a Better Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family! Vote Yes on the Arts Millage!

Find out more information at www.BetterGenesee.com

... Cannabis

(Continued from Page 16.)

Schedule I designation permanent. In a 1994 interview not published until 2016 in Harper's, Nixon aide John Ehrlichman recalled, "We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

Does this sound hauntingly familiar?

In 2016, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) conducted an exhaustive review of the health risks and benefits of cannabis. They concluded that "cannabis does indeed have notable therapeutic effects." Among them: Reduction in chronic pain symptoms, improvement in muscle spasms for those with multiple sclerosis (MS), and relief of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.

The evidence is growing that an even wider range of health problems can be positively influenced by cannabis, including: inflammation reduction, brain trauma/neuroprotection, wound and bone healing, anxiety reduction, and rehabilitation and recovery. In his recent CNN special on cannabis, "Weeds 4," Dr. Sanjay Gupta reported on the efficacy of marijuana in dealing with the opioid crisis. (Note: States that enacted medical cannabis laws are showing an opioid mortality rate drop of 24.8 percent)

But more research is needed to accurately determine the full range and effectiveness of these benefits. This is where the conundrum of the Schedule I restrictions comes into play. A review of the many "pro and con" lists of cannabis use highlight this problem. By far the major "con" on these lists is the fact that not enough research has been done on cannabis to determine its safety.

Fortunately, research in Canada, Israel, and other countries has narrowed the knowledge gap. Also, there is renewed

hope that the Schedule I restrictions in this country may soon be removed.

The second major "con" on the list, one that the NASEM report was very clear on, is the effect of the drug on adolescents: "Adolescent cannabis use is linked to psychosis (schizophrenic symptoms), substance use disorder, diminished academic performance, diminished employment, and income prospects, as well as impaired social relationships." This serious evidence, among all others, requires sober attention.

But enough history and science. Back to my personal experience. After eight years of medical marijuana use, here are my conclusions.



First, my prostate is still enlarged. But I consistently get a good night's sleep.

Second, my long marijuana regimen seems to have had a beneficial effect on a variety of conditions that have plagued me over the years. Persistent gum and dental problems have improved to the point where my dentist complains of no longer making a profit off me. Cancerous lesions on my face, one of which had to be removed surgically, have disappeared. Occasional bouts of stomach upset are now ended with one puff. My arthritis, which seems to be everywhere in my body, has been reduced to mildly bothersome. Good control over my Type II diabetes also has been helped by marijuana.

And then there are the diminishment of aging. I am 76 years OLD. Hardly a day goes by that some part of my body doesn't slow down, malfunction, or gripe. I am bent, beaten, and ground down. When I stumble along in public, wattles flapping, I am often mistaken for an ambulatory piece of road kill. For me,

marijuana is my "I ain't dead yet" pill. It helps me remember what it was like when I was only 75. It might not stop my aging, but it makes it more fun.

The most profound benefit of my cannabis use has been and continues to be stress reduction. Pot gives me an instantaneous relaxation response. It mellows me out, settles me down, and restores my appetite. In this crazy world, it helps keep me sane and balanced. It enhances my creativity, sensual appreciation, and sense of well-being. Hell, it even saves me money. With pot in my system I can watch the news without throwing a hammer at my expensive wide-screen TV.

One of its most peculiar effects, though, has been on my driving. While living in California, I did a daily 75-mile round-trip commute to Hollywood. As a naturally aggressive driver, I prided myself on knocking 15 minutes off a trip that usually took 45-60 minutes. My passengers, on the other hand, experienced my driving as a gateway to their own drug use. One even told me that when I got on my meds he was able to get off his.

In my own defense, with over a million miles of driving under my belt, I have never been in an accident. Nor, during the eight years of my medical marijuana use, have I had any moving violations. (And only one parking ticket.)

But what does my wife think about my marijuana use? Over the past eight years she has seen first-hand the effect cannabis has on my health and well-being. She is not a regular user herself, and she is uncomfortable with my occasional bouts of coughing when I smoke. (There are many ways to ingest cannabis — I happen to prefer smoking.) But she can speak for herself. This quote is from a newspaper story about my medical marijuana use: "I go to bed every night with a husband who is stoned — and I love it."

So, after all is said and done, why do I use medical marijuana?

Based on my own experience over eight years, and based on the history, knowledge, and research I have accumulated on this incredible plant, I'd be a fool not to!

EVM Editor-at-Large Ted Nelson can be reached at mainegame@icloud.com

Village Life

Why I use medical cannabis

By Ted Nelson

I thought I was losing my mind. Two sleepless nights in a row had left me exhausted, depressed, and mentally discombobulated. I was having dinner at my Los Angeles apartment with my youngest son, sharing my distress.

A month earlier, I had been diagnosed with an enlarged prostate after complaining of regularly having to get up at night to pee. My doctor prescribed Flomax. Two weeks on Flomax and my nighttime runs to the bathroom increased — from two a night to four. Then my doctor told me to stay on Flomax but to add Avodart to the regimen, which quickly led to the condition I was now bellyaching about.

After patiently hearing me out, my son said:

“Dad, why don’t you try this?” He handed me a joint of marijuana. “Maybe it will help you get some sleep.”

I took his advice and inhaled two puffs at bedtime. I slept like a baby, waking up the next morning feeling refreshed and relieved. Wow! That same day I made an appointment with a medical cannabis MD to get my certification.

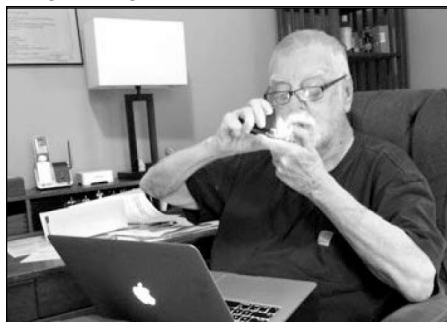
That was eight years ago. I’ve been “stoned” ever since. My original certification was in California, but I am now a card-carrying Michigan user. Since starting on my cannabis regimen, my new normal is to either sleep through the night or get up only once. When I reported the change of meds to my California family doc, he noted in the record that I had “sought alternative treatment.”

As I experienced relief from the symptoms of an enlarged prostate, I also developed a keen interest in finding out as much as I could about this substance I was using every day.

Though I had occasionally used pot recreationally in the past, I wanted to know what the long-term effects were. What were the dangers? What was the science? I get pretty picky when it comes to my health.

Over the eight years of my medical cannabis use, my knowledge has increased dramatically. I have also kept

careful track of its impact on my mind and body. The experience has been enlightening. Here is a small taste:



Ted Nelson

(photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

The history of cannabis is long and fascinating. The first documented use of the plant goes back over 29,000 years when hemp was used for rope. Its first use as an anesthetic goes back over 6000 years. In the Hindu culture, cannabis has been considered as sacred since 1400 BC. By the 13th century, the recreational and religious use of the plant was prevalent in the Middle East.

Particularly interesting is how cannabis came to be criminalized in this country. Early in the 1900s, several factors merged to bring about a change in perception on the plant. Marijuana users during that period were mostly Mexican and Caribbean immigrants, so-called bohemians, and African-American jazz musicians.

In the 1920s, the US commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Henry J. Anslinger, with the help of front-page support from the influential Hearst newspaper empire, mounted a powerful propaganda campaign against cannabis. In one of his more notable quotes, Anslinger stated, “There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the US, and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz, and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers, and any others.”

Thus the gap between reality and perception was expanded in the service of political manipulation and unadulterated racism. It wasn’t until the early 70s, how-

ever, that a complete federal prohibition on cannabis was enacted. This included the designation of cannabis as a Schedule I substance — an illegal drug with no medical purposes. This placed weighty impediments on medical and scientific research. The history is quite revealing:

“Listing of cannabis as a Schedule I Drug was a 1972 political action from Richard Nixon who, among other things found the resistance to his policies and the Vietnam War, especially from people of color, women and young people, to be so galling that he thought the best way to fight back was to take away something people enjoyed. In brief, this is how marijuana became illegal.”

— From: “Cannabis & Its Evolution: The Marijuana Prohibition Movement” at weedmaps.com)

Nixon was not a fan of marijuana. When Congress created the Controlled Substance Act in 1970, it stated clearly that information on marijuana was inadequate and called for the creation of a presidential commission to conduct research and make recommendations. The Schedule I designation was to be temporary pending commission findings. Nixon created the commission and appointed the former Republican governor from Pennsylvania, Richard Shafer, as chairman.

To Nixon’s eventual exasperation, the commission did its job rigorously. It turned out to be the most comprehensive report ever written about the drug, stating that marijuana did not cause crime, did not lead to harder drug use, and did not create significant mental or physical health issues. Also, it favored complete marijuana decriminalization. Its conclusion was clear: “Marihuana’s relative potential for harm to the vast majority of individual users and its actual impact on society does not justify a social policy designed to seek out and firmly punish those who use it.”

Nixon denounced the commission, shelved the report, and made the

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