

East Village

Magazine

March 2019



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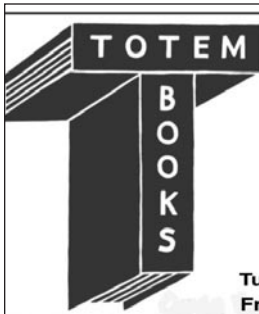
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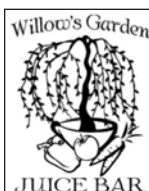


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Commentary

A number of numbers to watch in 2019

By Paul Rozycki

I once knew a math professor who argued that everything in the universe could be explained by numbers and mathematics — from the creation of the most basic atoms, to the formation of the stars and galaxies, to the most complex life forms, to all types of mechanical and electronic devices.

I don't claim to be enough of a mathematician to prove him right or wrong, but numbers do matter a lot. And most of the biggest issues of our government involve numbers. Yes, budgets and their numbers can be tedious and boring. It's a lot more fun to gossip about the latest sex scandal, rage at Trump's craziest tweet of the day, or shake our heads at the latest antics of the city council. But the numbers are the real guts of government. Here are a few numbers that we should be watching in the near future.

Gov. Whitmer's budget numbers: \$56 billion (or less)

Gov. Whitmer will present her budget in the first week of March, and the goals she laid out in her State of the State message will be tested in the hard numbers of the budget. Will she be able to find the money to pay for the roads? How will she find the funds to promise everyone two years of community college education? How will she fund improvements in our K-12 schools? And perhaps most importantly, how will the battle over her budget hurt her chances of working with Republicans?

The current Michigan budget is a little over \$56.8 billion, but that number is deceptive. More than a third of that is from federal funds and is restricted to certain projects. Another quarter of the budget is from Michigan funds that are also restricted. Just about a fifth of the budget is from the "general fund," where lawmakers have some real choice of how to spend the money. In the upcoming year, the "general fund" is expected to be

approximately \$10.7 billion, about what it was last year.

Fix the Damn Roads: \$2.7 billion (or more)

Gov. Whitmer presented her first State of the State message a few weeks ago and, like most, it was a list of goals and aspirations for her first year. Perhaps most notable on her list were, of course, the roads. Her "Fix the Damn Roads" campaign slogan was the keystone to her election victory, and most drivers don't have to be on the road very long to see, and feel, the need for fixing Michigan's roads.

But where will the money come from? Gov. Snyder began a road repair program by allocating about \$1.2 billion for road repair in 2015. But the roads have continued to deteriorate and costs continue to increase. By some estimates, we need at least \$2.7 billion or more every year to begin making progress on the roads.

How should we raise that kind of money? Higher gas taxes? Other tax or fee increases? Cuts in other programs? Which programs? A bond issue? None of those will be popular, especially with the Republican majority in the legislature, but Michigan has underfunded its roads for many years. The money will need to come from somewhere, and it won't be easy or painless. The good news is that there seems to be support for taking real action from both the Republican and Democratic sides of the aisle.

Days since the new Flint City Charter was adopted: 419 days (and more)

Number of days we've had an ombudsperson: 0

The new city charter, which took effect over a year ago (419 days as of Feb. 23, 2019) set aside \$250,000 for the creation and operation of a Flint ombudsperson's

(Continued on Page 13.)

Cover: Architecture of justice—Genesee County Courthouse



Photograph by
Chin O. Quate

Photo of the Month: Not quite spring yet — keep the wood pile dry

Civility, pipes, ombudsman delays at FCC

By Meghan Christian

The second month of 2019 brought yet more conflict and distrust to the Flint City Council (FCC) members and residents who attended the month's three regular FCC meetings.

Regardless of the conflicts, however, the council continued dialogue on the state of the pipe replacement program and made some progress with the Ethics and Accountability Board (EAB) and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Civility/Behavior on Council

The issues between various members of FCC have continued from January. As reported here in January, issues have revolved around First Ward Councilperson Eric Mays and a few of the female members: Fourth Ward Councilperson Kate Fields, Seventh Ward Councilperson Monica Galloway, and Ninth Ward Councilperson Eva Worthing.

The continued bickering has not gone unnoticed by residents.

"I have seen ... Councilman Mays attack these women in a wrong way," resident Quincy Murphy said, referring

to Fields, Galloway, and Worthing.

According to resident Chester Colburn, FCC's in-fighting could be doing more harm to residents than councilmembers might think or recognize. "What y'all showing the people right now: you don't care bout 'em," Colburn said. "The people are crying out for your mercy and y'all sitting them down like they're nobody," he added.

Resident Wilbert Jeret felt so strongly, he addressed the FCC at not one, but two of the three February regular meetings and called for a no-confidence vote to be added to the ballot in the next election. "After watching the last city council meeting, the last financial meeting on YouTube (Jan. 23 committee meeting), I've come to the conclusion that there must be a movement began to put a no-confidence vote of this city council on the ballot this election season," he said during the public speaking portion of the Feb. 4 regular FCC meeting.

Lesia Williams, a First Ward resident who protested Mays' treatment of the women on council during the Jan. 23

council committee meeting, also addressed the council on the civility issue at the Feb. 4 meeting. "It's hard when we look out here and we know why these seats aren't filled," Williams said.

"This is not a black or white thing and our community will not be divided ... We have an election coming up, we have pipes to be replaced, we have things that needs to be done in our community and at this time, I just want the councilwomen of all color to know that no abuse will be tolerated," she added.

"You may not see me, but I see you," Tony Palladeno said to the FCC, discussing the behaviors he has witnessed from the council. "And I can't come down no more — I'm ready to cry right now — I'm exploding," he added.

Still, some members tried to urge their colleagues toward a spirit of collaboration. "As long as we can work together ... we can move forward," Third Ward Councilperson Santino Guerra said. "We have a long way to go, but we can definitely do it," he added.

"Your opinions, your concerns, and all of

(Continued on Page 5.)

... Council

(Continued from Page 4.)

your issues are being heard from me,” Fifth Ward Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter said to residents before addressing her colleagues. “It’s reciprocal ... all of us need to be respectful,” she reminded them.

AECOM/Pipe Replacement/Water

As January ended, FCC struggled to decide whether to grant a second change order to the city’s contract with the LA-based global engineering firm, AECOM, that would give them an additional \$4,802,482, according to the resolution listed in the Jan. 9 finance committee agenda. (AECOM is the company’s official name; the letters of the acronym stand for Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations and Maintenance). As reported in *EVM* last April, AECOM took over water service line replacement project from General Michael McDaniel in the Fall of 2017. The firm received a 13-month, \$5 million contract from the city that began Dec. 1, 2017.

Both times this resolution for the second change order faced the FCC — once in committee Jan. 9 and then again as a reconsideration moved by Mays during the Jan. 14 regular council meeting — it failed with a tie vote of four in favor and four opposed. Some members of the FCC said they would not support giving AECOM more funds when they felt the company had not fulfilled the terms of their first contract.

“Why would we pay them \$10 million ... where (FCC) gave (General) McDaniels \$120,000,” Arthur Woodson said while addressing the FCC at the Feb. 4 meeting. “It doesn’t make sense,” he added.

At the first regular council meeting of the month on Feb. 4, Mays made a motion to discuss granting an emergency purchasing ordinance allowing AECOM to continue working on pipe replacement. “The emergency purchasing ordinance is one of the most important things we could do,” Mays said. “This city is in the middle of a water emergency — the mayor, myself, and others have said until all the pipes is out of the ground, we’re in an emergency,” he added.

“We’re in a crisis and this body con-

tinually makes bad mistakes and moves that’re delaying the health of the public,” Second Ward Councilperson Maurice Davis said. “We really need to put this back on the forefront ... we can’t afford to keep doing the same thing over and over,” he added.

Ultimately, Galloway made a substitute motion to discuss the matter during a legislative committee meeting, which passed by a vote of eight in favor and opposed by Mays.

The pipe replacement and manager of the program were not the only water-related issues on the minds of Flint residents in February. Long wait times in water lines; accessibility, particularly for seniors; and the contents of the water were among the issues presented to the FCC. “We need our water PODs (points of distribution) back open,” resident Shirley Taylor said. “They are more accessible for the people,” Taylor said, adding that even if four of the previous eight PODs would reopen, it would make things easier on the residents.

Woodson also raised concerns about City Hall’s narratives regarding the water. “The narrative of making it sound like once we get the lead service lines out, the emergency is over - no,” Woodson said. “We need to stop that narrative. We had more than just lead in our water,” he added.

Ethics and Accountability Board & ombudsperson

While the EAB has yet to hire an ombudsperson, FCC discussed the board in length during a public hearing on the job description and qualifications of the ombudsperson at their regular meeting on Feb. 25.

As described in previous *EVM* coverage, the EAB is a requirement of the charter adopted by voters in August, 2017 by a 2-1 vote and which was to have taken effect in January, 2018. The charter calls for 11 members, comprised of one member from each ward and two members appointed by the mayor. Terms on the board are staggered, meaning each of the 11 members serve a different number of years, to ensure that there is always someone on the board with experience.

The board’s main functions, as set out in the charter, include appointing an ombudsperson and hearing resident concerns. The board is empowered to hold public servants accountable per the ethical standards outlined in the charter. This power manifests in various ways, outlined in the charter, from calling hearings to subpoena powers, should it be necessary.

One main concern raised by the FCC about the job description for the ombudsperson surrounded the requirement that applicants have a bachelor’s degree instead of allowing applicants to have a degree or equivalent experience.

“I’m not going to be hasty ... I want to do this ombudsman thing right,” Mays said. “I don’t want to handicap them,” he added. “If they find a diamond in the rough, they can hire them.”

“Degrees shouldn’t eliminate anyone from this position,” Guerra said. “Changes need to be done,” he added, referring to the job description.

Loyce Driskell, the newly-appointed chair of the EAB, addressed this concern by reminding council they are searching for the top applicants. “We will certainly be looking at the first pass through to get the creme de la creme, and then we may look further to those who don’t have that experience,” she said.

Some members of the FCC were in support of the job description and qualifications as drafted from the EAB. “I absolutely understand the concerns raised about degree or no degree, but in this case it does not apply,” Worthing said. “The Ethics Board has already went through this process quite extensively and this is what they feel comfortable with and I will agree with them,” she added.

Ultimately, the job description for the ombudsperson was sent back to the legislative committee for further discussion and amendment by a vote of six in favor and three opposed. Those in favor were Mays, Davis, Guerra, Winfrey-Carter, Sixth Ward Councilperson and Council President Herbert Winfrey, and Galloway. Those opposed were Fields, Eighth Ward Councilperson Allan Griggs, and Worthing.

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“Neighbors Changing Flint” tasks begin close to home, workshop leaders say

By Meghan Christian

To suggest how neighborhood leaders might figure out which problems to focus on, Carma Lewis of Flint Neighborhoods United offers a practical lead.

“I start with what I can see outside my window, because that’s my domain that I have control over,” she told a group of about 25 at the first “Neighbors Changing Flint” workshop Feb. 20.

The “Neighbors Changing Flint” series has returned for its second year. The six-week long program aims to help residents become more informed on how to engage in and improve their neighborhoods.

Sessions are held every Wednesday evening until March 27 from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village, located at 4119 Saginaw St. Residents looking to attend must register by calling 810-620-1299, ext. 2 or via email at: director@neighborhoodengagementhub.org.

The series is hosted by the Neighborhood Engagement Hub in partnership with the Ruth Mott Foundation, Applewood, Flint Neighborhoods United, the City of Flint, the Crim Fitness Foundation, the Land Bank of Genesee County, and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

“We’re hoping residents are able to gather some ideas, resources and contacts for different types of projects they can apply to their neighborhoods,” Ashley Everhart, agency director of the Neighborhood Engagement Hub, said.

Those familiar with the series from last year can expect not only just a change in venue from Asbury Church on Davison Road to the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village, but a change in the methodology of the series.

According to Everhart, last year’s sessions followed more of a single-instruction

format, whereas the workshops this year will feature breakout sessions at each, where residents will be able to choose which they would like to attend upon arriving.

“The most significant challenge last year was keeping everyone engaged



First workshop in progress
(Photo by Meghan Christian)

throughout the whole time, which is why we switched to holding breakout sessions,” Everhart explained. “That change in format seemed to better facilitate dialogue and networking,” she added.

At the Feb. 20 session, breakout sessions were facilitated by various neighborhood leaders such as Carma Lewis from Flint Neighborhoods United (FNU), Theresa Roach from the Crim Fitness Foundation, and others.

Lewis, who discussed the basics of starting a group, reminded those in her breakout session that residents looking to get involved don’t need to look far. “I start by looking out my window,” Lewis said when describing how she goes about finding problems in her community. “Talk to your neighbors,” she added. Lewis reminded attendees there is an interactive map on the FNU site where residents can find active neighborhood groups in their area. Find the map here: <https://www.flintneighborhoodsunited.org/flint-neighborhoods-map/>

Regardless of how a group forms, Lewis urged residents creating new groups to consider the various ways they communicate with their members, reminding them that not all Flint resi-

dents use email or have access to a phone. “Do what works for you, but keep those lines of communication open,” Lewis said.

Overall, the Neighbors Changing Flint series has been viewed as a success to the staff of the Neighborhood Engagement Hub. “The sessions have been great both years,” Everhart said. “We’ve found that participants have enjoyed the sessions and have gotten a lot out of participating in them,” she added.

Schedule of remaining workshops:

March 13: Funding Opportunities
March 20: Promoting Health Through Neighborhood Design
March 27: Planning for Long-term Change

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

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Ways to reduce blight include new court, landscaping changes

By Patsy Isenberg

An overview of the City of Flint's Blight Court, tips on how to conduct a survey, and suggestions for using landscaping, lighting, pathways, entrances, signs and barriers to prevent crime were among the topics covered at the second "Neighbors Changing Flint" workshop Feb. 27 at the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village.

The theme was "Blight Elimination" and about 30 residents attended. Ashley Everhart, director of the Neighborhood

Engagement Hub, began with an introduction to that night's format after residents munched on sandwiches, salad, cookies and sodas. She explained what blight is and emphasized that making improvements in Flint neighborhoods will beautify the city.

Two breakout sessions of 45 minutes each covered two topics each. Attendees chose which topics interested them most. Packets handed out contained information on the topics covered, including other agencies that could provide support for blight elimination efforts.

Neighborhood surveys, blight court

Topic one covered how to take a neighborhood survey. This session was conducted by Michael Lawlor from the City of Flint Planning and Zoning Division. The surveys are done by a two or three-person team, a driver and a data collector, volunteers who have attended a training session. The team uses a map and a mobile device to put the information on the property portal, which anyone can access at flintpropertyportal.com. According to Lindsay Crawford from City of Flint Blight Elimination

Division, that site has the most up-to-date information and she uses it fre-



Blight workshop presenters: (front row l-r) Alexandria Brown, Lindsay Crawford, Theresa Roach, Ashley Everhart, Ange'le Johnson. (Back row l-r) Amanda Rolfes, Zach Hayes, John Cohoon, Carma Lewis, Michael Lawlor, Alyssa Olivarez. (Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

quently.

Topic two, conducted by Crawford, provided information about the recently created Blight Court. The court's goal is to follow up on tickets given to those residents who have reported needing work done on their properties. If the work isn't done by an established time frame, the fine increases and the offender might have to appear in Blight Court. Crawford said the hope is this will encourage people to make the improvements required. Each ward in the city has been assigned a neighborhood safety officer allowed to issue tickets. A representative who works at the court, Alyssa Olivarez, provided information about how the court works and how to go about reporting a violator of blight offenses.

Landscaping changes

Topic one was conducted by John Cohoon from Applewood Estates and Crawford from the city's Blight Elimination Division. They explained ways to reduce the problem, such as

landscaping and barriers. One of the handouts in the packet reiterated that "A lot that looks cared for is less likely to be mistreated than one that looks vacant."

Topic two was about Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Michael Lawlor explained that implementing CPTED guidelines discourages dangerous situations. Lawlor provided tips on landscaping, lighting, pathways, entrances, signs and barriers that can make a big difference. Keeping tree limbs at six feet or higher and shrubs three feet or lower produces natural

surveillance, enabling property owners "to see and be seen," he said. See-through fencing also contributes.

The next "Neighbors Changing Flint" event, "Vacant Lot Reuse Strategies" is March 6, the third of six presentations on Wednesdays and is also from 5-8 p.m. at Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village at 4119 N. Saginaw St., Flint MI 48505. To attend any of these events email director@neighborhoodengagementhub.org or call 810-620-1299, ext 2.

EVM Staff Writer Patsy Isenberg can be reached at pisenberg@gmail.com

Volunteer Distributors Wanted

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Yo-Yo Ma celebration unites, electrifies crowd at Berston Field House

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Steel drummers, a mariachi band, twirling dancers, spoken word, African drum and dance, a string quartet — and in the midst of it, a little bit of Bach by a world-renowned cellist and a joyous atmosphere — that was Thursday’s “Flint Voices: Culture, Community and Resilience” showcase at Berston Field House.



BaBa Collins & Yo-Yo Ma
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

A crowd of several hundred had to park up and down side streets off Saginaw and plod through ice and muddy slush on a miserable winter day to get into the iconic field house. Once inside, they packed the famous gym where there were only three rows of chairs provided.

“It’s unbelievable ... it’s amazing, oh my gosh,” cellist Yo-Yo Ma, the celebrity and star of the show, gushed as one local act followed another. “Do we have talent in Flint or what? WOW.”

He then pulled off his sweater, took up his instrument, and played Bach’s Cello Suite #1, a piece, he said, which “celebrates renewal and new beginnings.” The crowd applauded and lustily cheered. Then he called back to the stage “BaBa” Collins, from the Kuungana African Drum company, and the two played a kinetic, high-spirited improvised duet.

“We are so excited,” Bryant Nolden,

executive director of Berston Field House, said as he circulated among the crowd between acts, receiving many hugs and being photographed with Ma. “We have been extremely transparent about the arts millage,” he added, referring to the estimated \$400,000 Berston will be receiving every year for the next ten as part of a vote by Genesee County residents last year. “This is part of it,” he said, smiling broadly and surveying the crowd.

The two-hour event featured The University of Michigan-Flint Jazz Combo, the Kuungana African Drum and Dance Company, Capoeira Dance and Soul, Creative Expressions Dance Studio, UM-Flint spoken word artists David Guster and Lamees Musaid, The Steelheads from Mott Middle College, The Boys and Girls Club of Flint Steel Band, El Ballet Folklorico Estudiantil and Flint Mariachi Band, The Dort Honors String Quartet, and Tapology.

Ma’s visit to Flint was a “Day of Action,” an event sponsored by the University Musical Society of the University of Michigan, part of a 36-stop worldwide tour by the acclaimed musician.



Mariachi band at Yo-Yo Ma celebration
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

The Flint visit was something special — at Ma’s request, his itinerary was re-arranged to include a focus on the city when he stopped in Ann Arbor.

Detroit journalist Anna Clark, author of *The Poisoned City: Flint’s Water and the American Urban Tragedy*, came to Flint specifically to witness the Berston event.

“Seeing kids sing and make music with all their hearts — it was a beautiful thing,” Clark said, noting how the young artists beamed as they walked through the supportive, high-fiving crowd after their per-



Yo-Yo Ma & E Hill De Loney
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

formances. It was, she said, “purely cheerful.”

“This was through the roof,” said an exuberant Tom Allen, a musician who said he moved to Flint several years ago to take advantage of the city’s affordable housing. “To see somebody from the top of an erudite field playing in the nitty gritty of an American city ... it’s beautiful.”

Allen said he feels like he’s witnessing the “lively rebuilding” of a down and out place. What’s happening in Flint “has implications for every other Rust Belt city,” he said as a raucous, colorful mariachi band took to the stage.

Gary Fisher, downtown financial planner and radio talk show host said, “Oh my God, this is so amazing. This is one of the coolest cultural events in the history of Flint — I’ve seen 54 years of them and I rank this right at the very top. To bring the community together and to really powerfully express what we’re all about — you can see it right here.”

Joshua, 11, of Grand Blanc, said, “It was really nice to have Yo-Yo Ma here,

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... Yo-Yo Ma

(Continued from Page 8.)

and especially with the drummer.[BaBa Collins].” His brother, John, 9, who plays the cello himself — said he loved the steel drums and when it ended, he said, “I wanted to hear more!”

Lev Hunter was emcee for the event, and Tunde Olaniran, a recording artist, poet and songwriter who grew up in Flint, offered a welcome. Curator for the program performances was community activist and artist Natasha Thomas-Jackson.

Ma’s visit was co-sponsored by the Office of the Chancellor and the University of Michigan-Flint Office of the Provost, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Hagerman Foundation, the Ruth Mott Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.



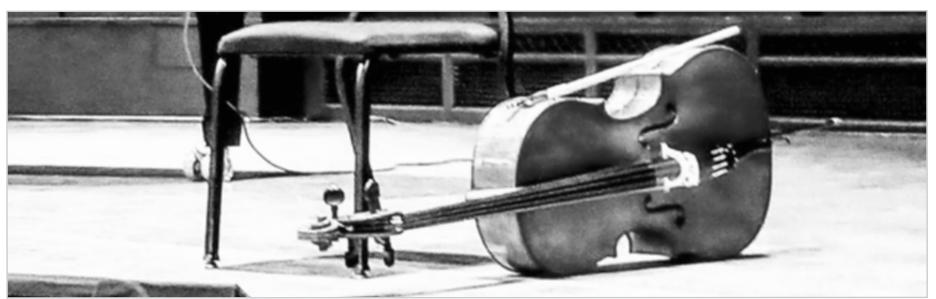
Bryant Nolden & Yo-Yo Ma
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

Food from the Flint Farmers' Market was provided by Semi-Sweets, Flour and Eggs, MaMang and Sweet Peaces.

In addition, a video project, “Reclaiming Our Story: Arts, Journalism and Community Resilience,” was presented in an adjoining space by Jiquanda Johnson of *FlintBeat* and Marjory Raymer of *Flintside*.

Earlier in the day, Ma met with about 50 community leaders at the Flint Fresh Food Hub to strategize and “to explore how culture can raise all voices in Flint and build a more inclusive and resilient community.”

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On the night of cellist Yo-Yo Ma’s recent appearance in Ann Arbor, Ma’s performance before a packed house at Hill Auditorium offered a magical aligning of the stars, a prelude to the next day when he brought his singular warm-hearted excitement to Flint. Read Darlene Carey’s full account of Ma’s Ann Arbor “story in sound” at eastillagemagazine.org. (Photo of Ma’s cello awaiting the master’s arrival by Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.)

Greater Flint Arts Council
Community Arts Grant Program

CALL FOR GRANT PROPOSALS

Greater Flint Arts Council (GFAC) is pleased to announce the 2019 Share Art Genesee Community Arts Grant Program. GFAC will be making grants to established nonprofit and governmental arts and cultural institutions. The Share Art Genesee Program was established to provide grants to build the capacity of local arts organizations in reaching their potential of transforming our communities into vibrant, inclusive destinations with a unique sense of place.

HOW TO APPLY WORKSHOPS

- Wed., February 27th** 5:30pm – 7:00pm **Greater Flint Arts Council**, 816 Saginaw St., Flint
- Thurs., March 7th** 6:00pm – 7:30pm **Clio Center for the Arts**, 3370 W. Vienna Rd., Clio
- Wed., March 20th** 6:00pm – 7:30pm **Fenton Community & Cultural Center**, 150 S. Leroy St., Fenton

Register by emailing: greg@greaterflintartscouncil.org.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: APRIL 1, 2019



More information about applying along with the required online application can be found at shareartgenesee.org.

For more information: **810.238.ARTS (2787)** or email: greg@greaterflintartscouncil.org.

This program is funded in whole by the Genesee County Arts Education and Cultural Enrichment Millage funds. Your tax dollars are at work.

Review: “A \$500 house in Detroit” paints a familiar picture for Flint readers

By Harold C. Ford

“You’re either part of the solution or you’re part of the problem.”

– Eldridge Cleaver

“What I learned ... was that my goal wasn’t to build a house. It was to transform myself by building a house.”

– author Drew Philp, *A \$500 House in Detroit, Rebuilding an Abandoned Home and an American City*, 2017, Scribner

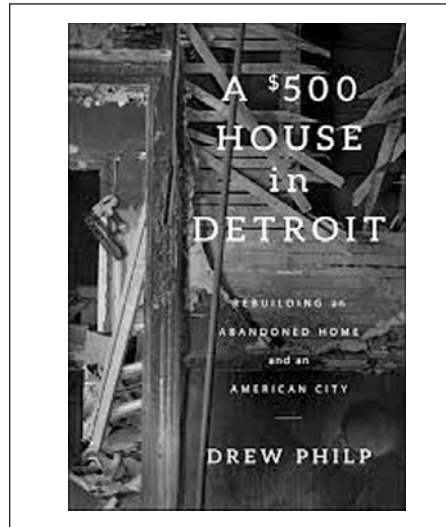
Don’t buy Drew Philp’s book, *A \$500 House in Detroit*, if all you’re looking for is how-to-do-it lessons on resurrecting an utterly abandoned shell of a house in a mostly empty neighborhood in a major American city. You’re better off visiting the local library, the local household goods stores, or accessing online videos as Philp did.

Indeed, Philp provides summary overviews of building a chimney from salvaged bricks, rebuilding a foundation, installing wallboard, plumbing, and windows. He piggybacks descriptions of these projects with sharp, historical analysis of the social, economic, and political forces that inhabit his building materials and the challenged city that he adopts. Take, for example, his reflection on the water that, after great labor, he provides to his thirsty home:

“The water had made a journey of thousands of miles and years to be trapped in little plastic tubes running to my faucet. In principal, it was a rather simple system — just cylinders to carry water around — but in practice it spanned the globe and the weather and thousands of years, from the copper miner in Peru, to the Roman aqueduct engineer, to the Chinese workers making plastic pipes, to the miracle of evaporation, climate change, and the Ice Age, to the cup I held in my hand as my father, smiling, watched me draw from my brand-new old kitchen sink the first water that had run through my house in a decade.”

Buying a house

In 2009, Philp was a self-described



“well-read twenty-one-year-old white kid” who thought he could “marry my education with my general knowledge of repairing things and fix the biggest project, the ailing city (Detroit) that had loomed over my childhood.”

The 20 or so people who attended a book club meeting at the Flint Public Library in January had a chance to meet Philp in person and learn more about him and the history of his book.

“I’m a blue-collar kid from Adrian, Michigan, about 70 miles southwest of Detroit,” he told them.

A decade earlier, he had been traveling back and forth from jobs in Detroit to the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, where he was nearing completion of a four-year degree.

He described as serendipitous, a Halloween party conversation between himself, dressed as an organ grinder, and Will, dressed as a monkey. Will had just purchased a home in Detroit for \$3,000.

That sparked an idea for Philp, who had been sanding wood floors in Detroit houses for \$8.50 an hour. “Working in these houses got me thinking, ‘Oh, I should buy one of these houses — they’re really cheap right now — and stay here because it will keep me here.’”

“I moved to Detroit because I could have an impact,” he told FPL patrons. “If I had a house, if I bought a house, if I put

my blood sweat and tears into that house, I wouldn’t be able to leave.”

Philp’s decade-long sojourn that began with considerable idealism and naïveté was oft-tempered by sparse resources and the harsh realities of his mission:

“I felt old and rusty, like my truck, surprised at what was holding me together. My credit card was maxed out,” he said. “I didn’t have a dollar to my name. Most of my words were curses, the only thing ready at the lips. I was hungry and cold, mentally, physically and emotionally tired.”

Street-level view

Turning away from the more comfortable path that his privilege and education may have afforded him, Philp fashioned a way to respond to the all-consuming blob of American capitalism that mesmerizes the masses with shiny gadgets and phony culture. He staked a claim along a nearly dead artery of a great, but diminished, American city and board by board, window by window, breathed life into the decrepit hull of a house.

\$500 House details the way Philp and his neighbors resurrected their Poletown neighborhood using agriculture, arts, and community. It’s largely, but not entirely, a microcosmic, street level story of human tribes, their amazing achievements and monumental missteps, as they create and abandon cities and civilizations.

Detroit’s 21st century plight was precisely why Philp landed there. “Nowhere was America’s fight for its soul clearer than in what was the Motor City,” he wrote. “Politics wasn’t going to fix things any longer. We’d have to do it ourselves.”

Romance and realism

\$500 House is more than nails, cement blocks, and hammers. Philp’s monomaniacal focus on his new home is broken one summer when he meets Cecilia, an architect from Italy. Their budding romance is consummated during a visit to Belle Isle and described in a steamy

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... Review

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departure from the rest of the account.

"I ran my hand under her shirt, my rough fingers along the smooth olive skin of her back. I gently pressed her against the ground and moved my hand around her body to her breast. She closed her eyes and arched her back and we were one."

The affair painfully ends when Cecilia tells him, "I have a life in Italy, a house, a boyfriend. We are engaged." Romantic reality check.

Philp's pioneer spirit is further chastened by the reality of violent crime. A neighbor advises him: "If someone has the audacity to come into your house, they have the audacity to kill you. You have to protect yourself."

Eventually there's "a knock on the door" in the dead of the night followed by someone trying to kick in the front door to gain entry. Philp grabbed the shotgun given him by his father and shouted, "I'm going to blow your head off, motherfucker." The invader departed.

"I knew that man outside wasn't my enemy," wrote Philp. "My enemy was the addiction stunting my community and the lack of help for it ... the desperation we've allowed to ferment within our brothers and sisters."

Potshots and shoutouts

Philp is unambiguous about what he disdains: freeway construction and urban renewal; arsonists; pretentious ruin porn artists; privileged culture as found in Ann Arbor and at the University of Michigan; banks; useless wars; restrictive covenants in suburban communities; big-box stores like Walmart; emergency managers; tax breaks for sports cathedrals; environmental racism; consumerism and planned obsolescence.

The 290 pages of his book find joyousness in: recycling; nature; light; industriousness; neighbors; pets; home ownership; agriculture and gardens.

Parting shots

Detroit's historic bankruptcy resonates with Philp as a seminal moment in 21st

century America: "The bankruptcy marked the first shots in the battle for Detroit's soul," he writes. "On one side stood the old methods of cold economics and scale, and on the other a grassroots movement of education, community, and compassion."

"The fight is against the corruption of the bosses, the politicians, the moneymen, those who perpetuate inequality, racism, and antidemocracy for their own gain."

Finally, Philp leaves the reader with some optimism and resolve in the final pages of his book:

"I find hope within the sanctuary of the walls of this house, nailed into each and every board I placed myself, screwed into every light switch, flowing out of each faucet."

"I know that I did the best I could with what I had. Our only failure can be trying nothing new. I haven't given up yet, and the game ain't over. I live free. I'm still here."

EVM Staff Writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com

FLINT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
1120 E. Kearsley St, Flint
810.234.1695

Wine Tasting
SATURDAY, APRIL 6
7:00p-9:00p

Viva España!

MAIN EVENT
Join us to sample a wide variety of international and domestic wines with a focus on Spain. Indulge in delicious hors d'oeuvres and desserts from local restaurants and enjoy entertainment all evening long. Complimentary valet available.

WINE PULL
Don't miss the popular Wine Pull Raffle. Every \$20 entry receives a number that corresponds to a mystery bottle of wine. All wines sampled are available to win, including some very rare and expensive bottles!

Funds raised cover bus transportation and art materials for elementary and secondary students participating in FIA education programs, as well as the JLF and its community partners.

FLINT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
Wine Tasting
JUNIOR LEAGUE OF FLINT

Flint Institute of Arts & Junior League of Flint
Present the 20th Annual

FIA & JLF Members
\$75/person

Non-Members
\$100/person

VISIT FLINTARTS.ORG OR
FOLLOW THE EVENT ON FACEBOOK
FOR TICKETS AND MORE
UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of events available to our readers – beginning after our publication date of March 7. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our April issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at meghan.christian22@gmail.com by March 26 .

Wellness at the Wheel

Mon - Sat.
Various times
The Ferris Wheel,
615 S. Saginaw St., 6th floor
Admission: \$12

A variety of health and well-being classes offered at the Ferris Wheel.

Schedule:

Monday: 5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Tuesday: 7 a.m. - Rise and Shine Yoga
4:30 p.m. - Pound Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Wednesday: 9:30 a.m. - Ashtanga Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Thursday: 2 p.m. - Adaptive Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Yoga Basics
Friday: 5:30 p.m. - Mindful Movement
Dance
Saturday: 8:15 a.m. - Hatha Yoga
(Call 810-213-4710 for more info.)

March Art Walk

March 8
6 p.m.
Various Locations Downtown
Admission: Free

Food, drink, and art at various locations downtown.

Natalie MacMaster

March 8
8 p.m.
Capitol Theatre,
140 E. 2nd St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$15-35

An evening of celtic music from Natalie MacMaster, a star fiddler and step-dancer.

Girls Rock Meetup

March 9
10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Flint Local 432,
124 W. 1st St.
810-232-1399
Admission: donation of up to \$20

For girls ages 9 to 15, join alums from the Girls Rock Camp for a monthly meet-up at the Flint Local. Participants will get to do a variety of activities around music such as songwriting, band practice, and more.

“Finding Neverland”

March 9, 2 and 8 p.m.
March 10, 2 p.m.
The Whiting,
1241 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$33-68

Based on the award-winning film that shares the same name, the play follows Peter Pan author J.M. Barrie as he finds inspiration for his tale.

Science on Tap: Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

March 12
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.
Table & Tap,
555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631
Admission: Free

Join Amanda Taylor, a UM-Flint psychology lecturer, in a discussion on mindfulness and emotion regulation in Table & Tap’s casual setting.

Friday Crafternoon with Flint Handmade

March 15
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Totem Books,
620 W. Court St.
Admission: Free

Join Flint Handmade and Totem for an afternoon of crafting! All non-messy crafts are welcome!

39th Annual Pot o’ Gold 4-Mile Walk/Run

March 17
2 - 5 p.m.
Downtown Flint
Admission: \$10-30

Participate in the 39th annual Pot o’ Gold 4-Mile Walk/Run! To register for the event and for more information visit: www.thecompleterunner.com/potofgoldrun/

Flint Symphony Orchestra March Classical Concert

March 23
7:30 p.m.
The Whiting,
1241 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$10-60

An evening of classical music at The Whiting. Under the conduction of Enrique Diemecke and featuring Baron Fenwick on the piano.

Science on Tap: Biology and Chemistry Outreach Collaboration with Flint Community Partners

March 26
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.
Table & Tap,
555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631
Admission: Free

Join Jim Cohen, a Kettering assistant professor in biology, and Veronica Moorman, a Kettering assistant professor in chemistry and biochemistry, in a casual setting.

“Significant Other”

March 29 and March 30, 7:30 p.m.
March 31, 2 p.m.
UM-Flint Theatre,
303 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-6522
Admission: \$8-15

See the UM-Flint Department of Theatre and Dance put on a rom-com about love, friendship, and finding oneself.

“Spamalot”

March 29, 8 p.m.
March 30, 2 and 8 p.m.
The Whiting,
1241 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$33-68

Lovingly ripped off from Monty Python’s “Holy Grail,” “Spamalot” is an award-winning show set during the time of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

Family Fun Literacy Event: “Hey Smart Girl”

March 30
2 - 5 p.m.
Greater Flint Arts Council,
816 Saginaw St.
810-238-2787
Admission: Free

Hosted by EMPOWER, a day of activities celebrating the release of the second book in the “Hey Girl” series, “Hey Smart Girl.”

... Numbers

(Continued from Page 3.)

office. After a long delay, the Ethics and Accountability Board has been established, and is in the process of creating a job description for the new position.

Yet, progress seems to be moving at a glacial pace, with one delay after another. It's no secret that some on the council, and in the mayor's office, are not fans of having an ombudsman looking over their shoulders. But that's what the voters decided by a 2-1 margin in 2017. It's time that Flint posts the position, and moves ahead with hiring our first ombudsperson in over eight years. It may be a major issue in this year's mayoral campaign. And now, with the new charter just barely in place, there are proposals to modify and amend it in ways that might require a new charter revision.

Mayor Weaver's reelection campaign fund: \$250,000

With the primary in August, and the general election next November, the Flint mayoral race has barely begun to heat up. Mayor Weaver, who hasn't officially announced her candidacy, has already raised about \$250,000 for the campaign.

It's quite possible that the campaign funds are a reflection of the confidence her supporters have in her role as mayor, and her handling of the water crisis. But questions have been raised about the source of those funds. How many come from city contractors? How many are from those who have been involved in working with Flint's water crisis? Are any of those funds "pay to play" for those who have received city contracts? Will the mayor face a serious challenge in either the August primary or the November election this year? Will any opponent be able to equal her campaign funds?

Flint's water numbers: four parts per billion

Recent tests of Flint's water show a continuing improvement in lead levels. As a result of a lawsuit from the Concerned Pastors for Social Action and others, water tests revealed that the 90th percentile for 51 high-risk homes in Flint placed the lead levels at four

parts per billion (ppb) less than the 15 parts per billion (ppb) that has been considered the federal "action level." That federal level will drop to 12 ppb starting in 2025. These numbers are in line with other tests within the last year. But a high level of distrust remains in Flint, and it will take more than six months of numbers to change that. From all indications, the number of residents who trust the water will rise much more slowly than the actual improvement in the water.

Money to dig up the pipes: \$300 or \$5,000?

In her response to the Flint water crisis, the governor has reorganized the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, with the goal of making the reporting of environmental problems more effective. After a brief conflict with Republicans in the legislature, it looks like the reorganization will go ahead, at least for now.

The governor also has indicated the state will avoid micromanaging the Flint water crisis and will allow Mayor Weaver to go ahead with full traditional excavation of the city's remaining water pipes, rather than relying on the less-expensive hydro-evacuation process. The hydro-evacuation process costs about \$300 per house, and the traditional excavation is about \$5,000. The state has agreed to pay back \$6.6 million that was withheld during the dispute of how to best replace the pipes in Flint.

Money to fix Flint's water: \$500 million

By some estimates, more than \$500 million has been received to repair Flint's water pipes, and deal with the effects of the water crisis. About \$167 million has been set aside for replacement and repair of Flint pipes by the state. Much of the rest is to be spent on children's health and economic development programs. But, with that amount of money, there has been controversy of how well it has been spent, who is in charge of it, and how well it has been accounted for. Almost certainly, those questions will continue to grow, and be the source for more con-

flict in city hall and beyond.

I don't know if the math prof was right about mathematics explaining everything, but it looks like a lot of our issues this year will revolve around someone's numbers, and how they all add up.

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

Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

7,966+

Source: Candice Mushatt, City of Flint public information officer. No change from Jan. due to weather.

Crews from the five area contractors doing the replacements have identified copper service lines at a total of 9,919 homes that did not need to be replaced. A total of 20,490 pipes have been excavated altogether as of 01/28.

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

Unclassified ads

MATT THE HANDYMAN. Not enough time in your busy life? I can help out. Repairs, painting, yard work. (231) 838-0256. Satisfaction guaranteed.
Two-Bedroom Upstairs Apartment For Rent. All bills paid. Close to UM-F and MCC. Call (810) 625-3927.



St. Paul's Episcopal Church MUSIC IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

MARCH CONCERT

• Sunday, Mar. 31, 4:00 pm
Nicholas Schmelter, organ

**Admission:
\$10 Adults, \$5 Students,
or Membership Pass**

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
711 South Saginaw Street
Flint, Michigan 48502
810-234-8637

... Flint

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museum in Michigan; 175,000 square feet facility that houses 25 galleries, 15 studios, and a theater; fifth largest art school in the nation serving 1,700 students annually; a collection of more than 8,000 objects from ancient to contemporary; state-of-the-art glass studios that rival any found in Toledo, OH, Seattle, WA, or Corning, NY.

- Longway Planetarium: Michigan's largest planetarium.
- The Whiting: a 2,000+ seat auditorium that hosts the Flint Symphony Orchestra (FSO) and a rich annual program of diverse performances from Spamalot to Shakespeare.
- Flint Institute of Music: home to the FSO and the Flint School of Performing Arts that serves some 3,500 students.
- Flint Repertory Theatre: with abundant programming for both youth and adults.
- Sloan Museum: a museum of regional history augmented by rotating and diverse exhibits.
- Other: the Flint Public Library, historic Applewood Estate, Buick Gallery, and Perry Archives add to the Flint Cultural Center's swag.

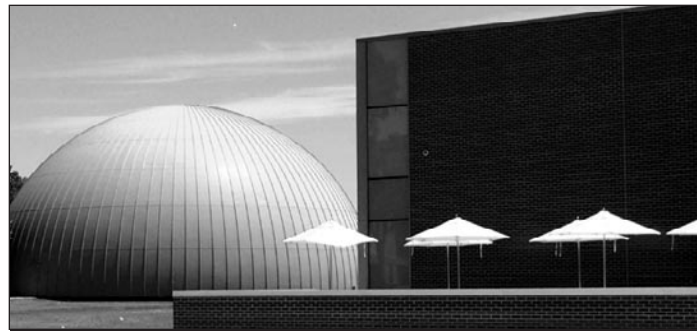
5. People

Flint's metropolitan community of 400,000 to 500,000 persons, depending on how far you extend the radius, is homeland for a richly diverse population of families that were drawn to mid-Michigan in the last century from all directions by the emerging auto industry. In one week, for example, I embraced auto magnate descendant Maryann Mott at a cultural event on a weeknight, then high-fived my pool-playing, blue-collar pals at the weekend pool league.

6. Art

The Flint community loves art. The aforementioned Flint Institute of Arts is augmented by several local galleries, including the Greater Flint Arts Council, MW Gallery, and the newly relocated Buckham Gallery. Smaller displays are common in local libraries, universities, and

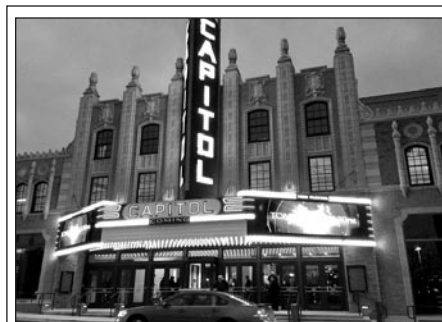
businesses. Further, in 2018, Genesee County residents passed an arts millage by a robust margin, bringing in \$8.7 million a year for the arts for the next 10 years.



Longway Planetarium and FIA
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

7. Foundational support

Though largely abandoned by the auto industry in recent decades, "old automobile money" still supports the Flint community. Start with the C.S. Mott Foundation and its nearly 100-year history of support from its assets totaling nearly \$3 billion. The Ruth Mott Foundation, Flint's second largest foundation, now focuses its grant-giving on Flint's north side. The Community Foundation of Greater Flint, with assets of nearly \$250 million, has served Genesee County residents since its



Capitol Theatre
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

establishment in 1988. Several other smaller foundations and trusts provide support for arts, education, and other charitable causes.

8. Libraries

At least 24 public libraries serve the residents of the Flint metropolitan area, with the Flint Public Library as an anchor neighboring the cultural center. Extensive libraries are also found at Flint's institutions of higher learning. And check out locally-owned Totem Books, located at

620 W. Court St., and other bookstores that dot the area's landscape.

9. Sports

Flint's national reputation in athletics is inarguable. The impact of Flint-area athletes at the collegiate and professional levels is impressive: from boxing champions Claressa Shields and Chris Byrd to NCAA and NBA champions Glen Rice and Trent Tucker; from two-time Super Bowl champion Carl Banks to hockey defenseman Ken Morrow, an Olympic Games and NHL champion.

Flint public high schools amassed 47 state championships from 1930 to 1995. Nearby school systems have added dozens more, led by Beecher with 23. Minor league sports teams include the Flint Rogues (rugby), the Firebirds (hockey), and Flint City Bucks (soccer). Intercollegiate and club-level teams are to be found at Flint's institutions of higher learning.

Amateur leagues of all sorts are available to Flint area citizens. The annual CANUSA games matching Flint's amateur athletes with those from Hamilton, Ontario is the longest-running amateur sports competition in North America.

10. Central city upgrades

UM-Flint began its move to the central city in the 1970s and now dominates the downtown landscape with the construction, acquisition, or repurposing of a dozen or more buildings. Flint Farmers' Market, recognized as one of the "Great Places in America" by the American Planning Association, moved to its current downtown location in 2014. Several downtown buildings have recently been given facelifts, led by the \$37 million, 18-month top-to-bottom restoration of the Capitol Theatre. Plentiful restaurants should satisfy anyone's appetite or thirst.

11. Proximity

Flint is a 50-minute drive from the university towns of Ann Arbor and East Lansing and all they offer in terms of entertainment, culture, and college athletics. Metro Detroit is only an hour's drive from

... Flint

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Flint. To the north are the beautiful woodlands of the northern lower peninsula and upper peninsula of Michigan.

12. Health care systems

Rarely do I have to leave the county for my health care needs. Three major hospitals — McLaren, Genesys, and Hurley — serve the area's population. Mott Children's Health Center and dozens of other clinics serve the Flint community.

13. Houses of worship

Pick a faith tradition and I bet you don't have to go more than a few miles to find its house of worship. There are hundreds.

Final thoughts

I didn't have a long enough list to include other ideas that came to mind while crafting this baker's dozen piece. A longer list would include Flint's temperate climate, events (2nd Friday Art Walk, Jazz Fest, Back to the Bricks, Flint Art Fair, Crim Festival of Races), and our rich tradition of music (Velvelettes, Grand Funk Railroad, Ready for the World, Dayton Family).

I'm not a Flint slappy. I know we've got our problems in terms of crime, blight, poverty, secondary education, and infrastructure, including street surfaces and water supply. But I invite those who evaluate towns like Flint to dig a little deeper. I extend an invitation to Messrs. Stebbens and Suneson to come to Flint. We'll visit the FIA, have dinner at Cork on Saginaw, listen to some hot jazz at Soggy Bottom, and shoot some pool at Sherman's Lounge.

EVM Staff Writer Harold C. Ford is retired from 43 years as an educator in the Beecher Community Schools, where he was the co-founder and first executive director of the Beecher Scholarship Incentive Program funded by the Ruth Mott Foundation. After having written for the Flint Voice and the Michigan Voice many years ago, Ford's return to journalism at East Village Magazine over the past two years is part of his stated "bucket list." He can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

Stonemason, artist, champion of peace David Smallidge dead at 83

By Jan Worth-Nelson

David Smallidge was a stone mason who helped lay bricks for the downtown campus of UM - Flint and constructed the frame for the original Flint Farmers' Market mosaic. He also created exquisitely detailed black and white porcelain plates and vases that found their way into New York galleries. A key member of Buckham Gallery from its beginnings in the '80s and an ardent supporter, with his wife Bernice, of peace movements and community arts efforts, Smallidge died Feb. 27 at age 83 of Alzheimer's disease.

"The paradox in Dave's work is he has huge hands that handled brick and cinder block all day and carrying around 125 pounds of hod," said his longtime friend Richard Mach of Flint. Pointing to one of Smallidge's vases, Mach added, "And then those same hands painted this exquisite, seamless pattern on this equally seamlessly apportioned vase made with those same hands."

Smallidge was frequently seen exercising his freedom of speech at the corner of Miller Road and Ballenger Highway and other locales. "Those who knew David well know he was not afraid to fully express his deeply held convictions about the ever changing state of democracy here in America. And he lived out loud those beliefs," Mach said.

His classic pickup truck, emblazoned with political bumper stickers, was readily recognizable around town for years.

His yearly October birthday parties at his property in Burton were legendary, bringing many of the arts and music crowd for bonfires and barbecue.

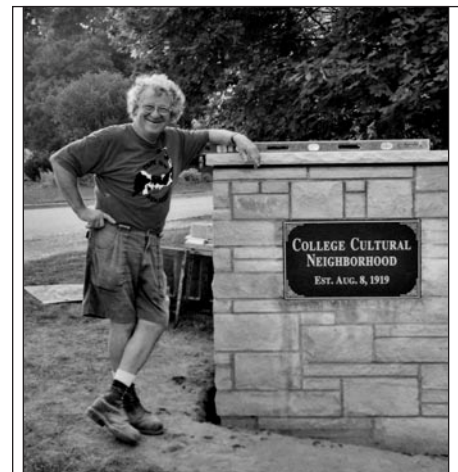
"David was built like the materials he worked with; rock solid, a bit weathered, seemingly eternal," downtown denizen Joel Rash, manager of Flint Local 432, commented. "His strong hands could lay brick from sunup to sunset, but were delicate enough to create intricate sculpture."

"He was kind and insightful, and had a sharp wit but a giant heart. He was a blue collar guy with a tremendous work ethic, and a lot of what he did was unas-

suming and utilitarian, kind of like he was. He will be missed, but reminders of his time on earth will be with us for a long, long time."

One reminder of his work is the familiar stone entryway to the College Cultural neighborhood on Court Street.

Mach said Smallidge showed early signs of Alzheimers 22 years ago, surviving through a very slow progression. Smallidge's wife Bernie died suddenly without warning four years ago, leading



David Smallidge
(Photo by Sherry Hayden)

to Smallidge's eventual departure from their home of many decades into assisted living. He granted his brain to the University of Michigan for Alzheimer's research, Mach said.

A Genesee County native, Smallidge was a scoring member of the state championship track and field team at Otisville High School in 1953. He loved organ music, especially classical and jazz. He also was a pilot.

Smallidge is survived by four children: Air Force Lt. Col.(Ret.) Dave Smallidge Jr. of Colorado Springs, CO; Wendy [Littleton-Kozma] of Boston, MA., a specialist in childhood wellness; Ben of Burton, a patented inventor and insurance agent; and Joey of Atlanta, GA., a minister and businessman. He also leaves behind ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

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

Village Life

I love Flint: 13 reasons why my town is NOT the 11th “Worst City to Live In”

By Harold C. Ford

I’m an unabashed, unashamed, scream-it-from-the-rooftops supporter/defender of Flint. And yet once again, my hometown was put on another “worst” list. This time, it was a publication called *24/7 Wall St.* Using “an index of over two dozen measures to identify the worst cities to live in,” Flint was ranked the 11th worst in the U.S.

I was drawn to the article while perusing the website of the *Detroit Free Press* and came across an article titled “6 Michigan cities make list of worst places to live in America.” When I spotted a photo of the familiar arches that adorn brick-blanketed Saginaw Street, I knew that the Vehicle City had made a shit-list cut once again.

In its Feb. 4 posting, *24/7 Wall St.* writers Samuel Stebbens and Grant Suneson stated that cities that made the the list “tend to have high crime rates, widespread poverty, weak job markets, and little in the way of entertainment options or cultural attractions.”

That’s the 10,000-foot view. Here’s the street-level view from a Flintstone veteran with seven decades in the community. It’s also the view of someone who’s traveled to all 50 states; all Canadian provinces except for Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories; and some two dozen nations in Europe, Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean.

It took all of 10 minutes to cobble together a baker’s dozen list of reasons why Flint is not the 11th “worst city to live in.”

1. Historical impact

Historically, Flint is David to the nation’s Goliath narrative. Consider the following:

- birthplace of the world’s largest auto builder, General Motors (early 1900s);
- originator of an after-hours community education model that became the envy of the nation (1935);
- a two-month labor struggle, the Sit-down Strike, that birthed the United Auto Workers and helped grow America’s

middle class (1936-37);

- election of the first African-American mayor of a major U.S. city since Reconstruction (1966);
- the first municipality in the nation to adopt an open housing ordinance (1967-68);
- release of the movie *Roger & Me* that signaled corporate abandonment of American communities (1989);
- the Flint water crisis that served as the nation’s wake-up call about the safety of its water delivery systems (2014-present);
- release of the Netflix series *Flint Town* that shone a light on police-community relations (2018).



Flint Institute of Arts
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

2. Standard of living, or cost-of-living adjusted to wages

The ratio of cost-of-living relative to wages is superior in Michigan compared to most other states. According to *Governing the States and Localities*: “The adjusted hourly wages varied greatly across the country, ranging from \$14.31 in Flagstaff, Ariz., to \$29.92 in Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C. for 2014. The metro area average for all regions was \$22.39 per hour.”

The averages in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Detroit — the only Michigan cities shown among 191 metro

areas — were \$24.27, \$24.61, and \$26.92 respectively. Collectively, the average adjusted wage for those three metropolitan areas in Michigan was \$25.27.

By contrast the cost-of-living adjusted wage for six metro areas in California — San Diego, Bakersfield, Los Angeles, Fresno, Stockton, and San Francisco — ranged from a low of \$19.05 to a high of \$22.44. Collectively, the adjusted hourly wage for six metro areas in the Golden State is \$20.45 — 24 percent lower than the three metro areas in Michigan.

The data shows what I’ve felt to be true for decades. The average worker in the Great Lakes State earns more than workers in most other states when adjusted for the cost of living. I strongly suspect that this is due to our rich history of labor union activism.

3. Flint is a college town

Flint boasts four institutions of higher learning—the University of Michigan-Flint (student count at 6,434); Kettering University (1,889), celebrating its 100th anniversary this year; Mott Community College (9,683); and Baker College (4,372). Though Baker has announced the closing of its Flint campus in 2020, that still leaves more than 18,000 students in the city.

Add in the enrollments of nine university satellite campuses — Central Michigan, Cleary, Davenport, Eastern Michigan, Ferris State, Northwood, Spring Arbor, Phoenix, and the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine — and you’re talking College Town USA.

Flint offers a less-expensive alternative to nearby higher ed behemoths MSU (38,996 students) in East Lansing and the University of Michigan (29,821) in Ann Arbor.

4. World-class cultural center

Flint boasts a world-class cultural center that hosts more than 610,000 visitors annually to the following venues:

- Flint Institute of Arts: second largest art

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