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Magazine

April 2019

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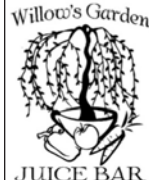
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Layout by Ted Nelson. Printing by Riegler Press Inc., 1282 N. Gale Rd., Davison, Mich. 48423.

East Village Magazine is a program of the Village Information Center Inc., a nonprofit corporation. We welcome material from readers, but all submissions become the property of the publication and if published will be edited to conform to the editorial style and policies of the publication. All inquiries about the publication should be mailed to *East Village Magazine*, Village Information Center, 720 E. Second St., Flint, Mich. 48503. Distribution is the first Thursday of each month. Display advertising rates are \$34 a column-inch plus any other costs. Unclassified ads are \$2.50 a printed line or part of a printed line. Rates subject to change without notice. The deadline for advertising is 10 days before each publication date.

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Commentary

Roads, schools, water, taxes — a short tour of Gov. Whitmer's \$60 billion budget

By Paul Rozycki

Last week, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer began a tour of the state to defend and explain her first budget proposal to the public. She's already been to Grand Rapids, Detroit, Dearborn, Jackson, Port Huron and Adrian, and plans are to continue the statewide journey as the budget works its way through the legislature.

Though her itinerary isn't complete, there is a good chance she will be in the Flint and Genesee County area to discuss the budget and hear the public response. As might be expected for a state the size of Michigan, the budget is a large and complex document, and all kinds of interest groups have specific parts that they like or don't like.

However, the biggest and most important parts of the budget fall into four major categories: the roads, education, water infrastructure, and, finally, taxes, which will overlap with everything else in the budget.

The big picture

Whitmer is proposing a \$60.2 billion budget for the state, a 3.6 percent increase over the past year. But the idea that the state has about \$60 billion to spend as it sees fit is a bit deceptive. More than 41 percent of that is from federal funds, which are typically earmarked for certain projects or purposes.

A number of other state funds are dedicated to specific goals. Only 18 percent, or about \$10.7 billion, is truly from the general fund, where lawmakers have some choice about how to spend the money. That amount is about the same as it was last year.

1) The roads

Whitmer won with the "fix the damn roads" election slogan, and it's no surprise that the roads are the first thing on her agenda. The problem is obvious. By

almost every official measure, Michigan's roads are in bad shape, and getting worse, and nearly every driver can tell of damaged cars and a teeth-rattling time on the highway.

Because of years of neglect and underfunding, the solution won't be quick, and it won't be cheap. Most experts estimate that the state should increase road repair spending by about \$2.7 billion over a number of years. In a state where there is only about \$10.7 billion in general fund money, where can we find that kind of money?

Whitmer has proposed a 45 cent increase in the gas tax, phased in over the next year and a half, to pay for it. As might be expected, there is significant opposition to the gas tax, but other options may be equally unpopular. Some suggest a sales tax increase, others favor a bond issue, and others suggest toll roads or other fee increases.

In addition to the gas tax increase, the governor would change the way funds are allocated. The funds would be directed toward the most heavily travelled and "economically significant" roads, rather than the rural roads as they are in the current formula.

The reaction to the gas tax proposal will certainly be a major issue of the governor's road tour as she hears from the voters. The details of the proposals to "fix the damn roads" deserve another column in the future.

2) Education

As our roads have deteriorated in the state, so has our educational system. Michigan has gone from being a leader in educational standards to trailing many other states. Whitmer proposes to increase the K-12 spending by \$507 million, by increasing the per-pupil funding by \$180 in the lowest-performing school districts, and \$120 for those currently

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Cover: Sylvester Manor



Photo of the Month: Harvesting the sap

Paddlers' Landing campaign succeeds, exceeds state match for Mott Park Recreation Area

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Flint River buffs are celebrating as a partnership of the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC), the Mott Park Neighborhood Association, the City of Flint and 600 other donors topped a \$50,000 goal to match an equivalent contribution from the State of Michigan for construction of a Paddlers' Landing at the Mott Park Recreation Area.

FRWC staff and representatives from the many partners and donors for the project assembled at the Ferris Wheel building downtown to mark the success of the campaign.

A beaming Rebecca Fedewa, executive director of the FRWC announced that the overall total raised for the project, including the state money, is \$138,000. "We've not only met our goal, we've blown it out of the water!" she said, adding, "The outpouring of love in this community — for this project and the Flint River — is just tremendous and we can't thank people enough for making the campaign a success."

The project will create safe and easier access to the river, which runs through the park, thanks to funds from 600 contributors to Patronicity, a crowd-funding platform of the Michigan Department of Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The watershed partners had 50 days to raise the \$50,000, reaching and exceeding the goal just a few hours before the time expired.

Sarah Scheitel, manager of the FRWC Corridor Alliance, said donations ranged from \$10 to \$10,000. The Paddlers' Landing campaign was primed by \$10,000 from the Hagerman Foundation. The total at the end of the campaign was \$68,000.

Other major donors included the Habitat for Humanity BRAND grant program, the Rotary Club, UAW Local 659, and the North American Engineering and Tooling Center.

Fedewa said additional donations included a \$5,000 personal donation from

Ridgway White, CEO and president of the C.S. Mott Foundation, \$7,000 from the Union Sportsman Alliance, and a final donation of \$8,000 from the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

The success of the Patronicity campaign clears the way for an additional \$50,000 from the MEDC through the Public Spaces, Community Places program. Fedewa said combining the Patronicity funds with the MEDC match and existing funds will "fully fund" the project, with construction set to be complete by this August.

Tom Saxton, a lifelong Mott Park resident, said the city's "turn back to the river is perfect," and noted, with Mott Park neighbors Ginny Braun and Teddy Robertson, that they are delighted about the natural beauty available. They said a bald eagle has been spotted recently in the vicinity.

The Mott Park Recreation Area was once a nine-hole golf course built in 1934 and designed for executives, who could

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... Landing

(Continued from Page 4.)

come out after “bankers’ ” hours, for a round, Robertson said. Closed in 2009, it has been resurrected in recent years by a devoted group of volunteers, the Mott Park Recreation Area Association. Lately, the park has been devoted to disc golf on a course designed by Paul Grasso, Myles Nakamura, and Mark Stevens, with help from Kettering University students and funding from the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

In a November 2017 story written for *East Village Magazine* by Robertson, Saxton, a women’s soccer coach at Michigan State, said he learned to play golf on the Mott Park course and taught



(left to right) Ginny Braun, Sarah Scheitler, Tom Saxton, Teddy Robertson
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

his sons there, too. To him, it was “a sacred space.”



Artist Rendering of Paddlers’ Landing
(Photo from Paddlers’ Landing website)

Project designers of the paddlers’ landing noted it will open up access to the southwest corner of the Mott Recreation Area currently accessible only by bicycle or on foot. The hope is that it will encourage use of the area for community use, and in general, support further development of the park.

Features of the landing project include:

- timber and concrete steps from the top of the river bank to the low water mark
- metal handrails
- wooden rails down the middle for sliding a canoe or kayak
- a transfer seat and step system to allow people with mobility issues to

safely access the water

- a gravel drive to the launch site and signage to mark the landing and recognize supporters

For project details and to donate, visit: patronicity.com/paddlerslanding.

Donations can always also be delivered to: The Flint River Watershed Coalition at 1300 Bluff Street, Suite 114, Flint, MI 48504.

The Flint River Watershed Coalition works in partnership to “protect, promote, and improve the Flint River and its watershed.” More information available at www.flintriver.org.

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



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Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint: Last count 7,966+

According to Candice Mushatt, City of Flint public information officer, because of a changeover of management of the pipeline replacement, there are no new numbers. She said as soon as adjustments are made, “certain information will become available.” As of the end of January, crews from the five area contractors doing the replacements had identified copper service lines at a total of 9,919 homes that did not need to be replaced. A total of 20,490 pipes had been excavated altogether as of 01/28. City officials say they hope to have all lead-tainted pipes replaced by 2020.

Artwork, fundraising begin to add women “Heroines and Humanitarians” to Flint’s sculpture pantheon

By Paul Rozycki

A heroine of the Flint water crisis, a matriarch of civil rights, an Olympic gold medal boxer, an ardent advocate for the poor, a benefactor of a major library, and a tireless champion in the NAACP: all these Flint women are deserving of sculptures in their honor, a Flint Institute of Arts sculptor and a Mott Community College trustee contend.



Jane Trotter & Andy Everman
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Jane Trotter, Flint Institute of Arts sculpture instructor, her students, and Mott College Trustee Andy Everman have decided it’s time to honor “heroines and humanitarians” who have contributed to Flint and Genesee County, as the community has honored many male auto pioneers with statues downtown.

And they’re putting some clay into the idea, hoping to raise necessary funds in time to unveil and celebrate six new sculptures by the 100th anniversary of the League of Women Voters in February, 2020 and Women’s History Month in March, 2020.

During last December’s Sybyl Award presentation, which honored many who have contributed to the betterment of Flint and Genesee County, a suggestion was made that there should be a memorial statue or bust of the late Sybyl Atwood, the award program’s namesake.

Atwood contributed much to the community with her leading role at the Resource Center and was a voice for the poor, sick and the elderly. The award program named for her, which ended its

ten-year run last year, was given to many who have pursued similar goals.

So Trotter and her students are creating busts of six women who have been leaders in the area. As the artists create the sculptures, Trotter and Everman also are seeking funding for crucial next steps, along with looking for a permanent home to display the finished work.

The women being honored are:

- Mona Hanna-Attisha, M.D., who became a primary voice for those harmed by the Flint water crisis. By challenging her critics both within and outside of the city, she became a leader in the campaign to deal with the Flint water crisis. Artist Jan Hanson is completing the statue of Dr. Hanna-Attisha.
- Sybyl McPeake Atwood, who worked for more than 40 years to advocate for the poor, the sick, and the elderly. In her role with the Resource Center, she motivated and organized countless volunteers for causes and projects that improved life in Genesee County. Trotter has completed Atwood’s bust.
- Olive Rankin Beasley, who has been called the “matriarch of the civil rights movement in Flint,” and devoted her life to racial equality and racial harmony. She was active in most of the civil right activities both in Flint and beyond. Carole Goyt is the sculptor working on Beasley’s statue.
- Claressa Shields, the Flint boxer who is a two-time Olympic gold medal winner and now established in a professional boxing career. She has proven to be a model for many young people in Flint and Genesee County. Sculptor Dee Moreno is creating Shields’ sculpture.
- Edith Prunty Spencer, has been a leader and active member of the Flint NAACP for more than 60 years, and has been a tireless champion for all. Trotter is completing the bust of Edith Spencer.
- Frances Willson Thompson has been a donor and philanthropist for many caus-

es and projects in the Flint area. She had been the major motivating factor behind the Frances Willson Thompson library, and the Critical Issues Forum at the UM-Flint. Her granddaughter Susie said of her, “She loved Flint so much and was so thankful for all that Flint had given to her family and her that she wanted to give back.” Trotter is also completing the



Dee Moreno sculpting Claressa Shields
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Thompson bust.

According to Everman, the project will require at least three separate and important steps. The first is underway right now, as Trotter and her students, with the support of the Flint Institute of Arts, are completing the six busts. The FIA has provided the studio time, clay, sculpture tools, and artistic expertise to support the project.

However, to cast the clay sculptures
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Flint City Council, mayor to get raises, pipeline management changes hands, city CFO quits

By Meghan Christian

The month of March continued Flint City Council (FCC) chaos — all delaying or complicating major matters of city business and exasperating some of the public in attendance, one of whom commented the city needed an ombudsman more than the city council.

First, even though a 5-4 majority of council members voted to reject proposed raises for Mayor Karen Weaver and themselves, a rule requiring a two-thirds vote to reject proposals from the city's Compensation Board means that it appears the raises will go through.

Second, the council's two cliques went to war with each other, making motions and counter motions to remove each other — not just from the meetings, but from their elected positions altogether. None of those motions passed.

In March the council also received and commented on the resignation of the City of Flint's Chief Financial Officer Hughey Newsome.

And the city's ongoing water pipe replacement program took another turn, with ROWE Professional Services taking over engineering management, replacing AECOM, a national civil engineering firm that had been in place since December 2017.

Pay increases to mayor and council go through despite majority denial

A hot topic in March revolved around proposed raises for the mayor and for FCC. The city's Compensation Board recommended that the mayor receive a 37 percent increase to her current salary, increasing it from \$91,801 to \$125,000 a year, and members of the FCC, who currently receive \$19,000 each, would get an additional \$1,000.

Some council members said the raise for the mayor would be a restoration of what she would have gotten had the city not been in emergency management. Others thought that it was not a good time to consider raises at all.

Fifth Ward Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter said, "She was the one that called this city into a state of emergency, okay? She's been working hard since the beginning of the water crisis ... I do believe the mayor does deserve a raise. I'm not going to vote to not give her a raise," Winfrey said.

"I personally do not think any elected official at a local, state, or national level should receive any pay increases, especially during the middle of their terms," Third Ward Councilperson Santino Guerra said.

"This is not responsible," Ninth Ward Councilperson Eva Worthing said. "This is not political ... but 37 percent increase for the mayor in a time where we are still going through the water crisis, that we are still recovering, and we are going to go in the negative, is just not appropriate."

Ultimately, Seventh Ward Councilperson Monica Galloway moved to reject the Compensation Board's recommendation to give the mayor and FCC members raises. However, the motion failed by a vote of five in favor and four opposed. While technically, the majority of the council were in favor of denying the raises, the city charter requires a vote of two-thirds, or six, in favor to pass. Those in favor of denying the raises were Guerra, Fourth Ward Councilperson Kate Fields, Galloway, Eighth Ward Councilperson Allan Griggs, and Worthing. Those opposed to denying the raises were First Ward Councilperson Eric Mays, Second Ward Councilperson Maurice Davis, Winfrey-Carter, and Council President Herb Winfrey.

CFO Quits

The City of Flint's Chief Financial Officer, Hughey Newsome, resigned, effective March 29.

Newsome, former senior manager for MorganFranklin Consulting in

Washington D.C., was appointed in November 2017 by a unanimous vote of the council. However, after 17 months of service, Newsome is resigning after negative treatment by members of the council, according to his letter of resignation and appearance before the council in March.

"I have been accused of lying, cheating and mismanaging funds. These lies and innuendos were passed on to the media in an attempt to slander my professional name," he wrote.

According to Newsome, the council will have some changes to make in upcoming weeks.

"Flint has been through too much, such as multiple emergency managers, rescinding of public services, receivership, and the water crisis," he wrote.

"Yes, politics as usual is the order of the day in many cities, counties, states and even federal government. It is expected, but I propose to you that due to Flint's situation, you cannot practice politics as usual. Flint, instead, needs leadership and needs it now," he wrote.

"The purpose of this letter is not to belittle or attack, but instead, to persuade," the letter continued. "I want to persuade this council to show true leadership and rise above the politics as usual to bring the Flint community to the next level.

"While I will move onto other responsibilities, a piece of my heart will always reside in the center of Genesee County in a place called Flint, Michigan. I just want to make sure that piece of my heart does not become broken," Newsome wrote.

"Mr. Newsome, I really hate to see you go," Council President Herbert Winfrey said to Newsome during final council comments March 25. "I think you have really served us well. I wish it was under other circumstances, but I am really going to miss you. You have set a high mark and we'll try to treat the other

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Local Methodists take stand after LGBTQ vote: “God loves all people — all means all”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

On Sunday, March 3, the week after the international United Methodist Church (UMC) took a vote to retain language excluding LGBTQ people, Rev. Jeremy Peters took to the pulpit at Court Street United Methodist Church to preach a sermon titled “God Loves All People: Bruised and Dimly Burning.”

That statement is part of the creed of the congregation of the Court Street church, a venerable downtown landmark built in 1894 whose members tend to be socially progressive. To Peters, Pastor Christy Miller-Black, choir director David Lindsey and the rest of the 400-member-plus congregation, that statement has never been more significant or more painfully relevant.

Their mission, declared in part on their website, is “to create a world with more peace and more hope by loving one another as Jesus loves us.”

Yet, in light of acrimonious divides, that mission, which the congregation interprets as calling for inclusion, seem to put Court Street in the thick of a debate about what exactly is meant by Christian love. And it’s a struggle being fought within the governing body of the United Methodist Church — with seven million members, the second largest Protestant denomination in the country.



Rev. Jeremy Peters
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

At a February meeting, about 1,000 delegates to the denomination’s General Conference in St. Louis voted by a slim majority to retain a 47-year-old statement from the church’s “Book of Discipline” — its policy manual, so to

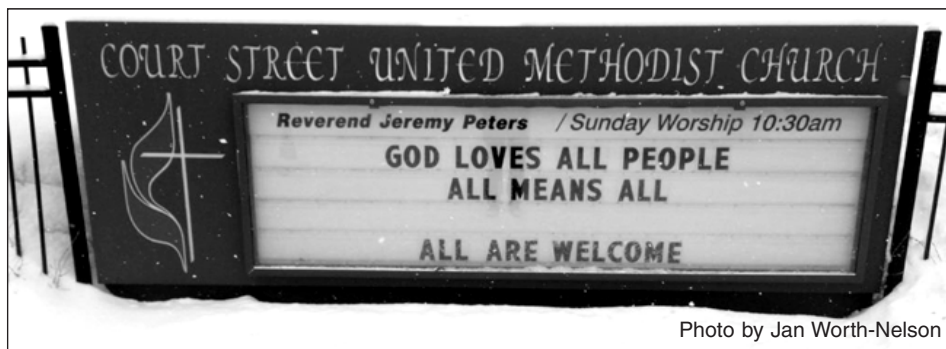


Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

speak, declaring “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Ironically, Peters explained in an interview, that statement was added in as a compromise in 1972 following a push by a group of liberal Methodists in the wake of the 1960s civil rights and gay rights movements. A principle approved that year read that “All people regardless of sexuality are people of sacred worth.” It was, he said, part of an attempt to acknowledge “we have long had gay clergy, gay bishops, gay lay leaders in our churches. It was a moment of social change and people in the church who wanted to articulate that LGBTQ community was part of who we are as a church.”

But following pushback from church conservatives, the second statement was added as a “nevertheless”: “Nevertheless, the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Discussion of the removal of that statement began at the General Conference in 2016, with two opposing plans, a “Traditional Plan” and a “One Church Plan” competing for denominational acceptance. Things got hot and so complicated that the meeting in St. Louis was set up exclusively to consider those alternatives.

The February vote to retain that “incompatible with Christian teaching” language, in the “Traditional Plan” by 53 to 47 percent, was accompanied by new wording punishing pastors officiating at same-sex weddings, calling for a suspension on the first “offense” and termination on the second. Also, although there now

are numerous gay Methodist clergy around the country — and even a gay bishop — they must not be in a partnership — and must not be “practicing” — that is, they must remain celibate.

This puts not just progressive UM congregations around the country, many of whom have long defied the prohibitions, into a head-on collision with the denomination and imperils progressive pastors, like Peters and Miller-Black.



Christy Miller-Black
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Peters and Miller-Black said they are sad, broken-hearted and grieving.

And for each of them, the moment is personal as well as collective. Peters grew up Methodist in the Upper Peninsula, going to church camp every summer and becoming a self-professed “Bible nerd.” His devotion to the church and to a theology and ministry of love and inclusion have been intense and lifelong.

A graduate of Albion College and the

(Continued on Page 9.)

... Methodists

(Continued from Page 8.)

Duke Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, N.C., he has been at Court Street for three and a half years.

Miller-Black began her religious life as a Nazarene and left that church out of disillusionment and a hunger for something more inclusive — making the current situation particularly painful. She went to seminary at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill. and has been at Court Street for about two and a half years.

“Part of what was so painful was that this felt like we were rejecting part of our identity as a denomination,” Peters said. Noting that it was Methodist founder John Wesley who first asserted it is possible for Christians to “agree to disagree,” Peters added, “that’s always been our ethos ... and yet this vote means that if you disagree, you are going to be removed — you are going to be rejected.”

David Lindsey, Court Street choir director, grew up in the Emanuel United Methodist church in Flint — a family connection going back three generations. He graduated from UM-Flint before attending Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.J. After coming out as gay at 21, he struggled with finding a place in the church community, always relying on music as his anchor. At 50, while not in a partnership, he has found a home in the Court Street community, which he regards as family. He says there are least a half dozen LGBTQ members in the choir and many more in the congregation.

“I am very, very angry and upset at the United Methodist Church,” Lindsey said. “I love my church family, but that’s different. As a gay man, the fact that if I were to want to become a pastor, it would be difficult — or if I wanted to get married, I would want to get married in my home church and be married by my pastor.”

In an interview two weeks later, Peters said the service the Sunday after the vote, March 3, was “incredibly moving and powerful — it’s not a morning I will ever forget.” He and Miller-Black scrapped all their previous plans for the day and start-

ed from scratch.

“We pastors have learned that there are people who have been deeply wounded



David Lindsey
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

by the church, have been rejected by the church in ways that have left marks and scars,” Peters said. “We felt like that morning we needed to confess that and ask forgiveness from people who have been hurt by the church.”

He said the sermon that day was about pain.

“Last weekend, my church had an opportunity to show grace to one another, to make room for each other at the table, to say we are going to continue to be a church where people are free to disagree, can agree to disagree, to start to bring some healing to the hurt we’ve done to LGBTQ persons for the the last 47 years,” he confessed to the congregation. “But that’s not what we did. Instead, we voted for more prohibitions and stricter penalties ... and in doing that we hurt an awful lot of people.”

Peters said several studies show that for LGBTQ youth, in particular, the church is “the most dangerous and most unhealthy place for them to be ... It can be deadly to be part of faith community that doesn’t affirm your sexuality or your gender identity.”

He offered three central messages:

1. *I am sorry. As a pastor, as a leader in the UM church ... I am sorry for all the times the church hurt you in the name of Jesus. I’m sorry people made you feel unwelcome and small because of your sexuality and your gender identity.*

2. *Thank you. In every church I’ve ever served, there have been LGBTQ members who lead worship, who serve the church, who build up the community, even when the UM Church has made it painful for*

you to be here — you have stuck with us, and I call you a miracle of God — you are the living embodiment of the graciousness and love of Jesus Christ.

3. *Churches will let you down, pastors, conferences, denominations — but Jesus will never let you down. When the church becomes painful, know that he will find you wherever you are. That’s the Jesus I have in mind.*

The service ended with David Lindsey, Miller-Black, Peters, and the choir singing “Child of God,” a hymn written by a gay Methodist man. The video of what all three described as an intensely emotional moment has gotten 19,000 hits on Facebook so far, Lindsey said.

While Peters said he can’t speak for everybody in the congregation, he described “a remarkable unity here at Court Street, a unity in grief, a unity in disappointment, and in the desire to say we’re going to do something different. We’re going to do something new.”

What that means is being considered — in round table meetings after the church service, in preparations for observing Pride Month in June, and in bringing in a gay speaker, one of the delegates to the St. Louis meeting, to preach.

“There are going to be a lot of rainbows around here,” Peters said.

The contested language and its consequences do not go into effect until 2020, Peters and Miller-Black point out, and the matter will be brought before the denomination’s judicial council next year. It is complicated — the push for prohibitions about homosexuality, though primarily propelled by a well-funded group in Ohio, Peters said, also is supported in part by the Methodist churches in Africa, some of whom are operating in countries where homosexuality is illegal.

Thus the debate has complex cultural and international implications for a denomination that established missions in Africa 150 years ago, and through UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, has worked to eliminate malaria and respond to international disasters. Lindsey said he fears if the denomination breaks up over the “One Church Plan” schism, those efforts might be damaged or lost.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article March 19 summarizing the debate, a Liberian bishop

(Continued on Page 13.)

Where will Flint middle school students be in August? Baker campus seems likely

By Harold C. Ford

“When parents are looking at where to send their kids (to school), there’s an awful lot of faith involved, in the sense that, you may not have any money, but you’re investing your kid in a school district. It’s the job of the school district, the challenge of the school district, to be worthy of that faith.” — Paul Jordan, member Flint Board of Education, 2005-2009.

In a widely reported March 20 press release, the Flint Community Schools (FCS) announced “it will undergo improvements to 10 buildings throughout the district ... to improve heating, cooling, lighting, air, energy, water, and other improvements.”

What was not so widely reported is that the district is contemplating moving its middle school students to the Baker College campus in Flint Township for the upcoming school year, scheduled to begin the first week of August 2019.

In January, Baker announced it would be “consolidating” its Flint operations into its Owosso location, presumably opening up space at the Hemphill campus, though classes reportedly still are to be offered there through August 2020.

At a regularly scheduled meeting of the Flint Board of Education on the same day of the aforementioned press release, FCS Superintendent Derrick Lopez distributed a document titled “TEAM FLINT, ‘FOUR-LEGGED STOOL’ February 2019.” The fourth leg of the ‘stool,’ titled “Visioning – The Restoration of Flint Community Schools” included “FCS High Tech Junior High (Grades 7-9).”

The bulleted list under “**FCS High Tech Junior High (Grades 7-9)**” (emphasis added) included:

- One-to-One Laptop — \$423,000 Musk Foundation Grant
- Looping
- The Algebra Project — \$300,000 C.S. Mott Foundation Grant
- Project Lead the Way
- Cultural Literacy
- @Baker College Next Year

At the end of the document, in a footnote, was a section indicating building destinations for FCS students next year. Beneath “Grade 7-8” was “FCS High Tech Junior High (7-8) @ Baker College.”

Whether or not Grade 9 would be included, the fact that FCS is contemplating a move of its middle school students to a campus in Flint Township is unmistakable.

Stakeholders tight-lipped, unavailable, or unaware

Harold Woodson, past president of the FCS Board of Education, came to the March 20 board meeting to speak about the possible move of middle school students to the Baker campus. After taking a seat at the table designated for those who wish to address the board, and a brief exchange with FCS officials, he had little to say. He declined to discuss the matter with *East Village Magazine (EVM)*.

Two subsequent attempts by *EVM* seeking comment from FCS Superintendent Lopez were unsuccessful. Morgan Greenberg, a representative of Lambert, Edwards & Associates, a public relations firm that has represented FCS since 2016, did not respond to a March 22 email seeking comment from Lopez. In a separate email sent on the same day, FCS Executive Assistant Monaca Wood said Supt. Lopez was on vacation.

Baker’s business neighbors have not been informed of the possible move. Managers at nearby Rite Aid, G-4033 Fenton Rd., and Walgreen’s, G-4010 Fenton Rd., were unaware of the move and unwilling to comment due to corporate restrictions. Informed of the possible move, Tammy Prieur, assistant manager of Donna’s Donuts, 1135 Bristol Rd., said, “It is what it is. Hopefully it brings us more business.”

Flint Township officials who would need to plan for transportation, safety, and other concerns, have little or no knowledge of the possible move. Tracey Tucker, Flint Township’s economic enhancement direc-

tor, did admit, “We’ve had a lot of people interested in that campus.” A sergeant of the Flint Township Police Department asked to remain anonymous, said that the department had not been informed of the possible move.

After two visits to the Baker campus and a recorded phone message, Baker’s Gerald McCarty, vice president of student affairs, responded to an email message with the following statement: “I have spoken to the President (Wen Hemingway) and at this time the College has ‘no com-



Baker College
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

ment’ other than what was reported on ABC12.”

ABC12 breaks the Baker story

According to a March 22 report by WJRT/ABC12:

“The (Flint) Board of Education authorized the creation of a STEM junior high in December ... ‘Currently we’re actually in exploration with Baker College to use part of their building to actually house our Junior High School next year,’ Lopez said. The building under consideration is the Center for Undergraduate Studies.”

“‘It’s a big state-of-the art facility,’ she (Wen Hemingway, Baker president) said in an interview by phone. ‘Most areas have just recently been redone; the technology enclosed in the building would lend itself wonderfully to STEM education.’ If selected, Baker College would serve as an interim location for the high tech junior high until the district selects a permanent location.”

(Continued on Page 11.)

... Baker

(Continued from Page 10.)

One year, three superintendents, and four plans for middle school

Flint schools have had three superintendents in the past 12 months. In March 2018, Bilal Tawwab was replaced by Gregory Weatherspoon on an interim basis. Derrick Lopez came on board as superintendent in August 2018.

In a March 2017 interview with *EVM*, then-Supt. Tawaab said 2020 was the target date for the opening of a new, consolidated Flint high school at the now-abandoned Flint Central High School campus. The location of middle school students under that plan seemed uncertain.

In the current 2018-2019 school year, Flint's middle school students have attended, based on their addresses, either Scott School or Southwestern Classical Academy. Both campuses have been upgraded in the past year.

In December 2018, *EVM* reported: "Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, FCS hopes to house grades 7-9 in a newly reopened Northern High School building ... It is estimated that \$20 million is needed to reopen the facility."

But now the Baker plan seems front and center.

"An absence of medium- or long-term planning"

"One of the great deficits I've seen in the Flint district over the years has been an absence of medium- or long-term planning," observed Paul Jordan, a former member of the Flint Board of Education from 2005 to 2009. I realize the difficulty of doing that when schools are underfunded by the state, and they're having to meet the changing priorities of the state, and it's very difficult not to be chaotic under those conditions."

"So the state bears a substantial amount of responsibility," Jordan continued. "Nonetheless, if planning is for next August or September and ... if it hasn't been decided upon by

now then that's a massive failure of planning."

"The effect of the lack of planning is the same whether it has an explanation or not," Jordan said.

Not necessarily the fault of superintendents

Jordan suggested responsibility for



Paul Jordan
(Photo provided by Paul Jordan)

the lack of planning should not fall entirely upon the shoulders of superintendents with short tenures:

"Doesn't it seem like the district ought to have a plan that the superintendents are required to work within rather than expecting a superintendent, who may only be in place for a couple of years, to have the long-term plan?" he asked. "They're not going to be able to fulfill it."

"I think it's hard for a district even to fulfill its basic functions under circumstances like that," he continued, "buying stuff, purchasing, hiring people, supervising people, evaluating people."

Not necessarily the fault of school boards

Jordan also suggested the challenges facing many local school boards in Michigan may be insurmountable and largely the fault of the state:

"Serving on a school board in a district like Flint, a district that is struggling with totally inadequate support, with challenges that are purposefully built in, legally at times, is perhaps the most challenging job in public service that any elected official could have," said Jordan.

"They're swimming with anvils

strapped to their backs," he said. "They are volunteering to struggle when they are being set up by the state to fail."

Jordan's view is supported by a Jan. 25, 2019 opinion, by the *Detroit Free Press* titled, "Michigan Schools Stink Because We Stopped Paying For Them":

"While other states have increased the amount of money they spend on education, Michigan's inflation-adjusted allocation has dropped 30 percent since 2002. It's worse for at-risk kids, for whom school funds have dropped 60 percent since 2001."

"Michigan's students' scores on national tests are among the worst in the nation. The amount of money we're willing to spend on schools has not grown. Sometimes, correlation is causation."

Locating a campus outside the city not a first for FCS:

Jordan recollected that an FCS move outside the city limits would not be a first.

"Back in the district's heyday, the district and the entire city assumed that Flint would keep on growing, so they built Northwestern outside the city limits and annexed that property," he said. "They built Northern outside the city limits and annexed that property. So there's a long history of doing that."

"We're not going to be annexing Burton," said Jordan, a lifelong Flint resident.

"You could maybe understand the optimism of the time (of annexations), because nobody could really anticipate that GM was going to gradually abandon Flint and automation would make even more jobs unnecessary and that the city would lose population as it has," Jordan said. "Charter schools would attract over half the children to them."

Flint's precipitous loss of student population

"When I was on the board, members quite confidently predicted that the student population would bottom out at 10,000 students," Jordan recalled. "I don't think there was any reason to believe that ... and it's proven that

(Continued on Page 14.)

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of April 4. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our May issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at meghan.christian22@gmail.com by April 23.

Wellness at the Wheel

Mon - Sat.

Various times

The Ferris Wheel,
615 S. Saginaw St., 6th floor
Call 810-213-4710 for more info.
Admission: \$12

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

Schedule:

Monday

Hatha Yoga – 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday

Rise and Shine Yoga – 7:00 a.m.

Hatha Yoga – 5:30 p.m.

Saturday

Hatha Yoga – 8:15 a.m.

Mindful Movement Dance – 5:30 p.m.

“Significant Other”

April 5 and April 6, 7:30 p.m.

April 7, 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 rom-com “Significant Other,” a show about love, friendship, and finding oneself.

“The Russian Five”

April 5

8 p.m.

Capitol Theatre,
140 E. 2nd St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$10

A documentary following five immigrants who made big names for themselves in Detroit playing in the National Hockey League. Follow Federov, Larionov, Fetisov, Kozlov, and Konstantinov on their journeys.

Flint Handmade Coloring Party with Vehicle City Tacos: Fancy Tea Party

April 9

3 - 10 p.m.

Tenacity Brewing,
119 N. Grand Traverse
Admission: Free

Join Flint Handmade for a day of crafting and coloring. All materials provided at this free family friendly event.

Science on Tap: Mythbusters:

Misconceptions of cancer and cancer treatment

April 9

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Table & Tap,
555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631

Cheryl Samaniego, a Kettering biology assistant professor, and Lihua Wang, a Kettering professor in chemistry and biochemistry. Sponsored by the Thompson Center for Learning and Teaching.

Pax Christi Dorothy Day

April 11

10 a.m.

Dorothy’s House of Coffee,
503 East Street
810-337-8045

Admission: Free

People from all faiths welcome. The meeting offers study/discussion, prayer, and action to advocate for peace with justice on local, national, and global issues. This month focuses on a short piece from Barmen Today: A Contemporary Contemplation Declaration, and an overview of the 1934 original from the German Christian Movement.

April Art Walk

April 12

6 p.m.

Various Locations Downtown
Admission: Free

Enjoy food, drink, and art at various locations downtown.

Flint Youth Symphony Orchestra

April 13

3 p.m.

The Whiting
1241 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$6-12

Enjoy an afternoon of music with the talented young musicians from Flint’s Youth Symphony Orchestra. Group tickets available for groups of 10 or more.

Friday Crafternoon

April 19

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

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

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

Science on Tap

Black Holes: Hot, Cold, and Hairy

April 23

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Table & Tap
Admission: Free
555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631

Join James Alsup, UM-Flint physics associate professor. Sponsored by UM-Flint’s Thompson Center for Learning and Teaching.

... Budget

(Continued from Page 3.)

receiving the highest state grants. Her budget also increases funds for community colleges and universities by three percent and would make the first two years of college free for most. She also proposes increased funding for career and technical education and special education.

3) Water infrastructure

Flint's water crisis has become the poster child for the water problems that Michigan and much of the nation may face in the future. And just as it seems that Flint is starting to resolve the issue of lead in the water, over 119 locations have tested positive for the presence of PFAS (per fluorinated alkyl substances), which are considered potentially carcinogenic chemicals, in their water. The governor has proposed \$120 million to help municipalities and utilities meet tougher water standards and rebuild the state's water infrastructure. She also proposes \$60 million to install hydration stations in schools with water problems. All of that is likely to be only a small down payment on what could be a much larger problem in the future.

4) Taxes and revenue

All of those goals, (and many more) could be expensive, and the key question is always "How will you pay for it?" As part of her budget, Gov. Whitmer is proposing new taxes and other changes in the current tax system.

Almost certainly, the most striking and controversial change is the proposed 45 cent increase in the gas tax to pay for the roads. The increase would come on top of Michigan's current 26.3 cent gas tax, and would give the state the highest gas tax in the nation, according to Bridge Magazine. If passed, it would be applied in three stages, over the next year and a half, and would raise about \$2.5 billion per year for the roads.

A second tax change would be a repeal of the so-called "pension tax" on retirement income and replacing the lost revenue with an increase in taxes on some smaller business corporations. Removing the pension tax would save some 400,000 families about \$800 a year, according to

tax officials. While getting rid of the tax on some pension income is popular with lawmakers in both parties, getting rid of it would cost the state \$330 million in lost general fund revenue. Whitmer hopes to fill that gap with an increased tax on smaller businesses and corporations, raising their tax from 4.25 percent to 6 percent. That shift is particularly unpopular with the business community and their Republican supporters in the legislature.

The budget also proposes a doubling of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), for low-income taxpayers, from 6 to 12 percent of the federal credit. It would be phased in over two years and benefit about 750,000 families. The average credit would increase by about \$150 by 2021.

To make things even more complex, the new budget proposes several shifts in existing funds. If the gas tax passes, it would free up about \$500 million of general fund money for higher education. And some of the money from the school aid fund that has aided community colleges and universities, would be shifted back to the K-12 school aid fund.

The long road to passage

To be sure, there are many other details to the four proposals, and there is much more to the governor's proposed budget. Many of those topics call for separate columns. The governor is beginning a statewide tour, trying to sell the budget to the voters, and hearing suggestions about what might be changed or modified.

It still has to work its way through the state House and Senate, both controlled by Republicans. After hearing from the public, and wending its way through a series of legislative committees, the budget is likely to be different in the end. The trip through the legislature may be longer and more complex than the governor's tour through the state. The normal target date to complete the budget is late June, and the official budget year begins on Oct. 1.

Meeting that deadline may be more of a challenge this year than it has been in the past. But the new budget may also be a blueprint for the future.

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

... Methodists

(Continued from Page 9.)

said the Methodist Church in Africa is "growing by leaps and bounds because we are committed to biblical Christianity," adding that if United Methodists become more "permissive" of homosexuality "the church in Africa would cease to exist."

An Ohio conservative pastor, Keith Boyette, who leads a group believing a pastor should have sex only if he or she is in a heterosexual marriage, asserted in the same article, "It's not just the issue of human sexuality that divides the church. We're divided on the authority and interpretation of Scripture ... we're divided on what constitutes sin."

In Flint, the local congregation appears to agree to move forward with its support of greater inclusion. "We will continue to be a place where everybody is really welcome – all races, creeds, special needs – we want to still be that place, no matter what our denomination does," Miller-Black said.

"Across the board, I don't know of anyone at Court Street that would say we are allowed to be unkind or unloving towards others — they may disagree theologically with some things, but the general unity that we love people is absolutely across the board. If you're uncomfortable, come talk to us about it ... we agree to disagree, and to find a way to hold on to the bigger things that keep us together."

Peters said attendance is "way up" the last few weeks.

"People don't want to miss out on the conversation. There is already a sense of momentum. I think they are saying, I don't want to lose my church."

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

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.

... Baker

(Continued from Page 11.)

there's no bottom reached so far."

As of Nov. 30, 2018, Flint's student count stood at 4,331 according to a "membership report" presented to the board. More than two-thirds of Flint's school-aged children opt to attend other schools.

Baker plan likely to be targeted by critics

Sending Flint kids to a campus located one-half mile beyond the city's limits is likely to be targeted by critics. Count Jordan as one of the first.

"Parents who live on Carpenter Road would be expected to get their kids to school outside the southern border of Flint," Jordan observed. "That seems to me to be flaky. They have to plan how they're going to get kids there because it's a half a mile outside the city of Flint."

"I don't see how in any manner, shape, or form that it is realistic," he continued. "If they haven't made a decision yet, a firm plan yet... they're going to have to put this before the community in order to get some sort of buy-in from the parents of those 7th, 8th, and 9th graders."

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

Unclassified ads

-Two-bedroom Apartment for Lease in June.

Two-story apartment on Avon near Kearsley St. Features washer, dryer, refrigerator, stove, two bathrooms, hardwood floors, private deck onto large backyard, off street parking. Walk four blocks or less to UM-Flint, MSU, MCC, Cultural Center, Downtown, Farmers' Market, four parks. On site management. References and credit report requested. \$675 per month plus electricity. Heat and water included. No pets. (E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write Box 7B, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503).

Three-bedroom Apartment for Lease in July.

Two story apartment on Avon near Kearsley St. Features washer, dryer, refrigerator, stove, one and a half baths, hardwood floors, off street parking. Walk four blocks or less to UM-Flint, MSU, MCC, Cultural Center, Downtown, Farmers' Market and four parks. On site management. References and credit report requested. \$655 per month plus utilities. No pets. (E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write Box 09, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503).

Two-Bedroom Upstairs Apartment For Rent. All bills paid. Close to UM-F and MCC. Call (810) 625-3927.

... Council

(Continued from Page 7.)

financial person fair. I appreciate you, sir."

To help ease the transition from Newsome to whomever the next appointee will be, First Ward Councilperson Eric Mays moved at the end of the March 25 meeting to enter into a temporary consulting contract with Newsome and/or Dawn Steele, the current deputy finance director for the city. The resolution passed unanimously by a vote of five in favor and zero opposed. Fields, Galloway, Griggs, and Worthing were not present at the time of the vote.

Rowe takes over project management for pipe replacement

At the March 11 regular FCC meeting, ROWE Professional Services, an engineering consultant with offices in downtown Flint, was selected to replace AECOM as the project manager for the FAST Start pipe replacement program.

AECOM, a Los Angeles based civil engineering firm, had managed the pipeline replacement since December 2017, but their contract with the city, originally for \$6.1 million, fell apart after the council disagreed on proposed contract renewal provisions and voted down AECOM's requests for more money.

The \$2.1 million contract with ROWE was approved by a vote of 5-3. In favor were Mays, Davis, Guerra, Winfrey, and Galloway. Opposed were Fields, Winfrey-Carter, and Worthing. Griggs was not present at the time of the vote.

According to MLive, ROWE oversaw the beginning of the FAST Start program in 2016 before being replaced by General Michael McDaniel in 2017. AECOM came in that December.

Those in favor of ROWE said they did not want to delay city business; those opposed were wary that they had not seen much of the contract. "How can I vote on something with-

out seeing the contract?" Worthing asked.

"I don't want to delay the city business another second," Davis said. "We need to get back on track with the FAST Start."

Council members lob attacks and counterattacks

Simmering council conflicts came to a head during the March 25 regular FCC meeting where several council members attempted to move to remove others not only from the meeting, but also from their council seats based on their recent conduct.

Mays moved to "start forfeiture procedures on Ms. Fields, Mr. Griggs, and Ms. Worthing for violating the charter." Maurice Davis seconded.

According to Mays, Fields, Griggs, and Worthing violated the charter and the Open Meetings Act of 1976 by having a meeting between two or more councilpersons. The motion failed by a vote of 3-6. Those in favor were Mays, Davis, and Jerri Winfrey-Carter. Those opposed were Guerra, Fields, Winfrey, Galloway, Griggs, and Worthing.

In response, Worthing then moved to remove Mays "as he does have a felony after he was voted in," she said, adding she would move to remove him "due to his severe misconduct." Griggs seconded.

The motion failed 1-3 with one abstention. In favor was Guerra; opposed were Winfrey-Carter, Winfrey, and Davis. Mays abstained from the vote, as it pertained to him. Fields, Galloway, Griggs, and Worthing left shortly after and were not present at the time of the vote.

The council issues are not going unnoticed by members of the public. Seventh Ward resident Shirley Taylor addressed FCC at the March 25 meeting saying, "We need the office of the ombudsman more than the City Council." Taylor also voiced her displeasure that some members of the FCC had not remained until the public speaking portion of the meeting. "I'm sorry to see some of the people gone because I came to speak directly to them," she said.

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

... Tai chi

(Continued from Page 16.)

against Alzheimer's.

Each class tests me — how much of the entire form will my body remember? I've got the short opening section down pat, melded into my muscle memory. I'm doing better with the middle section; sequences of moves repeat and sometimes, if I can remember how one arm or leg goes, the next moves will come to me. At some point in the third and longest section, I will sneak a glance at Beverly; where are we? Did I miss "snake creeps down"?

It takes our group 30 minutes or more to do the entire Yang long form. If we go slowly enough. When we finish we repeat the salute and bow. We clap for our instructor and ourselves. I am elated; for a few moments, my arthritic body feels light and fluid again.

Even when my kicks on one leg wobbled or I forgot half of the last section, I feel satisfaction. Even if my errant mind got distracted, I am peaceful.

Real devotees say you can practice tai chi anywhere. Allen Ginsberg dedicated a poem to his tai chi master. It turned out to be a wry commentary about practicing in his tiny Manhattan apartment and it's recorded on video. The first stanzas go like this:

*Bend knees, shift weight
Picasso's blue deathhead self portrait
tacked on refrigerator door*

*This is the only space in the apartment
big enough to do t'ai chi*

*Straighten right foot & rise—I wonder
if I should have set aside that garbage
pail*

*Raise up my hands & bring them back to
shoulders—The towels and pyjama
laundry's hanging on a rope in the hall*

*Push down & grasp the sparrow's tail
Those paper boxes of grocery bags are
blocking the closed door*

*Turn north—I should hang up all
those pots on the stovetop
Am I holding the world right? That*

*Hopi picture on the wall shows
rain & lightning bolt*

*Turn right again – thru the door, God
my office space is a mess of
pictures & unanswered letters*

*I better concentrate on what I'm doing
weight in belly, move by hips
No, that was the single whip—that apron's
hanging on the North wall a year
I haven't used it once
Except to wipe my hands – the Crane
spreads its wings have I paid
the electric bill?*

Yeah, Allen, not enough space and too many distractions at home for me, too. But the poem consoles me. Each week I join my tai chi friends in warm expectation; I see the ocean and hear the muffled clang of the bell buoy. We bow, raise hands, and salute; we try again.

EVM columnist *Teddy Robertson* can be reached at teddyrob@umflint.edu.

Editor's Note: *Saturday, April 27, is World Tai Chi Day, observed in hundreds of cities in over 80 nations, spanning six continents, according to world-taichiday.org. The day will include mass teach-ins and exhibitions held around the planet.*

... Heroines

(Continued from Page 6.)

into bronze, they need to raise \$4,000 by the end of March. The timing and the money is critical, because the rubber molds for the bronze casting must be done before the clay models dry out, and since most of the clay work is nearly done, that work is on the clock.

Once the busts are cast, funds need to be raised for plaques and pedestals for each sculpture.

Finally, the group is seeking a prime location for the placement of the sculptures. At the moment, several areas in the downtown area have been suggested, and discussions are underway to find a suitable permanent location for the "Women Heroines and Humanitarians" of Flint.

Those wishing to help can contribute funds by sending them to the Court Street Village Non-Profit, at 727 East St., in care of "Heroines and Humanitarians." A GoFundMe account also is expected to be up online soon.

EVM staff writer *Paul Rozycki* can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

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Village Life

Tai chi yields gifts of challenge, elation, peace

By *Teddy Robertson*

“Breathe from the diaphragm,” says Beverly, my tai chi instructor. “Clear your mind; try to go slowly,” she reminds us before we begin. We never go slowly enough.

We stand in two rows in a large room, the dining hall in a senior center. Some wear the thin-soled martial arts slippers that help in tai chi’s turns and kicks, glides and slides.

Through its floor-to-ceiling windows, a hummingbird jabs at the orange and purple blooms on stalks of bird of paradise that edge the building. Across the grass between the fig and palm trees, I can glimpse the gray-blue Pacific in the distance; when the doors are open, we can hear the muffled clang of the bell buoy.

This is January on the south bay coast west of Los Angeles, not my home in Flint. I get distracted.

We bow and then raise our outstretched arms to clasp our left hand over our right fist, the tai chi salute. At some point in the next half hour — if I can corral my wandering thoughts — my mind will float away from my body. Part of tai chi’s allure for me has been the promise of settling the mind, but I’ve come to love the exercise, how it feels in my body.

I first learned about tai chi through a class taught one semester at the UM-Flint Rec Center. I learned about “the empty leg” and how to “sink the chest.” They were different concepts and techniques after years of yoga. I found YouTube videos and began to follow articles online.

My first winter in southern California, I saw a group of 20 or so people in a nearby park moving in slow motion like the videos I’d watched. I looked up the park activities online, but the tai chi group had disbanded. Another group met in a different park, but it was too far to drive. I checked Meetup — more than a dozen tai chi groups were listed, but all were nearly an hour away. That’s Los Angeles.

Then by chance, I stopped in at a nearby senior center, and on the message board was a flyer for a tai chi class taught there, a weekly session in something called “the Yang style long form.”

I joined a group of eight learners — the oldest one turns 90 this year and another, aged 83, walks with a cane. For an hour on Thursday mornings, we move silently through a routine that requires 10 kicks standing on one leg, several with turns on one foot.

No one has ever fallen. We don’t kick very high.

The Yang style long form turned out to be a series of 103 moves (or more, depending on how they are counted),



Teddy Robertson doing tai chi
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

many with flowery names: grasp the bird’s tail, play the lute, repulse the monkey, fighting tiger, fair lady works

the shuttles, the snake creeps down, the golden cock stands on one leg.

I see the brushstrokes of a Chinese painting.

Don’t be fooled. Tai chi is an internal martial art practiced for health and relaxation, but its full name, t’ai chi ch’uan, can be translated as “Supreme Ultimate Fist.” Basic moves like “ward off” and “parry and punch” come from combat and self-defense, but those with the flowery names do also. Beverly reminds us: you are blocking, you are striking, you are kicking an opponent. Keep space between your feet so you won’t be knocked off balance.

Tai chi’s modern history is traced to Chen village in Wenxian County, Henan Province, in central China. A 17th Century warrior and master of martial arts named Chen Wangting is credited with creating tai chi.

The art remained in the Chen family and their village for centuries. People came to the village to learn the art (and still do today). An outsider named Yang Lu-chan (1799-1872) studied the Chen practice and developed the style that is named after him. More styles developed from the Chen form. You can find a bewildering tree of lineages of tai chi styles in Wikipedia.

During China’s Civil War, many traditional tai chi teachers emigrated or ceased activity, but in 1949, the People’s Republic government established the Chinese Sports Committee. The committee developed hybrid forms of tai chi that were easier to learn and practice and promoted group tournament; the government encouraged public practice. Qigong, Chinese medicine’s ancient system of physical exercises and breathing control (and used for tai chi training), also came under state regulation.

Tai chi spread in America in the wake of the martial arts interest that exploded in the 1970s. Boomers have embraced tai chi for health; the Mayo Clinic recommends it to reduce stress, and some hope its practice will prove beneficial

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