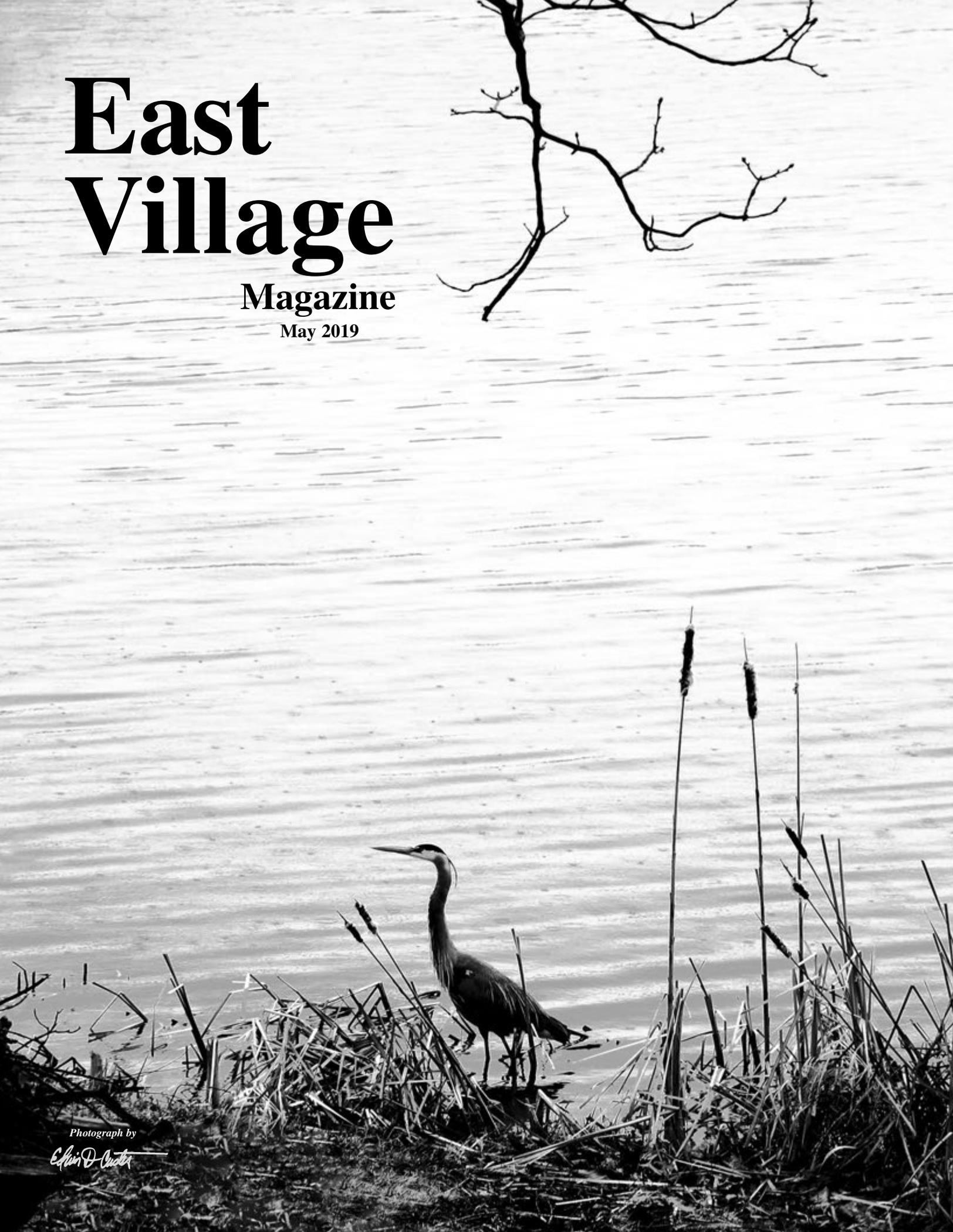


# East Village

Magazine

May 2019



Photograph by

*Edwin O. Carter*

# The Tom Sumner Program

Produced live weekdays from 9 to noon

## Ways to listen...

★ **STREAM IT ON-LINE:**

[www.tomsumnerprogram.com](http://www.tomsumnerprogram.com)  
(810) 339-8255 (TALK)

★ **ON THE RADIO:**

WFOV 92.1 FM in Flint

★ **ARCHIVED:**

Episodes & Podcasts



# VERN'S COLLISION INC.

## Free Loaners

- Unibody • Frame
- Paint Specialists • Glass
- State-certified Mechanics

More than 40 years at the same location.

(810) 232-6751  
2409 Davison Rd.



**Books Vinyl Cafe**

Tu-Th: 11am-7pm  
Fr-Sa: 10am-6pm  
Su-Mo: Closed

Ph.: 810-407-6402  
620 W. Court St. Downtown Flint

**RE/MAX**  
Real Estate Team  
Independently Owned and Operated

**FREE Home Warranty**

*Flint's Resident Realtor — The Name Trusted in More Neighborhoods*

(810) 234-1234



Ryan Eashoo



Located inside the Flint Farmers' Market

BATTISTE'S

## TEMPLE DINING ROOM

**PUBLIC WELCOME**

*Serving Downtown Flint since 1947*

Luncheon Monday-Friday 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

**All Occasion Catering**

**235-7760**

Support community journalism! Donations to *East Village Magazine* are tax deductible. Go to [eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org) for easy giving.



**May 11 – Sept. 8, 2019**

**Free admission for Genesee County Residents**

Robot Zoo reveals the magic of nature as a master engineer. Explore the biomechanics of complex animal robots to discover how real animals work! Robot animals and hands-on activities illustrate fascinating real-life characteristics, such as how a chameleon changes colors, how a giant squid propels itself, and how a fly walks on the ceiling.

4190 E. Court St. Burton, MI 48509 • 810-237-3450 • [SloanMuseum.org](http://SloanMuseum.org)



**Willow's Garden JUICE BAR**  
FLINT FARMERS' MARKET  
Open: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday



*~ wine ~  
craft beer  
& more...  
at the Flint Farmers' Market*



**Healthy Home Cooking!**  
810-235-1968  
Flint Farmers' Market



# East Village Magazine

Vol. LVII No. 5 May 2019

**Founder** *Gary P. Custer*

**Editor** *Jan Worth-Nelson*  
**Managing Editor** *Meghan Christian*

**Editor-at-Large** *Ted Nelson*

**Copy Editor** *Danielle Ward*

**Reporters** *Darlene Carey*

*Jeffery L. Carey*

*Harold C. Ford*

*Luther Houle*

*Patsy Isenberg*

**Columnists** *Jan Worth-Nelson*

*Teddy Robertson*

*Paul Rozycki*

**Business Manager** *Casey Custer*

**Photographer** *Edwin D. Custer*

## Distribution Staff

**Director:** Edwin D. Custer. **Staff:** Sue Bailey, Kim Bary, Lisa Bennington-Love, Jane Bingham, Jacob Blunner, Connor Coyne & Ruby Coyne, Casey Custer, Marabeth Foreman, Charlie & Linda & Patrick & Terrance & Christan & Jillianne Goldsberry, Ingrid Halling & Bob Thomas, Christine & Patrick Figgins, Robert Jewell, Carol Larzelere Kellermann, Stephen Kellermann, Jo Larzelere, Mary LeRoy, James & Lillian & Livia Londrigan, Alan & Julie Lynch, Ron & Mary Meeker, Robert & Nancy Meszko, Mary & Jeff Mintline, Ted Nelson, Walt & Edythe Peake, Edith & John Pendell, Dave & Becky Pettengill, Lucia Rodrigues, Julian Rodriguez, Mike Spleet, Kim & Ronan & Jude Streby, and Karen Wilkinson.

## Board of Trustees

- Jane M. Bingham • FaLessia Booker
- Edwin D. Custer • Jack D. Minore
- Paul Rozycki • Robert R. Thomas
- Jan Worth-Nelson, ex officio

**720 E. Second St.  
Flint, Mich. 48503  
(810) 233-7459**

**Website:**  
[eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org)

**E-mail:**  
[eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com](mailto:eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com)

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.

## Commentary

# Fix the “damn roads”? OK, but how do we pay for the “damn roads”?

*By Paul Rozycki*

Are you ready to “fix the damn roads”? It was Gov. Whitmer’s campaign promise, and just about everyone agrees that it’s job one for Michigan this year.

But, how do we pay for it? By most estimates, the state needs to raise about \$2.5 billion to get the job done. And even then, it will take years to undo the harm from the underinvestment over the past decades.

In 2018, only 77 percent of the state’s roads were in “good or fair” condition. By 2025, less than 50 percent will be “good or fair,” and the numbers grow worse after that. More than 40 percent of Detroit’s and Flint’s roads are rated in “poor” condition. Many sources list Michigan’s roads as the worst or nearly the worst in the nation.

There are a number of choices to fix the roads, but none of them are cheap, none of them will be quick, and none of them will be easy to sell politically. Here are a few options with some pros and cons of each.

### The gas tax?

Currently, about half of Michigan’s Transportation Fund comes from fuel taxes, and about half from vehicle registration fees. Gov. Whitmer has proposed a 45-cent increase in the gas tax as part of her budget this year. It would raise the required amount of money, but it would give Michigan the highest gas tax in the nation, at a time when fuel prices are rising. It would raise Michigan’s gas tax to 71.3 cents per gallon, well ahead of Pennsylvania, currently the highest, at 57.6 cents per gallon. We are currently the sixth highest in the nation.

The governor’s plan would phase in over the next year and a half, reaching the full 45-cent increase in October of 2020. There has been a strong reaction to the proposal from many quarters.

Republicans in the state legislature consider it a non-starter. Some businesses are afraid of the impact, and more than a few of Whitmer’s supporters have doubts about the political wisdom of such a large increase.

In support of her plan, Gov. Whitmer said that the poor roads cost the average driver \$562 per year in repairs, (one estimate placed Flint’s costs at \$797), while the gas tax increase would cost the average person — who drives 15,000 miles a year, in a car that gets 30 miles per gallon — about \$225 per year. While the tax might hit the poor harder, other changes would reduce taxes for low-income families.

The fuel tax increase would raise the needed money, but taxing fuel has one major problem. Autos are becoming more fuel-efficient. In 1975, cars averaged just a little over 13 miles per gallon. In 2017, they got over 25 miles per gallon. And that number is likely to increase in the future with better engines and electric vehicles. That’s all great news for drivers, but it means less fuel sales, and a smaller amount of tax revenue for the roads. To keep up with better fuel efficiency, fuel taxes might need to rise even more in the future.

Having said all that, Gov. Whitmer knows the legislative process, and the 45-cent increase may turn out to be an opening bid in negotiations with the lawmakers, subject to change in several directions. Working with the Republican legislature, the amount of the increase could change, so could the time frame, or there could be other changes in revenue sources. But at least both parties seem committed to finding a solution.

### Other new revenue?

Are there other sources of new money for the roads?

*(Continued on Page 13.)*



Photograph by  
*Erin D. Carter*

Photo of the Month: Spring daffodills

---

## *Four candidates file for Flint's first mayoral election under new charter*

*By Paul Rozycki*

Flint's first mayoral election under its new charter got off to a robust start as five candidates filed to run for mayor this year. They are incumbent Mayor Karen Weaver, Greg Eason, Sheldon Neeley, and Don Pfeiffer.

The filing deadline was 4 p.m. Tuesday April 23.

Candidates had until Friday, April 26 to have their petitions verified or withdraw. Though Sixth Ward resident Tonya Burns, president and CEO of Global Security Protection Alarm Company, turned in her petition just ahead of the deadline on Tuesday, with the intent of running, she failed to have the required 600 valid signatures.

All three of the remaining challengers— Eason, Neeley and Pfeiffer — have run for mayor before.

Incumbent Mayor Karen Weaver was the first to announce her run for reelection. Several weeks ago, she kicked off her campaign with a rally at Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church. The

first woman to be Flint's mayor, Weaver was first elected in 2015, when she defeated Mayor Dayne Walling in what some consider an upset election. She later survived a recall attempt in November, 2017, outpolling 17 challengers, after a controversy over trash hauling contracts. She has raised more than \$250,000 for her reelection campaign.

As part of her campaign she has highlighted her attempts to bring national attention to the Flint water crisis, by working with state and national officials and inviting celebrities to the city to speak about the water crisis. She also saw the end to Flint's oversight by the Receivership Transition Advisory Board (RTAB) in 2018.

Greg Eason served as city administrator for the city of Flint for more than two years during the Walling administration, and is currently senior consultant for Visions Unlimited

Consulting. He has also been president and CEO of the Center for Progressive Learning, Center for Banking Education and Jobs Central. He ran for mayor in 2009.

Sheldon Neeley, who served on the Flint City Council representing the Sixth Ward for nine years, and is currently a member of the state House of Representatives from the 34th District, filed his petitions more than a week ago. He is considered by many to be Weaver's major opponent.

Neeley is in his third term in the state House, and is term-limited. He served as chair of the Black Caucus in the legislature. He introduced legislation that provided for the Flint Promise, a program to create a tuition-free college program for Flint students and the Good Job Skills Package, which he said played a role in Lear Corporation coming to Flint.

In earlier years, he served as union president of his broadcast engineer's

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

## ... Candidates

(Continued from Page 4.)

local at ABC-12, and worked for 10 years as a community school counselor. He has run for mayor before, losing in the primary in 2007. He has said that restructuring city hall is most important to deliver the needed services to the people of Flint and restore trust in the city government.

Don Pfeiffer, who has run several times for mayor in past years, also filed his signatures within the last half hour before the deadline. He ran for mayor in 2011 and 2017, and was a candidate for the state House in 2013. He has worked in the past with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Union and currently is the owner of a technology consulting company. He also joined the effort to rebuild the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. As part of his campaign he said, "I have seen firsthand what true devastation is; we are not even close to that. If New Orleans can come back from Katrina stronger than ever, we too can fix our local issues." On his website he said, "The city has declined during this administration more so than the last. The roads, blight, lack of new business, water prices, and poisoned water are still major issues."

The top two candidates in the Aug. 6 primary will advance to the general election Nov. 5. Because of the transition to the new charter, the person elected will serve only a three-year term, until 2022, though there have been attempts to modify the charter. After that time, as required by the city charter, the mayor will be elected every four years, at the same time as the governor.

EVM staff writer Paul Rozycki can be reached at [paul.rozycki@mcc.edu](mailto:paul.rozycki@mcc.edu).

**Support community journalism!**

Donations to *East Village Magazine* are tax deductible. For easy giving, go to: [eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org)

## White privilege: "Use it to end injustice"

By Harold C. Ford

*"If your white privilege and class privilege protects you, then you have an obligation to use that privilege to take stands that work to end the injustice that grants that privilege in the first place."*

— Ayelet Waldman, Israeli-American novelist and essayist

Flint resident Jeff Bean stepped forward at the Flint Public Library April 9, conceded his white privilege, and suggested ways to end it. Bean spoke before some 15 persons at the April Tendaji Talk, "The Consequences of Not Addressing White Privilege and Power."

Named for long-time community leader Tendaji W. Ganges, the series, sponsored by the nonprofit group Neighborhoods Without Borders, offers discussions on systemic racism. The focus this season is white power and privilege, and what white people can do to end racism. Bean's talk was the second of four sessions, with the last two scheduled for May 14 with Tracy Kim, and June 11 with Bob Brown.

"I grew up in Sturgis, Michigan, an incredibly white community," Bean recalled. According to the 2010 census, the population of Sturgis was nearly 11,000, and only 1.4 percent African American.

"I missed a tremendous amount by excluding people in my world," Bean said. "One of the things that got me into the issue of race was the realization that my world would be so much better if everybody was involved in it."

With that newfound realization, Bean moved his family to Flint and enrolled his children in the Flint Community Schools (FCS), where he worked as an educator for 30 years. He retired from FCS three years ago and is currently employed by Ferris State University to help train teachers.

Bean came to a position of greater enlightenment on the matter of race relations with the help of friends. "I came to the understanding of race through a long academic process," he said.

### White privilege everywhere, every day

Bean cited several examples of white privilege during his talk.

- Michigan State University's basketball team was bounced from the NCAA tournament only four days prior to Bean's talk. A few thousand students, many drinking alcohol, poured into the streets blocking traffic, hurling glass bottles, destroying street signs, setting fires, prompting 23 arrests. Bean heard the media describe the event as "a party (by) anxious students." "What you saw was a riot," said Bean. "But we don't use that term because those were predominantly white students."

- A Walled Lake Western High School student was randomly shot in the arm in February 2019 while dropping off clothes. The victim, a 17-year-old black male, was banned from campus by his suburban high school, including the prom, because they feared retaliation from outsiders. "I ... offer to you that, had that been a white student, when he came back he would have been a hero because he survived," Bean reasoned.

- The 2019 college admissions scandal resulted in charges leveled against some 50 persons, including 33 parents who are accused of paying more than \$25 million between 2011 and 2018 to fraudulently inflate applicants' entrance exam test scores and bribe college officials. "There is a prime example of privilege," Bean said.

### Law enforcement

Bean referenced the gruesome shooting of black motorist Philando Castile near Minneapolis in August 2017. Castile was shot seven times by a police officer in front of a female passenger and her child when he was reaching for identification. Castile politely informed the officer he was a licensed carrier just prior to being shot.

"We're not asking you to be a saint," Bean said, "but we are asking you to be sane. There's no way to defend that." All felony charges brought against the

(Continued on Page 14.)

# New skateboard park plans announced by Flint's SK810 group

By Jeffery L. Carey Jr.

Under threat of rain, more than 75 people were in attendance April 20 for the announcement of plans to build a new skate park for the city of Flint.

The announcement came during this year's Easter egg hunt and skateboard jam at the existing skate park, 1902 Hammerberg Rd. The new skate park would be built on the same site, on the old tennis courts visible from the west-bound side of I-69.

The new park, announced at the skate-jam by steering committee member Michael Wright, of Flint's Factory Two, will be planned by a group of local members under the name Flint Sk810, a play on Flint's area code.

Wright also thanked local skateboarder Dan Wilson for revitalizing the old skate park and "bringing it out [of] the ashes it had fallen into."

"This project is very similar in many ways to how the city has helped guide and facilitate at the former Mott Park Golf Course, now known as the Mott Park Recreation Area," said Candice Mushatt with the city of Flint communications and public information department. "The planning and zoning division of the city is responsible for Flint's publicly owned parks and implementing Imagine Flint Master Plan's environmental, open space, and park goals."

The Mott Park project, a "paddler's landing" on the Flint River, is being built this summer and was financed partly through a "Patronicity" matching funds campaign through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. That project was promoted by a group of Mott Park residents and other local donors in collaboration with the Flint River Watershed Coalition and the city.

"This project is another example of how we work to empower Flint's residents, volunteers, and partners to plan and implement improvements in parks and neighborhoods," Mushatt said.

"Ideally, the community-led Flint

Sk810 steering committee will research, promote, and guide the project's design process and planning, and ultimately raise funds and write grants for the skate park. This is very similar to what has been done at several Flint park properties, including the Mott Park Recreation Area, Max Brandon Park, Berston Fieldhouse and the 45 other parks that have been adopted by Adopt-a-Park groups. Partnerships and volunteer groups such as the Friends of Max Brandon, and now the Flint Sk810 committee, are valuable partners of Flint.



**Easter Bunny skateboarder**  
(Photo by Darlene Carey)

"In the process of doing our due diligence, city planning staff have contacted and had conversations with several other municipalities, foundations, skate park designers and builders, and several local and national professional skateboarders. This includes meeting with representatives of the Tony Hawk Foundation to tour potential sites, and to discuss the different grant and funding opportunities their organization and others might be able to provide," Mushatt explained.

The mission of the Tony Hawk Foundation, as described on their website, is to "promote high-quality, public skate parks in low-income areas throughout the United States, and to support international programs that enrich the lives of youth through skateboarding. Only organizations seeking to build free, public skate parks in low-income communities in the United States may apply for a grant from

the Tony Hawk Foundation."

In attendance at the launch event was also Ann Arbor consultant Trevor Staples, a member of the Friends of Ann Arbor Skatepark. Sk810 members say they hope to use Ann Arbor's skate park initiative as a model for their own community fundraised initiative.

Currently, the stakeholders involved in this project are Michael Wright, of Factory Two in Flint, a community member on the committee; Zachary Hayes, a student majoring in environmental science and sustainability at the University of Michigan-Flint and who is also part of the city of Flint Master Plan Implementation group through AmeriCorps VISTA – Parks; Adam M. Moore, lead planner in the planning and zoning department for the city of Flint, who is sponsoring the project and is on the planning committee; and local volunteers Shawn Rust, Brett Pierce, Dan Wilson, William "Mackie" Thomas, Jennings Harper, Jenna Bankston, Thomas Hutchinson, John Guynn, Nick Cotton, Sydney McCarley, Jon Hardman, Polly McCollum, Dave Pietrowski, Drake Allen, Stefanie Bentoski, Jeff Johnson, Angela Stamps, Joe Enriquez, and Nick Welch as chairman, are all on the steering committee.

"In order to assist with this project, the city is working to hire a professional skate park designer to work with the

*(Continued on Page 7.)*

**COLLEGE CULTURAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**  
ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net  
**Members meet Thurs., May 16, 2019**  
7-9 pm in MCC's RTC Auditorium  
**Neighborhood Watch meets Thurs.,  
June 20, 7-9 pm, MCC's RTC Auditorium**

**CONSOLIDATED**  
BARBER SHOP  
**107 W. Kearsley St.**  
**Downtown Flint**  
**Open Monday-Saturday**  
Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop



**Skateboarders hanging out at the existing park on Hammerberg Road**  
(Photo by Darlene Carey)

## ... Skateboard

*(Continued from Page 6.)*

public at large, stakeholders, neighbors, and the Sk810 committee, to design and budget a new park,” Mushatt said. “This process is in its very early stages and will work to ensure a community-designed, multi-use space near the parking lot of the city-owned, Swartz Creek Valley Golf Course.”

Five design companies submitted proposals to the city of Flint on Thursday, April 4, Mushatt added. “The proposals themselves are being reviewed by the city and its purchasing division. The city’s goal in hiring a designer is to allow the Sk810 committee to focus on outreach, building the growing committee, and eventually fundraising for the park.”

The steering committee expects to hold quite a few more meetings to get to the bottom of their design, but Jennings Harper, of the Brush Alley Skateboard Shop, has been personally looking at a company called California Skateparks. “That’s the most up-to-date and modern style skate park that everyone in California skates and that’s where skateboarding is from, so I want a park like the ones they skate every day,” Harper said.

As for ownership of the new skateboard park, Mushatt said, “Improvements to Flint city parks, regardless of who makes or pays for them, become the property of the city of Flint. Ultimately, the long-term maintenance of the 70 public recreation and open space properties, and the public amenities in them, are the responsibility of the city.

“The city does enter into partnership

agreements, leases, or other formal agreements with private, public, non-profit, and governmental organizations, stakeholders, or community volunteers, to raise funds for new amenities to conduct maintenance of existing amenities,” she said.

Mushatt said the city has worked with a number of local and national partners to build new playgrounds in Flint parks. She stated the playgrounds were bought and installed by a mix of partners and volunteers, though they become the property of the city.

“While fundraising to build those playgrounds, a maintenance fund was also created, and park adopter relationships formed. General day-to-day maintenance, such as picking up litter, changing trash bags, painting, etc. is handled by volunteer groups coordinated by the city and Keep Genesee County Beautiful, a program of the Genesee County Parks, which operates the Adopt-a-Park program.”

The fund, Mushatt described, also pays for hiring contractors to make improvements or install replacement parts, where a professional is required. While the details have yet to be worked out, a similar arrangement to this will be sought with the Flint Sk810 committee.

Sponsored by the newly formed Sk810 steering committee, DIY Flint, Brush Alley Skateboard Shop, and the Recycle Bike Shop and Mobile Bike Repair of Flint, the April 20 event included children and adults alike, as children were able to meet the Easter Bunny as he skated around the park

during the egg hunt.

Also featured at the event was local artist Zeb Molina, who created a large mural of a skull wearing a baseball cap. The performance artist used spray paint to create a nearly seven-foot-tall piece. Free food, vendor tables for the sponsors, and prizes including tee-shirts and free skateboards rounded out the day.

*EVM Staff Writer Jeffery L. Carey Jr. can be reached at [jlcareyjr@hotmail.com](mailto:jlcareyjr@hotmail.com).*

### **Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:**

**8,260+**

Candice Mushatt, City of Flint public information officer, said some numbers have been delayed as the city moves from AECOM to ROWE coordinating the project. But she said a **total of 21,498 pipes have been excavated altogether as of 4/25 and 8,260 have been replaced.**

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

### **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](mailto:ecuster@sbcglobal.net) or write to 720 E. Second St. Flint, MI 48503.

# To restore the public trust, voters have to get involved

By Paul Rozycki

Perhaps the most important highlight one could draw from the “Restore the Public Trust” Town Hall, held at the Flint Public Library in late April, was emphasized by Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

Of the 100 precincts in Michigan with the lowest voter turnout, she said, 20 of them were in Flint. They averaged about 15 percent turnout.

By contrast, Benson said many precincts in Bloomfield Hills averaged an 85 percent turnout and added that it wasn’t surprising who elected officials paid attention to when there was such a difference in turnout.

Of the 100 precincts with the lowest turnout 40 were in Detroit, but Flint’s proportion of low turnout precincts is certainly greater.

Benson, Congressman Dan Kildee, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver, and state Representative Sheldon Neeley were the keynote speakers at the forum, designed to encourage voters to get involved in working toward voter turnout, and to inform them of some of the measures taken to protect and expand the right to vote. They spoke to a standing room only audience of at least 150.



**U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee**  
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Benson highlighted some of the measures her office has taken to expand the right to vote. With a theme of “Restoring the Public Trust,” she spoke of measures to allow for same day registration, easier absentee voting, and automatic registration at the secretary of state offices.

She encouraged citizens to get involved in the newly forming redistricting commission approved by the voters last



**Sheldon Neeley & Jocelyn Benson**  
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

November. She promised to insure that “government would be transparent” and that Michigan had much to improve with regard to openness of government.

In response to audience questions toward the end of the program, Benson emphasized the need to increase voter turnout and said that some of the precincts with the lowest turnout were in Flint and Detroit.

Flint Mayor Karen Weaver followed Benson, saying, “We have a lot of work to do,” and that the state needs to protect the right to vote and promote early voting.

Sheldon Neeley, chair of the Black Caucus in the state House of Representatives, also emphasized the importance of voting turnout and called the low turnout in many minority precincts a “self-inflicted wound” for black voters.

He said voting “is the greatest right we have as American citizens.” He said he was offering a series of voter education training sessions for those intimidated by voting. He passed out pamphlets on voting rights and copies of the U.S. Constitution.

Congressman Dan Kildee took a national view of the issue of voting and trust, and said he was concerned about the threats to democratic institutions. “Many of our foundations are being challenged,” he said, adding he felt there was a need to preserve democratic processes and norms, many of which had been eroded in recent years.

Kildee said he was particularly con-

cerned about the rise of authoritarian leaders, both in the U.S. and abroad, about the weakening of the traditional norms of our government, and about attacks on the media. He said he felt that because of the importance of a well informed electorate the media is critical in keeping citizens involved and aware of the issues.

Turning to the Flint water crisis, Kildee said “It wasn’t about the water. It was



**Mayor Karen Weaver**  
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

because people were kept in the dark” and not informed of what the government was doing. Policies like the emergency manager laws denied people the right to control their own destiny. He said he felt that if the public had been involved, the water crisis could have been avoided.

As a member of the U.S. House, Kildee sponsored H.R.1, a bill which would protect and restore a range of voting rights that

(Continued on Page 9.)

(Continued from Page 8.)

have been threatened. It would prevent the purging of voting rolls which has been used to deny voting rights in many states.

The same bill would also require transparency in government. It would require that candidates for the presidency and vice presidency disclose the previous ten years of taxes. Similarly, the bill would require that any state receiving federal funds (he jokingly said "That's about 50 of them.") would have to meet the same transparency requirements as members of Congress do.

"That would bring Michigan into the 21st century in terms of governmental transparency," he said.

In response to a question from the audience on the national debt, Kildee said there were many causes, including tax cuts and military spending. He said the real way to reduce the deficit was to increase growth and that sometimes those things that save a little money in the short run end up costing more in the long run. Cutting revenue-sharing funds to cities may have saved a little money, but caused bigger problems in the long run.

"You can't cut your way to prosperity," he said, adding that when it came to investment in the future, we should "allow every child to have the opportunity to go to great schools and use their talents" to the fullest, as a means of promoting economic growth.

In the end, Jocelyn Benson summed up the evening. "The path of true democracy comes through Flint," she said. "Flint is a story for our nation when democracy fails. The state of government here and in the state will change."

She said greater voter involvement and registration can lead to a "transformative change" in our politics.

However, at the end of the presentations, the distrust in the system showed. Angry voices from neighborhood activist Tony Palladeno and others yelled out their questions hadn't been answered.

*EVM Staff Writer and political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu. EVM Staff Writer Harold C. Ford contributed to this report.*

# Flint City Council update

By Meghan Christian

While April brought still more fighting among Flint City Council members and the community, the council got a bit more done than in previous months. The month's work included some movement toward the next phase of the pipe replacement program, toward a job description for the office of the ombudsperson, and making three appointments to the Downtown Development Authority.

## Two contractors approved for Phase VI of FAST Start program

City council approved the contracts for two contractors to begin work on Phase VI of the FAST Start program. Lang Constructors, Inc., and W.T. Stevens Construction, Inc. were both approved, to service five zones each of the 10 service line replacement zones outlined in Phase VI. According to the agenda for the April 8 regular Flint City Council meeting, Lang Constructors' contract is set for \$5,221,907.50 and the contract with W.T. Stevens Construction is set for \$5,624,600, both "contingent upon the award of additional funding from the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) grant by the State of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to the City of Flint Water Fund."

Some members of the council had concerns that Lang and W.T. Stevens would not be able to complete the allotted work by the July 31, 2019, proposed end date because of the limited time and number of contractors. "Quality is important and I'm not quite sure that just two contractors are going to get this done," Ninth Ward Councilperson Eva Worthing said. "I don't want it to be the city's...possible goal of it being done by July 31. If that's the date you set ... then they should live up to the work and we should have to extend contracts," she added.

It was not just some members of council that took issue with the number of contractors being approved for Phase VI and the amount of time being proposed. Joe Parks, project manager for Flint-based

Goyette Mechanical, raised his concerns during the April 8 regular FCC meeting. "In the past we've had completion dates of Dec. 31 and four to five contractors out working," Parks said, adding that Phase V of the program took eight months to complete and they had five contractors working. "I cannot tell you how you are going to do that," he said, referencing the new proposed completion date of July 31.

"If your goal really is to finish this project this year, which is the way it's been stated ... then I implore you to look for an alternative way to do that other than what's presented here in this agenda," Parks said. "I appeal to you not to just give Goyette a whole bunch of work. I appeal to you on behalf of the citizens of the city, and for the project itself, that you need to bring on more than two contractors," he added.

Lang Constructors was approved five in favor and four opposed. Those in favor were First Ward Councilperson Eric Mays, Second Ward Councilperson Maurice Davis, Third Ward Councilperson Santino Guerra, Fifth Ward Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter, and Sixth Ward Councilperson Herbert Winfrey.

Those opposed were Fourth Ward Councilperson Kate Fields, Seventh Ward Councilperson Monica Galloway, Eighth Ward Councilperson Allan Griggs, and Ninth Ward Councilperson Eva Worthing. W.T. Stevens was approved five in favor and one opposed. Those in favor were Mays, Davis, Guerra, Winfrey-Carter, and Winfrey. Opposed was Worthing. Fields, Galloway, and Griggs were not present at the time of the vote.

## Appointments

Three appointments were made to the Flint Downtown Development Authority Board by unanimous votes. All three were recommended by Mayor Karen Weaver and will serve four-year terms ending March 31, 2023. Those appointed were Adrian Walker, replacing Thomas James; Brandee Cooke-Brown, filling Deborah Pasco's seat; and Jonathan Hardman, fill-

(Continued on Page 13.)

# Local financial advisor also helps bluebirds feather their nests

By Patsy Isenberg

Bob Wright is not only a financial advisor at Complete Wealth Advisors in Flint, but also a bluebird protector, sustainer, and instructor.

He began this pursuit seven years ago in his own backyard on Potter Road when he happened to see one of the gorgeous birds from his kitchen window. Wright already had a birdbath, feeders, suet, and most of the other things people who want to attract birds to their yards have.

But this was the first time he'd seen a bluebird. Wondering why he didn't see them more often, Wright did some research — soon identifying that it was an actual

bluebird, a member of the thrush family of birds native to Michigan, not just a blue bird. He checked out the Michigan Bluebird Society website, [www.MichiganBluebirds.org](http://www.MichiganBluebirds.org), and got hooked.

So Wright set out to attract more bluebirds to his property. First, he began feeding them mealworms and noticed a little activity. Then he found instructions on how to provide the kinds of nesting places bluebirds like, and put a couple of those boxes up in his yard.

He's since become an expert. In a recent presentation to the College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA) he explain how to attract the birds. His talk was called "Becoming a Bluebird Landlord."

Bluebirds are "people-shy" and keep to themselves, he said, nesting in cavities, not in the open like many other birds.

But that isn't the only difference — they don't eat birdseed either. Their diet consists of non-flying insects, live or dried mealworms, and wild berries in the winter when available.

They're not at all predatory, either, Wright said, which, aside from their beau-



**Five bluebird eggs at For-Mar**  
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

ty, also makes them so attractive.

For a while, the number of bluebirds in Michigan was on the decline, but lately, the numbers have improved as more people get interested in seeing bluebirds and helping improve their habitat.

The kind of bluebird found in Michigan is the Eastern Bluebird, blue with a brownish-red breast. The male is a slightly deeper blue. Their song is described on the National Geographic website as "chur-lee, chur-lee."

He says that not much is known about their lifespan, which ones migrate, and where they go if they do. With most birds, banding them is what provides that kind of information. But according to Wright, "banding bluebirds is very difficult. A guy in Traverse City is doing it ... but very little data is available."

It took four years before Wright finally got the bluebirds to live in his yard. Even after he put out the boxes, he noticed "they'd land on them and flutter in and out but wouldn't build a nest." They were taking their time and being cautious.

So Wright tried moving the boxes around. "Maybe there's something about the location ... location, location, location!"

But for the last three years, pairs of bluebirds have been nesting in his boxes and feasting on the food he learned that they require.

He also has several setups at For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum in Burton, which is where *EVM* talked to Wright on a perfect early spring day and got to see the setups and nests. One of the nests was "active," meaning that there were beautiful, tiny, blue eggs in it.

The Crim Fitness Foundation recently contacted Wright about working with kids at Pierson Elementary School's gardening club to do this activity, too. And he's willing to

assist individuals with getting started putting setups in their own yards and properties. He doesn't charge anything for this, and the only thing people would have to pay for is the boxes.



**Bob Wright & bluebird box**  
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

The nesting box is an important element for creating the ideal habitat for bluebirds. Cavity nesters like the bluebird sometimes nest in a hole of an old tree, but a better ideas is to mount the box on top of a pole in an open area, away from trees, buildings, fences or any other place that would enable pred-

(Continued on Page 11.)

## ... Bluebirds

(Continued from Page 10.)

ators like “snakes, raccoons, squirrels ... any kind of animals that like a nice egg for breakfast” to get to the nest.

Bluebirds like open spaces and because the insects they like to eat don't fly, the setup should be placed in a low-lying, wide, grassy area as opposed to areas where weeds or tall grass grows around the pole. This gives them access to the insects.

Wright checks the nests that have eggs in them every couple of days.

“Bluebirds will stay in the winter if there's shelter, and if there's food, and if there's water. They need those three things to survive,” Wright said. Wright said he sees the ones on his property all winter. He puts food out all year and plans to get a heated birdbath to keep the water from freezing.

A new pipeline runs through the field where Wright's setups are located at For-Mar, and For-Mar officials plan to replant that area. He's urging them to plant bluebird-friendly plants native to Michigan that produce berries, like holly and chokeberry, which the bluebirds can eat all winter.

The boxes do need attention, though. Wright says to check them a couple times a week for blowflies or other invasive insects — or any other predatory threat — by brushing away anything suspicious from the box. Wright saves old nests that are in good condition so that he can put a new one in a box if needed, or he even makes them himself.

He says it's a myth that birds reject nests or eggs and newly hatched baby birds touched by people. He's done it, and has even picked up young fledglings and put them into a replacement nest when needed. “She (the mother bird) will go back. That bond is incredibly strong,” he said. “Birds have a very weak, if any, sense of smell.”

Wright is generous about sharing information about the bluebird, and he's clearly passionate about it. He comments on the idea that so many people mistakenly think that a bird that's blue is a bluebird. But through his initial research, he discovered that the bluebird

is a very desirable native bird whose population needs help to flourish.

He remembers his reaction when he first got into this pursuit: “Oh my gosh, there's this whole world out there that I don't know anything about, and the more you get into it — I mean, the kids are grown, you come home in the evening and you've got nothing to do ... you're outside, you're doing something neat and something cool and helping out.”

Attracting bluebirds could be a fun

project for residents to do individually or as a neighborhood engagement project, if you've got about an acre of land, according to Wright. Not only is it enjoyable, but it could help increase the population of native bluebirds. Wright offers more information at [mibluebirds@gmail.com](mailto:mibluebirds@gmail.com) or 810-919-6061 for questions or to help attract bluebirds to your property.

EVM staff writer Patsy Isenberg can be reached at [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com).

AL SERRA AUTO PLAZA PRESENT  
**THE PARTY**  
ART OF THE FUTURE  
**JUNE 1**  
7p-12a

Enjoy an evening of live entertainment, unique performers, dancing, and cutting edge cuisine at the FIA like you've never seen it before. The future awaits at the bash of the year!

Advance Ticket | \$130  
At the Door | \$150

Visit [flintarts.org](http://flintarts.org) or follow the event on Facebook for tickets and more up-to-date information.

Flint Institute of Arts  
1120 E Kearsley St, Flint | 810.234.1695 | [flintarts.org](http://flintarts.org)

Funds raised cover bus transportation and art materials for elementary and secondary students participating in FIA education programs.

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of events available to our readers – beginning after our publication date of June 6. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our June issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at [meghan.christian22@gmail.com](mailto:meghan.christian22@gmail.com) by May 28

## 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 a.m.  
Hatha Yoga – 5:30 p.m.

#### Wednesday

Hatha Yoga  
5:30 p.m.

#### Saturday

Hatha Yoga – 8:15 a.m.  
Mindful Movement Dance – 5:30 p.m.

## Game Space

May 2 and 16  
6:30-9 p.m.  
Factory Two  
129 N. Grand Traverse  
810-354-7766  
Admission: Free

*Play games at Factory Two. Bring your favorite board game, card game, or tabletop game every first and third Thursday of the month.*

## Flint City Bucks vs. Detroit City

May 4  
7 p.m.  
Atwood Stadium  
701 University Ave.  
810-762-9735  
Admission: \$5-15

*See the inaugural game of the Flint City Bucks as they take on Detroit City in a friendly match at Kettering's Atwood Stadium. Tickets available on Ticketmaster and at the stadium on game day two hours before kick-off.*

## An Evening With Todd Gilbert at Tenacity

May 4  
7-10 p.m.  
Tenacity Brewing,  
119 N. Grand Traverse  
810-339-6676  
Admission: Free

*Todd Gilbert's back for another show at Tenacity Brewing, presenting rock from the 60s, 70s, and more.*

## Family Storytime at Applewood: Look! Flowers! by Stephanie Calmenson

May 10  
11:30 a.m.  
Applewood Estate,  
1400 E. Kearsley St.  
Admission: Free

*Storytime at Applewood Estate every Friday at 11:30 a.m. Online registration strongly encouraged as supplies are limited. RSVP: [tinyurl.com/applewoodstorytime](http://tinyurl.com/applewoodstorytime)*

## May Art Walk

May 10  
6-9 p.m.  
Various Locations Downtown  
Admission: Free

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

## May Flint Symphony Orchestra Concert

May 11  
7:30 p.m.  
The Whiting  
1241 E. Kearsley St.  
810-237-7333  
Admission: \$10-65

*An evening of music with the Flint's Symphony Orchestra performing music from Mahler's Resurrection.*

## Second Sunday Brunch

May 12  
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
Cork on Saginaw,  
635 S. Saginaw St.  
810-422-9625

*Enjoy brunch at Cork on Saginaw. To make a reservation, call 810-422-9625.*

## Jersey Boys

May 14  
7:30 p.m.  
The Whiting,  
1241 E. Kearsley St.  
810-237-7333  
Admission: \$32-72

*Behind-the-scenes look at Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons in the Tony-award winning musical. Visit <http://tickets.the-whiting.com/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=79> 12 for tickets.*

## Drag Night at Totem

May 17  
8 p.m.  
Totem Books,  
620 W. Court St.  
Admission: \$30 in advance, \$35 at the door

*Drag performances, live music, and refreshments at Totem Books.*

## Dinner Under the Lights

May 17  
5:30 p.m.  
Buckham and Brush alleys  
<http://friendsofthealley.org/>  
Admission: \$75, includes two drink tickets (wine and beer)

*Back for another summer of events, enjoy a menu of Vietnamese/Soul food with the Friends of the Alley nonprofit based downtown. All funds raised go toward beautifying the alleys and hosting future events.*

## Flint Flower Daze 2019

May 18 and May 25  
6:30-9 p.m.  
Flint Farmers' Market,  
300 E. 1st St.  
810-354-7766  
Admission: Free

*Shop a selection of annuals & perennial, trees, shrubs, hanging plants, yard art, and more while enjoying music and master gardeners.*

## ... Roads

(Continued from Page 3.)

How about toll roads in Michigan? As an “auto state,” Michigan has long opposed toll roads, though many other Midwestern states have them. But even if we did have toll roads, it probably wouldn’t raise enough money. The Ohio Turnpike, which is heavily traveled, raised about \$329 million in 2017 — not even close to the \$2.5 billion that we need.

And on top of that, since we are a peninsula surrounded by lakes, Michigan doesn’t have as many vehicles “passing through” as Ohio, Indiana or Illinois do. Typically, only freeways can be turned into toll roads. Only about one percent of Michigan roads are freeways, and the tolls are normally used only to maintain the tollways.

What about the lottery? The state lottery raises a little less than \$1 billion each year, which is dedicated to fund education, and many argue that education is underfunded already.

The marijuana tax? Not even close. It would raise about \$150 million at best.

Could we use the “Rainy Day Fund?” Currently, it’s a little over \$1 billion and has been built up over the last decade, but it would only cover a part of the needed road funds, and using it would leave the state with no emergency reserve in times of recession.

Similarly, others have suggested an increase in the sales tax, property tax, income tax, beer and wine tax, and others, but politically, those ideas have little chance in the legislature. Michigan State University economist Charles Ballard said, “The economics is pretty easy. The politics is really hard.”

### More money from the General Fund?

While the overall state budget is about \$60 billion, much of that is federal money and is already allocated for specific purposes. The state’s General Fund, where the governor and lawmakers have some choice of how they spend the money, is about \$10 billion. Could the state find an extra \$2.5 billion in the General Fund?

Not likely. That would require large cuts in funding for K-12 education, colleges and universities, corrections,

health and human services, and other key interests. Perhaps a few dollars could be found by reallocating some of the General Fund, but politically, it would be nearly impossible — and perhaps unwise — to try and find anywhere near the full amount in the current General Fund.

### Borrow the money?

Like most governments, the state has the option of borrowing money for long-term projects. Yet, unlike the national government, states must have balanced budgets. There are two major sources for borrowed money for Michigan.

The state can borrow through the State Trunkline Fund, which is backed by transportation taxes and revenues. But there are specific limits to the amount the state can currently borrow in this manner. Based on current conditions, it couldn’t raise more than \$1 billion in this manner, and it could only be used for state roads, not local, county, city or village roads.

The state could also issue general obligation bonds, backed by the full faith and credit of the state. There is no limit to the amount, but these bonds would require the approval of the voters. Like any bonds, the interest payments would be an added expense for the state well into the future. While this could raise a lot of money quickly, it might hamper the state’s chances to raise new money for road maintenance or other projects in the future.

### Who gets the money?

Finally, if and when the money is raised to “fix the damn roads,” the next question is how to spend it. The state has a complex formula for how road funds are distributed to the state, county, city, township, and village levels. Act 51, passed in 1951, sets up the basic principles of how road funds are given to local governments. Many of those who have sought new sources of funding also have maintained that the formula for giving out those funds is dated and unfair, and needs to be changed. That may be a topic for a future column.

EVM staff writer Paul Rozycki can be reached at [paul.rozycki@mcc.edu](mailto:paul.rozycki@mcc.edu).

## ... Council

(Continued from Page 9.)

ing a vacancy left by Barbara Veasley.

### Steps forward with office of the ombudsperson

City council approved the ordinance containing the job description for the ombudsperson for first reading during their regular meeting April 22. The ordinance went to second reading by a vote of six in favor and two opposed. Those in favor were Davis, Guerra, Fields, Winfrey, Galloway, and Griggs. Those opposed were Mays and Winfrey-Carter. Worthing was not present at the April 22 meeting and therefore could not vote.

### Residents take action

Residents of the city were not shy in voicing their displeasure with the city and with city council during the month of April. For some, issues were mostly with members of council themselves, but for others issues went beyond them and to other areas of the city’s government as well.

Quincy Murphy, activist and former city charter review commissioner, addressed the issues he has been seeing on council and said, “If we don’t get control of these council meetings it’s going to escalate into something.”

Former resident Pamela Gerald spoke before council for the first time in nearly a decade, she said, to offer criticism and a reminder. “All of you are over the age of 18. You criticize your kids and grandkids for the conduct I seen and witnessed here today,” Gerald said. “The citizens are at the top of the organizational chart and every time you convene and come together, it’s not your business, it’s the peoples’ business.”

Some residents went beyond addressing the council and took actual steps toward achieving their ends. In particular, Flint resident and attorney Linda Pohly filed an official complaint against the City of Flint. The complaint includes allegations of numerous violations of the Open Meetings Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and breaches in the Flint city charter.

EVM Managing Editor Meghan Christian can be reached at [meghan.christian22@gmail.com](mailto:meghan.christian22@gmail.com).

## ... Privilege

(Continued from Page 5.)

officer were dismissed.

Bean was further taken aback by the position of the National Rifle Association (NRA) in response to the Castile shooting. "I never heard the NRA say, 'They're threatening the rights of this gun owner.'"

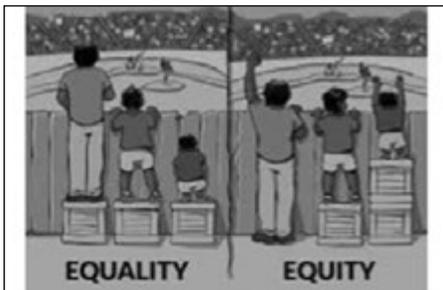
In fact, a public statement by NRA spokesperson Dana Loesch claimed that Castile was not legally carrying his handgun at the time of his death because he was found to be in possession of marijuana. Loesch said that Castile's "permit should've been out and hands not moving."

Bean decried as "ridiculous" the "coded language" that describe such black encounters with law enforcers: "If he had just kept his hands visible. If he would've spoken more politely to the officer. If he hadn't had his cell phone in his hand."

"Those phrases are what comes out of a position of privilege," Bean asserted.

A black female friend once advised Bean about the street-level difference between her black son, Greg, and his white son, Malcolm: "If Greg gets pulled over by the police, he's worried about getting out of it alive. If Malcolm gets pulled over by the police, he's worried about you (Bean) taking away the car."

"And that's the difference between privilege and not privilege," said Bean. "Neither one of them [the sons] asked for that. Neither one of them did anything to deserve or not deserve that."



### Equality and equity

"There's often the mistake that we believe that everybody is at the same level and we're not," said Bean. "Everybody's coming to the table with a whole history of issues and events."

"There's a difference between equal and equity," reasoned Bean. He cited the commonly used illustration of this that involves

three youngsters trying to watch a ball game over a fence, one tallest, one shorter, and one shortest. The same size box will not equally accommodate all three youngsters' ability to see the game.

Bean would illustrate this concept with former students by putting them at one end of the hallway and a wastebasket at the other. Each would wad up a sheet of paper; the object was to throw the wadded paper into the basket. But first he would ask loaded questions such as: "Who has a parent that went to college? Who has traveled to a foreign country? Who is from a family with two parents?" Affirmative answers allowed the students a step closer to the basket as a way of demonstrating privilege.

"Fish don't know what water looks like," said Bean. "If you take them out of water, then they realize the value of water. White people are the same way (with privilege)."

### Trump

Multiple references to the current U.S. president was common during the 90-minute event. "There are people out there who will take advantage of it (privilege)," said Bean. "We actually elected one to president."

"The president's base isn't going to change," Bean predicted. "For them to admit that they have been that wrong is absolutely terrifying. Their whole life has been built on this idea that they deserve that privilege."

"At some point, Donald Trump will go away, but when he goes away that base is still there," said Bean. "I truly believe that what we're seeing are the death throes of the white supremacist movement. That's why it's so loud, because they're on their way out."

### Solutions

**Reparations:** Local attorney John Streby contended that "talk about reparations ... is going to insure Trump's reelection ... I don't think it has enough popular support to ever take effect." Bean agreed that, "If you want to terrify white people, use the term reparations (but) the conversation needs to happen."

**Elementary education:** "They (elementary teachers) are the true revolutionaries of the world," claimed Bean. "If we don't

get elementary teachers who will shift peoples' perspective on matters of race and gender, then we're not going to change the population."

**Law enforcement discipline and training:** "There has to be very harsh penalties (for police misconduct)," Bean said. "Make sure we have a legal system that enforces what we say we want." He also advocated for effective training. "You can't just go in and say, 'We're going to have a weekend training and it's good.'"

**Social media and youth:** Bean claimed youth are having a more diverse racial experience in America than older generations due, in part, to social media that has the ability to cross physical barriers. "Where a lot of that is happening is through the social media," he said. "A lot of kids are online and worldwide."

**Increased opportunities:** "Your life is better if everybody has a better chance," Bean said. "How many great minds were beat down and never got a chance? It doesn't just affect that person; it affected me. I didn't benefit from their achievements."

**Shared social experiences:** "If you break bread with somebody, your whole perspective changes," said Bean. "If you sit down and have a meal with somebody who's different, then your life will alter forever."

*EVM Staff Writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at [hcford1185@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

## ... Boike

(Continued from Page 16.)

celebrity, the Vernor's gnome.

The portraits echo Boike's love of the unlimited wall. Even though the canvases were comparatively small and side by side, in an interview at the gallery he pointed to how many have lines seeming to go off the frame, suggesting there's something to look at in the wall, arrows to the adjoining space, something else beyond the limits. The works, even at their most traditional, thus have an open, unbounded feel.

Talking about the portraits, Boike uses words like "rhythm" — the lettering and paint strokes having "movement," — a viewer can see the impulse of the graffiti artist, maybe working fast in the dark and leaving something surprising to be discovered in the morning.

Beyond the stylistic elements, too, Boike's evolution into the gallery and commercial realm has offered challenges he welcomes — offering financial rewards, of course, but also introducing the the chance to align his individual vision with that of a buyer.

He remains fond of the audacity and drive of taggers. He said he thinks the competitiveness of the commercial art world is something for which a graffiti artist is uniquely suited.



**Boike viewing JFK portrait**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

He recalled an acquaintance noting, "A street artist already is willing to commit a crime to put up his art."

"If you're not willing to do that, you don't have the same drive and ambition that would be required to compete in the marketplace," Boike said.

"Who is more hungry for the job? If he's going to do it illegally, he's pretty hungry. That is my lineage."

Street artists have to cope with chal-



**Boike portraits of Marilyn Monroe and George Harrison at the April MCC show** (photo by Paul Rozycki)

lenges by other street artists — those who paint over their work or claim their territory after the fact. Overall, he said, he's now "old school" enough that he's generally respected by other artists. But not entirely: a commissioned mural he did for the Eastern Market in Detroit was vandalized and remains to be repainted.

That's one advantage to working on commission for work installed in homes. When he puts up his artwork, he said, "I own that wall" and nobody can mess with it. He said he enjoys trying to align his vision with the clients': most of the time they know his work and that's why they approach him to start with, so there often are commonalities between what he does and what they want. The differences often can be negotiated.

"In my mind I'm lucky," he said, He calls that kind of relationship with his clients "a fair exchange."

Boike's professional journey took him from Powers Catholic High School ("School just wasn't for me," though he did ultimately graduate) to years of working in bars, representing musicians and playing in a jazz group, The Macy Trio, moving from Flint to Lansing to Chicago and back.

"My dad told me, you don't want to be working in a bar all your life because the hours suck," he recalled. Eventually he got into Chicago's Columbia College, majoring in art and media management, and started performing more, headlining in the Flint Jazz Festival in 2009.

Still, he was a starving artist. His mother advised, "You're trying to be Eminem

and that didn't work out — maybe you should be Eminem's attorney." So he enrolled at Cooley Law School and was admitted to the bar in 2012.

He's now house counsel at Progressive Insurance, most often litigating issues around auto accidents.

And sometimes at night, after the baby and his wife are both asleep and he knows "everybody's safe and sound," he'll get up and go into his garage and



**Boike's take on Nixon**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

paint, sometimes until 3 a.m.

"But then I'll stop and say to myself, 'Wait, I have to go to work in the morning!'" and he'll put away his spray paints and vivid palette for another day, another wall.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at [janworth1118@gmail.com](mailto:janworth1118@gmail.com).

**Support community journalism!**  
For tax deductible easy giving, go to:  
[eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org)

# Village Life

## “Graffiti artist at heart,” Charles Boike brings street art vitality to Flint’s “permissible walls”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Charles Boike long ago gave up his “life of crime” in the name of art.

But Boike, 36, who’s been described by colleagues as an “urban graffiti artist at heart,” definitely has not given up his life of art.

Now a practicing attorney with a wife and baby daughter, the Fenton artist has been for years creating high energy, vibrantly colorful murals in

Flint, from Buckham Alley to Totem Books to the Farmers’ Market to Table and Tap to Habitat for Humanity to the corner of Twelfth Street and Fenton Road.

In the parlance of the street artists whose inclinations he still identifies with, Boike is “getting up” in the city.

And the effect of that work, along with other artists from the street arts like his painting partner Kevin Burdick, Pauly Everett, and the muralists coming to town through Joseph Schipani’s Flint Public Art Project, are creating a substantial and powerful body of public art.

Boike confines himself these days to “permissible walls,” as he put it, working on commission and often interacting with the property owners about color, design and subject.

That is a change from the days when he would sneak out in the middle of the night — with a supply of spray cans, a crew and assistants offering surveillance against getting caught — to tag railroad cars and subversively blanket unsuspecting walls.

That era of his life, he said, appealed to a craving for freedom and self-expression.

“Graffiti is an art form that is totally for yourself — even selfish,” he observed in an interview. “A graffiti artist is never given an assignment. The only rule is to come up with an identifying mark, a moniker. Your first step is to come up with something that’s YOU.

“It’s about having your own style — you’re not told what to paint — you



**Charles Boike with his Sammy Davis Jr. triptych**  
(photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

create a name and then you go out and paint your name, and then you think of other things you want to paint and then you go out and paint them.”

The graffiti artist “is not thinking about what the community wants to view, or what the business owner wanted on his property — there are no discussions with anybody but your own internal discussions about what to create,” he said.

He was a teenager when his graffiti life bloomed, and he did get caught.

“Unfortunately, I got into some trouble and had to repent,” he said. He got arrested in Flint, East Lansing, and Detroit, sentenced to “large restitutions,” and many hours of community service — “it went on for multiple years with multiple agencies involved.”

He luckily was a minor during these years of confrontation with the law. The repercussions did extend into his adult life, he said, when he had to explain himself and his legal history in formal detail to be admitted to the bar.

But that is not Boike now. His work since then has been strongly devoted to supporting the community and bringing art where people live and can see it.

Early on, Boike gave himself the name “Wake Up,” — sometimes just “Wake” with the “E” in Wake prominently favored — and in fact still uses the moniker.

His tag name probably has some existential meaning, he said with a smile. “I just thought sometimes people

need to wake up. Graffiti has always been about acts of rebellion, cultural rebellion. I think people need to realize they have more blessings than they know — and also should have a healthy disrespect for things,” he said, until the facts are proven.

“Waking up might lead to more education and self-realization, which makes you happier in life,” he said. “The better you

know yourself, the more comfortable you can be in your own shoes.”

And even though “Wake Up” still appears on some of his work and is how he’s known in the street art world, now that he’s legal, he also can use his actual name without fear of prosecution.

The change to “legal art” has not meant an abandonment of his aesthetic or the drive for self-expression — he still vigorously asserts his right to free speech and to explore the potential of the spaces his work inhabits.

“I’m inspired by the choice of freedom, exercise of free speech, bright vivid colors and anything that breaks away from traditional mindset,” he wrote in his artist statement accompanying a show at the Mott Community College Fine Arts gallery that closed April 23.

“I feel a need to create a legacy of how I interpret my existence,” he wrote. “I use my paintings as a vehicle to create conversations within an individual by finding ways to juxtapose traditional and non-traditional elements.”

The Mott exhibit revealed Boike’s art on a very different scale than the murals — including 16 three-by-three-foot spray paint and acrylic canvases.

Called “High Profile,” the show featured 16 portraits with a pop-art flavor of Nixon, JFK, Audrey Hepburn, Carl Sagan, Albert Einstein, Nelson Mandela, Sammy Davis Jr., and Marilyn Monroe. Not to mention a Flint high-profile

(Continued on Page 15.)