

# East Village

Magazine

October 2019

You take something  
with you. Hopefully, you  
leave something good  
behind.

Anthony Bourdain

Photograph by

*Elaine D. 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



**FREE Home Warranty**

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

Ryan Eashoo  
(810) 234-1234



REALTOR  




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



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

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



**WILD KRATTS CREATURE POWER! THE EXHIBIT**

NOW OPEN FOR PLAY!

Wild Kratts® © 2019 Kratt Bros. Co. Ltd. / 9 Story Media Group Inc.



4190 E. Court St. Burton, MI 48509  
SloanMuseum.org | 810-237-3450



# East Village Magazine

Vol. LVII No. 10 October 2019

**Founder** Gary P. Custer

**Editor** Jan Worth-Nelson

**Editor-at-Large** Ted Nelson

**Copy Editor** Danielle Ward

**Reporters** Darlene Carey

Jeffery L. Carey

Harold C. Ford

Madeleine Graham

Luther Houle

Patsy Isenberg

Melodee Mabbitt

Tom Travis

**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 Bargo, Jane Bingham, Jacob Blummer, Connor Coyne & Ruby Coyne, Casey Custer, Caroline Fechik, Christine & Patrick Figgins, Marabeth Foreman, Charlie & Linda & Patrick & Terrance & Christan & Jillianne Goldsberry, Ingrid Halling & Bob Thomas, 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, Dave & Becky Pettengill, Dick Ramsdell, 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

**E-mail:**  
eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com

Layout by Ted Nelson. Printing by Riegle 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

# Election 2019: Weaver, Neeley, and the public library. How it's different. Why it's important.

By Paul Rozycki

The campaign signs are popping up. The campaign flyers are in the mail. TV and social media ads are sure to be seen soon. The Flint mayoral campaign is under way.

In less than a month Flint voters will elect their next mayor — the first general election under the new charter. But the big questions is — How much do Flint voters care? In the August primary only 12 percent of the voters turned out to give Mayor Karen Weaver and Rep. Sheldon Neeley the right to move on to the Nov. 5 election. [Interviews with both candidates begin on p. 6-7]

How many more voters will show up next month? Genesee County Clerk John Gleason, a close observer of local elections, suggests that turnout might be as low as 20 percent for the general election — perhaps 15,000 to 17,000 votes total. That's a typical turnout for a primary, but a dismal showing for a general election.

Though Flint has had a history of low turnout elections in recent years, this one is different in several ways. Because it's the first one under the new charter, the mayor will serve only three years, until 2022, rather than the usual four-year term. After 2022, the mayor will be elected every four years, in the same year as the governor. The hope is that turnout will improve by holding the mayor's contest at the same time as the election for governor and state lawmakers.

But this election is different in one other way as well. It's the first time that two African American candidates have faced off for Flint's top job. Over the last 40 years it has been common to have one white candidate and one African American candidate running for mayor. And voters often divided along racial lines. However, having two African American candidates hasn't stopped race from being a factor in this

campaign and it hasn't prevented negative campaigning.

The primary election was close. Weaver won 42 percent of the vote. Neeley got 39 percent. Pfeiffer won 13 percent and Eason got five percent. Where will those who voted for Greg Eason and Don Pfeiffer go?

With less than a month to go, the outcome of the election is up in the air, and good case can be made for either a Weaver or Neeley victory.

### Why Weaver could win

On Mayor Karen Weaver's side there are a number of good reasons why she could win another term.

As the incumbent, she has built up strong name recognition and community visibility.

During her first term, the state takeover of Flint ended.

She has raised substantial campaign funds — over a quarter of a million dollars early in the year.

She has brought national attention to the Flint water crisis with numerous celebrity visits, and national media stories. Offers of financial help often followed.

While there has been controversy over the pipe replacement in Flint, the process is moving along, and by one estimate, may be done by the end of the year.

Her supporters include some of the major players in Flint politics, who know the system well.

She has proven herself to be a competitive campaigner — winning her first election over Dayne Walling in 2015, and then turning back a recall attempt in 2017, with a majority of the vote.

### Why Neeley could win

On the other side, Rep. Sheldon

*(Continued on Page 14.)*



Photograph by  
*Edwin D. Lester*

Photo of the Month: Pumpkins

## Education Beat

# *Stream of departed educators becomes a torrent; FCS loses 60 educators, 833 years of experience in 2019*

*By Harold C. Ford*

What had been a steady stream of educators departing Flint Community Schools (FCS) in the first seven months of 2019, became a torrent in August and September. According to FCS records posted at its website, the district lost 60 educators with 833 years of experience from January to September.

FCS “Personnel Recommendations” revealed the following number of educator resignations and retirements and collective years of experience:

Date	No. Resignations	Years Experience*
Jan. 17	4	25
Feb. 20	4	53
Mar. 20	4	31
May 15	6	80
June 19	5**	106
Aug. 21	26	388
Sept. 18	11	150
Total	60	833

\*rounded to nearest whole year  
\*\*includes one death

### **FCS superintendent implicates pay**

Derrick Lopez, FCS Superintendent, read from a long statement at the Sept. 18

board meeting, which, in part, assessed the reason for the extraordinary number of departures to be low pay:

“For too long the teacher shortage across the state of Michigan was exacerbated in Flint because we did not have a collective bargaining agreement in place and we had the lowest starting rate in Genesee County ... In partnership with the United Teachers of Flint and the Michigan Education Association we have completely rewritten the collective bargaining agreement to create real incentives for teachers to work in the Flint Community Schools.”

Lopez said Southwestern Academy and Flint Junior High were hardest hit.

Casey Lester, the Flint board’s secretary/treasurer, asked Lopez about exit interviews with departed employees. Lopez indicated that Cassandra Washington, executive director of human resources, had already begun to collect data from those who’d left the district.

“I would love to look at some of

that,” said Lester. “Statistically ... pay is typically not one of the top three reasons people leave a job ... I’d be very curious to see what our top three reasons for people leaving the district are versus what we believe they are.”

### **New contract ends five-year pay freeze:**

In August, Flint’s 250 teachers ratified, by a 96 percent majority, a new contract that raised pay. The new pact ended a five-year pay freeze for Flint teachers.

“We eliminated the two lowest pay steps of the former contract, raised the starting salary for entry level employees by roughly \$3,000 per year,” said Lopez in his prepared statement, “and included an on-average two percent raise for every teacher in the district.”

The agreement also extends longevity benefits to begin at five years for those who remain in FCS service as follows: \$500/year starting at the end of the fifth year; \$750/year starting at the end of the

*(Continued on Page 13.)*

# City Council considers protests, pipelines, pot

By Luther Houle

Well past sunset, the second monthly City Council meeting for September came to order at 8:15 p.m. Monday, Sept. 23 after a three-hour Special Affairs Committee meeting.

The Special Affairs Committee meeting is where the City Council decides which issues will be addressed during the subsequent council meeting. With tensions high and a thicker-than-average agenda to sort through, council members were challenged to call their meeting to order nearly three hours after its scheduled commencement time.

Highlights from Monday's City Council meeting include continued backlash to the proposed affordable income housing to be built in Carriage Town, a \$7 million increase to service line replacement funds, a \$75,000 transfer from the city's general fund to pay for doubled janitorial prices, an increase to the Flint Lead Exposure Registry Grant, and the first reading of an opt-out article to prohibit the sale of medical marijuana.

## **Carriage Town plan protested, developer defended**

As introduced at the Sept. 9 City Council meeting, Communities First, Inc. has plans in place to build an affordable housing project in Carriage Town at the corner of Grand Traverse and University avenues. Some residents took the opportunity to let the council know they do not support this development.

Ken Van Wagoner, a resident of Carriage Town and the owner of Good Beans Cafe, stepped forward to the podium, saying "I don't trust Communities First." Speaking about the proposed project, he said, "I don't support it as it is, and neither does a lot of my neighborhood."

"This development is too big," Van Wagoner continued. "There's 48 parking spaces. Where are 83 people in beds gonna put their cars?"

After public comment, Council President Herbert Winfrey responded

directly to Wagoner, "I heard you say you don't trust them (Communities First). I do."

After mentioning Communities First's Coolidge Project at the former Coolidge Elementary School just opened at a ribbon-cutting that same day in Winfrey's own Ward Six, he said, "Let's not cast aspersions on Communities First ... They've actually done some really good work for a whole lot of folks."

City Council did not pass any business regarding the development on Monday. Currently, they are awaiting City Planning and Development to place it on the agenda if and when Communities First decides to proceed.

## **Service pipes grant: more class action lawsuit funds delivered**

According to the details of Monday's City Council agenda, the City of Flint has previously received a total grant of \$29 million in state funds for the purpose of replacing lead service lines. City Administrator Steve Branch explained that a new resolution will approve the city to accept an additional \$7.7 million in grant funds from the state for a total grant of \$36.7 million.

Branch says this \$36.7 million is just part of the \$47 million that the state owes the City of Flint for lead service line replacement. He said this \$47 million comes from the Concerned Pastors for Social Action settlement, a class action lawsuit settled against state officials in March 2017.

City Council approved the grant acceptance as part of the meeting's master resolution in a unanimous vote.

## **Janitorial budget increased**

The city is being forced to double its annual budget for janitorial services, including city hall, police and fire station maintenance. When a \$75,000 budget amendment came up on the agenda, City Administrator Steve Branch was again called to the podium to explain.

Branch said the city's previous supplier for the service charged \$75,000 annually. But the city's latest bid resulted in a lowest bid of \$150,000, he said.

Facing a 100 percent price increase, the city must go through council to cover the deficit. Branch said the \$75,000 amendment to the budget will have to come from the city's general fund.

The budget amendment passed with a vote of five to one with Councilperson Monica Galloway dissenting.

## **Flint Lead Exposure Registry receives additional funds**

A resolution to accept a \$43,300 grant was brought before the City Council.

According to the council meeting's agenda, a Flint Lead Exposure Registry (FLExR) grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Michigan State University has provided the City of Flint with aid since 2018.

Described on the agenda, the FLExR program is to further support the development and implementation of the Flint Registry, (described in *EVM* stories in July 2018 and January of this year) which has been operating since 2018 to identify individuals exposed to lead drinking water for long-term surveillance.

The program's goals are described in four parts. FLExR aims to register eligible Flint residents, conduct health and development assessments on registrants, assess the needs of registrants and refer them to clinical services, and track improvements in health and development outcomes via follow-up assessments.

The FLExR grant awarded the City of Flint \$18,400 in FY2018 and again in FY2019. This amount has been increased to \$43,300 for FY2020, and the City Council is tasked to accept the increased grant fund and approve to amend the FY2020 budget to accommodate the extra funding.

The council decided to table the resolution in a five-to-one vote with Councilperson Eric Mays dissenting. They will reconvene to discuss it at their City Finance Committee meeting next Wednesday.

(Continued on Page 13.)

# Mayor Karen Weaver: “We are better off now”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

It’s mid-afternoon on a balmy Monday, the first day of autumn, and Flint Mayor Karen Weaver already is running behind. It’s been a demanding and emotional day.

That morning, Weaver had stood next to her police chief, Tim Johnson, flanked by city staff and community religious leaders and said, “Our city is in need of prayer.” The press conference had been hastily called after a bloody weekend left three dead in a triple homicide on the city’s east side.

“This is not right, it’s got to stop,” she declared, in a somber plea for more resources for the city’s youth. “We need to get a message to young people that there are other ways to resolve issues. We’ve already had a water crisis — a generation has suffered and been damaged by lead in the water. Some kind of way this city has to come together. There need to be some alternatives to thinking that the only way to resolve things is to kill people.”

Later that day, the mood shifted as she joined in a ribbon cutting for a new Communities First, Inc. apartment complex, the refurbished Coolidge Elementary School, which has been transformed into 54 apartments.

That project is a reflection of both how the city’s schools one by one have been abandoned as enrollments plummeted, and also of how enterprising developers, like Communities First president and CEO Glenn Wilson, who attended Coolidge Elementary as a child, are finding ways to repurpose and rehabilitate some of the city’s beautiful old structures.

In a way, those two events typify the dimensions of Weaver’s turbulent first four years in office: facing down tragedy and the turmoil of the city’s residents as the water crisis hit one of the poorest and most violent cities in the country, and then representing the city as it was thrust into the national spotlight, and then managing the influx — sometimes problematic, demanding and controversial — as that attention triggered millions of dollars of aid, dona-

tions and visits from hundreds of outsiders.

We are told because of her schedule crunch we have 20 minutes, less than we expected; we negotiated for 30, understanding that we would not get to all our questions.

She sits down at one end of a long table in her conference room with two *EVM* reporters. At the other end are Candice Mushatt, her communications director, and Aonie Gilcreast, Weaver’s chief advisor and outreach development liaison.



**Mayor Karen Weaver**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Gilcreast is an old friend who had served her for the first three years as a volunteer but then was hired officially for a \$120,000 salary provided out of a \$3 million Kellogg Foundation economic development grant.

“It was overwhelming at times,” Weaver says, reflecting on how she had no “honeymoon” to speak of following the Nov. 2015 election in which she ousted incumbent Dayne Walling, based on her focused campaign promising action on the water crisis. “It’s been nonstop,” she said. “It was exhausting — and it still is.”

But as her mayoral campaign for a second term picks up steam, she’s taking some time to reflect.

“I sometimes use that quote from Ronald Reagan,” she says with a smile: “Are you better off than four years ago?”

“I think we are better off,” she says.

“Four years ago we still had poisoned water. Four years ago we didn’t have the information to know what we needed. Four years ago we didn’t know how much it would take to make things right.”

Now, while she still is advocating for more state aid to continue community rehabilitation such as replacing in-home plumbing fixtures possibly damaged by lead, she is relieved that water is testing better.

“And we’ve been able to start building back,” she said, noting that despite bumps in restoration contracting and implementation replacement — just 4,000 homes remain out of close to 28,000 on the original list, she said, and are scheduled to be completed in 2020.

Still, she says she understands trust has been one of the biggest casualties of the crisis. When a reporter says many people still won’t drink out of the tap, she quickly replies, “I’m not telling them to! I hope they’re not drinking out of the tap! Not unless they’re comfortable, and that’s a choice that they can make.”

A month into her tenure, she declared a state of emergency, part of a strategy to open up state and federal funds. In January of 2016, Gov. Rick Snyder followed suit. Then-president Obama declined to call it a disaster as she had hoped, but designated it an emergency and signed off on \$5 million in initial federal funds.

That was the start of multiple processes bringing in millions more from multiple directions — federal and state grants, class action lawsuits, contributions from charities and individuals — for infrastructure and pipeline replacement, children’s services, health care, nutrition, Medicaid supplements, educational support, psychological and trauma-related support, and of course, lots and lots of water.

Some have said the totals approach \$1 billion, but she says nailing those totals down is extremely hard to calculate.

She said she honestly doesn’t know how much money has flowed into the city over the years, and pressed on that point, she said, regarding public funds, “You’ll have to ask the state about that

*(Continued on Page 8.)*

# Rep. Sheldon Neeley: “We should be further along”

By Tom Travis

Speaking with *East Village Magazine* on his birthday, Sept. 20, Flint mayoral candidate Sheldon Neeley offered insight about how he would conduct his administration if he wins the Nov. 5 election. He was pressed for time and was able to grant 20 minutes on the phone for the interview.

Neeley cited that if elected, his focus would be on what he calls his “Five Points of Light” — residential, recreation, economics, education and safety.

Neeley is familiar to many Flint residents, having served as Flint’s Sixth Ward Councilperson for nine years and for the last six years as Michigan’s 34th District state representative.

He could be characterized as a seasoned politician, from his years of experience holding elected offices. In his terms in the state legislature, he has served on the health policy, commerce and trade, tax policy, local government, and transportation and infrastructure committees. For the past four years Neeley has served on the legislative Black Caucus in the House of Representatives.

He’s been on the mayoral track before: 10 years ago, Neeley ran for mayor of Flint against Dayne Walling and lost.

Today, trying again, he said he wants to bring back respect and trust when it comes to the city administration working with city council and the citizens.

“The city administration and city council are co-equal branches of government, each with different responsibilities,” he said. “It’s important for the city administration and city council to understand we have a mandate to be followed.”

The night before, Sept. 19, Neeley spoke to about 85 residents gathered at Mott Community College for a College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA) meeting. There Neeley said his administration would be populated by professionals and qualified individuals, not “friends and family.” When he spoke to *EVM* he clarified that what he meant was that he was not going to choose leaders and directors in his administration just because they were his friends or they

went to church together — alluding to several of Mayor Karen Weaver’s appointments.

“That’s not a good way to build a government, he said, pledging, “I will choose experienced and qualified people.”

“In our City Hall there are people who don’t deserve their positions because of their skill set,” he said, adding he will put



professional people in transition within 90 days of being in office.

“We have to rebuild City Hall,” he said. “Flint residents deserve a level of consistency.”

At the CCNA meeting, Neeley stated, “We need to improve the quality of life and protect the most vulnerable. We’re on the precipice of not being a real city.” He asserted more than \$1 billion has come to this region, and said, considering that, “We should be further along.”

## City Council thoughts

Neeley also talked about what his relationship as mayor would be with City Council, noting complaints about frequent chaos at the meetings from other council members and residents — in part about an abuse of parliamentary rules.

Neeley complained about the numerous “points of order, points of information”

shouted out at council meetings, which he suggested often delay progress through council business. “There is an agenda and you get through it,” he said. “The council has become divisive. Even though he asserted the council and mayor are co-equal branches of government, he said they seem not to work together smoothly.

## Regional government collaboration?

Neeley referred to “32 units of government” in Genesee County that surround the city of Flint, including Flint Township, Davison, Davison Township, Flushing, and Flushing Township. As mayor he said he hopes to work well with these other city and township governments and communities, and envisions collaborating services for all of Genesee County.

## Restoring, improving revenue sharing?

Another issue Neeley says he will advocate for is improvement in revenue sharing. Revenue sharing for cities creates income for the City of Flint each month.

According to the State of Michigan Treasury website, the City of Flint receives about \$2.5 – \$2.7 million from the State each month. According to Maxwell Evans in his article “Cities, Counties Still Losing Out on Revenue Sharing Money” dated March 30, 2018, “There are two types of revenue sharing: constitutional and statutory. Constitutional revenue sharing, funded by ten percent of the state sales tax revenues, is guaranteed.

The state constitution calls for about one-seventh of sales tax revenues to go towards statutory revenue shares. However that amount can be — and consistently has been — lowered through the Legislature’s appropriations process.”

Asked if there was any chance that the state legislature would increase revenue sharing for cities, Neeley said, “while the full amount of revenue sharing has not yet reached the full amount, it is moving in a positive direction, but it’s not where it needs to be.”

## Former broadcast engineer

A broadcast engineer by training and

(Continued on Page 8.)

## ... Weaver

(Continued from Page 6.)

— they doled it out.” She said following the money in state documents has proven flummoxing — with amounts and destinations often buried in hard-to-find and hard-to-specify line items.

Accounting for the philanthropic flood of money has proven equally elusive, she said.

“And when people hear that money has come in, they think it came to City Hall, and it didn’t,” she said. “I don’t know how many ways to say it.” She said she wishes some of the other agencies in town who received donations would be more transparent, so that City Hall “doesn’t have to take the fall” for accountability that she cannot provide.

“If you spent it in a way that’s helpful to the city, talk about it,” she said. “A lot of places got money but have been very quiet.”

### On Flint foundations:

#### “I thank them every chance I get”

Regarding the omnipresent influence of philanthropic institutions in the city — the C.S. Mott Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Flint, the Ruth Mott Foundation, and others — Weaver said, “We can’t do this by ourselves and we shouldn’t do it by ourselves ... in Flint, philanthropy has played a big role and I thank them every chance I get.

“When the water crisis hit, they didn’t want to overstep their bounds — we had a conversation about pipes and infrastructure, but that’s not where their money is supposed to go — that’s something the government was supposed to do. But our foundations have been present for us: they’ve been partners.”

### City Council

Addressing the notorious chaos of the City Council, Weaver said, “I used to go, but it’s exasperating. It’s hard when you send your department heads up there and they get insulted and talked down to. I’ve lost two department heads because of the City Council.

“And eight-hour meetings? We can’t do that.” She said she is asked about the council’s reputation in Washington,

Baltimore, Chicago — everywhere she goes. The city may be losing business because of it, she suggests.

“Nobody wants to go through that experience of having to come before them,” she said.

But asked what to do about it, she says, “I don’t know. I can’t be responsible for them. It’s sad for a city that had our voices taken away [during the emergency manager era] and then when we got it back, look what happened.”

### On the ombudsperson

Asked why the selection of the ombudsperson is taking so long — a position required in the city’s revised charter approved by voters in 2017 and mandated to take effect in January 2018, Weaver said as for the city administration, “we did our part — we did what we were supposed to do,” developing a job description and getting candidates selected — adding she wasn’t sure why HR (human resources) and the new charter-mandated Ethics and Accountability Board haven’t gotten past that.

### Police and water rates

Asked why there has been no increase in the police budget in the pending city budget, she said simply, “You’ll have to ask the City Council about that.”

Asked if the Great Lakes Water Authority water rates are going up, she quickly answered, “Not for Flint.”

### Exciting signs

In short, Weaver says, “It’s been non-stop moving the city, making good things happen.”

“You walk around Flint, you see that we’ve made great strides — you see cranes, and contractors working — it’s exciting to see different restaurants; Flint has a fashion industry; we’ve got all of these things happening, entertainment coming into the city — people are buying houses, people want to invest in Flint.

In the meantime, she has clung to several rituals that she says help keep her sane and healthy.

“I pray. I exercise. I listen to loud music,” she says.

“I like so many kinds of music — it

(Continued on Page 13)

## ... Neeley

(Continued from Page 7.)

career, Neeley spent 27 years at WJRT. “This was supposed to be my retirement,” he said with a laugh. But he might use some of those skills in office — he plans to communicate with the constituents and citizens of Flint by continuing a tradition of radio broadcasts he says he styles after FDR’s “Fire Side Chats.”

Neeley said he wants to increase the dialog with citizens so that he can “clarify the direction and scope of where the city government wants to go.” He said he is committed to an “open-door policy” and will allow residents to vent comments and share concerns and input.

“We will adjust hours and communication at City Hall so that people have better communication with us all.

### About that charter

Regarding the city’s relatively new charter, approved by voters and which took effect in January 2018, Neeley stated, “The charter is the constitution for the community — it’s not an option; it’s a mandate.

Neeley said he will look at the city’s master plan that has been developed and not yet approved by City Council to see if it fits with the city’s new charter. He said he would implement whatever parts of the charter have not been put into effect and would do it quickly, he stated. Maybe not on day one, he said, but quickly after getting elected.

### Water crisis not over

Considering the water crisis in Flint, Neeley stated, “We are absolutely still in a crisis. We have not done due diligence for our residents. We must reestablish trust. Many residents still don’t drink out the tap because of a lack of trust.”

“We will answer citizens’ questions especially around water and utility issues,” he said.

Neeley said he considers himself a people person and believes in connecting with his constituents. He said he regularly has 27 community engagements per year including health fairs, Easter and Christmas celebrations, expungement seminars, and dental care events where he gives each child a

(Continued on Page 13.)



# Commentary

## Join us — Become a First Amendment warrior

By Ted Nelson

In the September 2018 edition of *East Village Magazine*, a rare editorial proclaimed “The Free Press Is Not The Enemy Of The People.” We made the argument that WE ARE THE PEOPLE. The five freedoms set out in our Bill of Rights have made us “... a bulwark of civilization,” a shining light against the dark forces of demagoguery, tyranny, and oppression.

One year later, the battle rages on.

“It is our constitutional right, our privilege, our patriotic duty to continue this role and

to support, with our small but stalwart voice, our call ... for doing what the Constitution calls the press to do. We will not be silenced. We will continue to do our job, with dignity and ferocity.”

—EVM editorial, September, 2018.

Humans solve problems through a process of trial and error. We look at an issue, gather as much information about it as we can, make some educated guesses about its nature, and decide what to do about it. But effective decision making requires us to marshal as much accurate information and scientific fact as we can bring to it.

When fact and truth become the baubles of political manipulation, problem solving is corrupted and our democracy is wounded. Sadly, this is the situation we now find ourselves in. This is what telling truth to power is all about. This is the battle that journalists are now engaged in.

Words matter. Truth matters. Our purpose at *East Village Magazine* is to honor and present the truth. In this time of intense political and social discord, this time when our very existence on the planet is threatened, could there be a more important mission?

Historically, democracy has

always been a messy and problematic process. “Genuine democracy is difficult to achieve and once achieved, fragile. In the grand scheme of human events, it is the exception, not the rule.” — Costica Bradstan, *NY Times*

fundraising — all of those things that pump the blood of vitality into an organization.

Link arms with your neighbors and fellow Flintoids in keeping one of the most critical elements of our democracy healthy and effective.

And have fun in the process. Meet new people. Make new friends. Exercise your mind and body. Take your heart out for a walk. Let your spirit taste the sweet honey of engagement with your fellow humans in a great cause. It’s good for your health,

good for the neighborhood, and good for the country. E Pluribus Unum!

This is it. America’s most basic values are being challenged. The next year or so will determine the direction our democracy takes. Don’t be that panty-waist on the sideline waiting on others to decide the outcome. Be proactive. Take a risk. Become involved. You can make a difference. You have the power of ONE. Extend your hand to your fellow citizens and become the many that cannot be resisted.

Let’s talk.

Call me at 810-235-2977.

Whatever your talents, skills, or limitations, there is a way for you to participate and we will figure it out.

EVM Editor-at-Large Ted Nelson can be reached at [mainegame@icloud.com](mailto:mainegame@icloud.com)

### FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

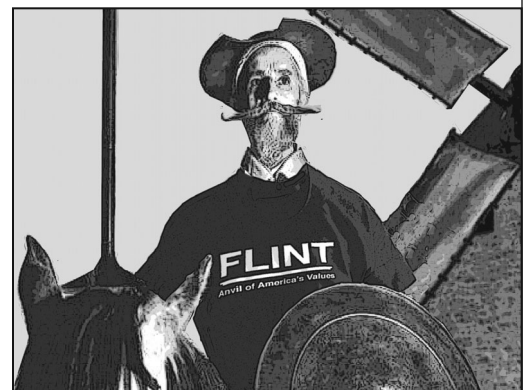
Basically, the idea of democracy — one person, one vote — runs contrary to human nature. We are a contentious lot, always looking for an edge and not predisposed to getting along. Democracy, messy and difficult as it is, remains the only path that allows for the survival of human dignity.

In a July 5 *New York Times* article about democracy titled “It should be no surprise that humans cannot sustain it,” Costica Bradstan concludes with the following observation: “Yet democracy is one of those elusive things — happiness is another — whose promise, even if perpetually deferred, is more important than its actual existence. We may never get it, but we cannot afford to stop dreaming of it.”

As dedicated First Amendment supporters, the staff of *East Village Magazine* invite you to join the fray.

Support us in our role as First Amendment warriors. Join us in the front lines as a reporter, distributor, neighborhood associate, news photographer, or cartoonist.

Or help to cover our backs with your talent, time, and money. We need individuals with skills in IT, accounting, graphics, advertising, research, grant writing, legal, event planning,



# *Ombudsperson appointment postponed; Ethics and Accountability Board struggles to achieve fair hiring process*

*By Melodee Mabbitt*

Appointment of Flint's ombudsperson is postponed as Ethics and Accountability Board (EAB) members appeal to the city to review additional applicants and achieve a process of appointing the ombudsperson that is independent from interference by the city's administration.

Eight people applied for the ombudsperson positions, but only three applicants were provided by the human resources department to the EAB for review.

Interviews of candidates Lauren Rowley, Louis Hawkins and Tané Dorsey took place in City Council chambers Aug. 22 with oversight by representatives of the human resources department.

"I have two concerns about the search. One, it only drew a small number of applicants ... Two groups should be interested applicants: retired police and attorneys. The fact that we apparently got no applications from either group is problematic," EAB member John Daly said.

Daly explained his second concern is that the EAB is treated by the administration as a typical board of volunteers, but that it is unique in its function. "I don't know any other boards that have appointment authority, investigative and subpoena powers, or the ability to appoint outside legal counsel. The goal is to recognize that this board was mandated by a vote of people through the charter and is a different type of board than they have ever had before."

On Sept. 10, a complaint before the court was heard by Seventh Judicial Circuit Court Judge F. Kay Behm. Filed by Linda Pohly, the complaint sought an injunction to prevent the hiring of an ombudsperson "until the city allows the Ethics and Accountability Board [EAB] to review all of the resumes and to hold interviews as they choose, as opposed to

under the supervision of the human resources department," she said.

Pohly's attorney Alec Gibbs argued that the EAB was established to oversee the executive and legislative branches and that allowing the city's Human Resources department to impede the independent appointment of an ombudsperson was a violation of its role as established by the charter.

City Attorney Angela Wheeler argued the city has an interest in protecting applicant information as it contains personal information and is performing its role in accordance with the charter.

"We're at the finish line (in the process of hiring an ombudsperson). To stop the process now would be a harm to the public," Wheeler said.

Judge Behm denied the motion because she did not find that a breach of the charter has happened yet and no irreparable harm would happen by allowing the hiring to take place because there is nothing stopping the EAB from asking to review the other five applicants.

According to Judge Behm, the board does not have to allow the human resources department to limit its review of applications or interfere with its questioning of candidates.

At the general meeting of the EAB on the evening of Sept. 10, the board discussed the court's findings and voted to ask the city for the remaining applications. The board also canceled a town hall to discuss the ombudsperson hiring process and the board's roles and responsibilities previously scheduled for Sept. 17.

Instead, the board scheduled a meeting Sept. 27 to continue efforts to achieve an independent effort for appointing the ombudsperson.

"This person will serve the city for six years and only be removed for

malfeasance. It is critically important that the residents have faith in the hiring process and that we select the best candidate for the position," Daly said.

Pohly explained that she is not concerned with who is appointed, but with establishing a clearly independent appointment process.

"This is totally about the process of the appointment. It is not my place as a citizen with a lawsuit to second guess the decisions of the EAB," Pohly said.

"The concern is that the administration is interfering in the process by selecting applications that are preferred by administration. This is not something that should be forced on the administration by the courts. This should be something that they embraced freely."

*EVM Staff Writer Melodee Mabbitt can be reached melodee.mabbitt@gmail.com.*

## **Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint: 9,293**

Numbers provided by pipeline contractor ROWE Engineering are now posted at cityofflint.com under Fast Start Replacement Program. Totals as of Sept. 20 were **23,129 pipes excavated (wording changed to "explored" since returning to the "predictive model") and 9,293 replaced.**

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

## **Unclassified ads**

**WANTED: Garage Space, approx. 10'X10'** to store display shelves for FIA student Art Fair ceramics. Access needed only once or twice per year. Email John at: [applegroveclayworks@gmail.com](mailto:applegroveclayworks@gmail.com).

# Get ready to vote Nov. 5: absentee voting tips here

By Jan Worth-Nelson


Absentee voting has been made easier thanks to Statewide Ballot Proposal 18-3 approved by voters last year. Basic info:

- Any registered voter now can vote absentee without providing a reason.
- Your request for an absentee ballot to be mailed must be submitted in writing to City Clerk Inez Brown at 1101 Saginaw St. #201C (Second floor of City Hall) by 5 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1.
- If you're already registered at your current address, you can pick up an absentee voter ballot in person at the clerk's office anytime up to 4 p.m. on the day prior

to the election. You have until 8 p.m. election day, Nov. 5, to turn in your absentee ballot to the clerk's office, second floor of

City Hall.

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



**107 W. Kearsley St.  
Downtown Flint  
Open Monday-Saturday**  
[Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop](https://www.facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop)



## RECREATION CENTER

The UM-Flint Recreation Center is a leader in health, fitness & recreational experiences for Flint and the surrounding communities.

VISIT [FlintRec.com](http://FlintRec.com) FOR MORE INFORMATION






**SPECIAL FEATURES**

- Cardio Room with TV's
- Free-weights & Cybex® Prestige Weight Machines
- FREE drop-in fitness Classes
- FREE Unlimited U•FIT
- Indoor Track
- Indoor Pool
- Multi-Sport Gym
- Raquetball Courts
- Whirlpool Spa & Dry Saunas

**OTHER SERVICES (fee-based)**

- Personal Training
- Fitness Assessment
- Iyengar Yoga
- Locker Rental

**LET US HELP YOU REACH YOUR HEALTH & FITNESS GOALS!**

- OPEN to the public through membership or day pass
- Free equipment orientations
- Free tours, call (810) 762-3441
- Like us on **Facebook** | Follow us on **Instagram**

**PERSONAL TRAINING = \$76** Includes TWO 1-hour Personal Training Sessions

**DAY PASS RATES**

0-5 years	Free
6-12 years	\$5
13-17 years	\$10
18-61 years	\$12
62 years & older	\$6

Day pass includes a returnable towel. Bring your own lock for day use lockers. Save \$ --- Purchase a 10-pack! WATCH for seasonal sale events!

Official Training Center for the



## SHEPPY DOG FUND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

# Irish Folk Tales & Halloween Legends

## An Evening of Storytelling

**10.23.19 7:00p FIA Theater**

Join Mark O'Géarain, Experience Manager of Dublin's National Leprechaun Museum, for an evening of Irish stories about the ancient feast known as Halloween. Intended for an adult audience, these darkly funny tales have inspired and protected the Irish people for generations.

*Free and open to the public*



Mark O'Géarain



*The Shabby Dog Fund has been established to address topics of art, religion, and history, and is funded annually by The Shabby Dog Fund, Dr. Alan Klein, advisor.*



**1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint**  
For information, please contact 810.234.1695 or visit [flintarts.org](http://flintarts.org)

Media Sponsor  
**WKAR**

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

*"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers—beginning after our publication date of Oct. 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our November issue, email your event to us by Oct. 24 to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com).*

## Tai Chi Fall 2019

Now through Dec. 14

Thurs. and Sat., beginners at 9:30 a.m., intermediate at 10:30 a.m. and advanced at 11:30 a.m.

No classes Oct. 24 and 26 and Nov. 9, 28 and 30.

McLaren Hospitality House

G-3170 Beecher Rd., Flint

Cost: \$105 for Fall Session and drop ins \$6 per class.

Contact Chi Force Tai Chi at 810-348-6530

for questions.

## The New McCree Theatre:

### "Memphis The Musical"

Oct. 3-19

Thurs.-Sat. at 7 p.m., Sat. matinees at 2 p.m.

A fictional story set in the 50s is based on a book by Joe Dipietro about a white DJ in Memphis who begins playing R&B on the radio and befriends an upcoming black female singer. The original score is by Dipietro and David Bryan.

The New McCree (Flint Jr. High School NW Campus)

G-2138 W. Carpenter Rd., Flint

Admission: \$5.00

Call 810-787-2200 for tickets.

## Halloween Ghosts & Goodies

Oct. 5-31

Weekdays 5-9 p.m. and weekends noon-9 p.m.

"Enjoy treats and tricks, cider and donuts, little monsters and big fun for the whole family. From an Enchanted Forest to the magic show at the Colwell Opera House or the straw maze and treat stops throughout the village, it's sure to put all in the spirit of the season. Don't forget to top off your visit with a 40-minute ride through the autumn countryside on the famous Huckleberry Railroad Ghost Train Express or a cruise around Mott Lake on the Genesee Belle." Recommended that you purchase your train ride early as they often sell out in advance."

Crossroads Village & Huckleberry Railroad  
6140 Bray Rd., Flint

Ticket prices vary depending on choice of events. For tickets and more info go to [genesee parks.org](http://genesee parks.org).

## Coloring Party with Flint Handmade

Oct. 8

3-10 p.m. Tuesday

Tenacity Brewery hosts this family friendly event to color a page by a local artist, eat Vehicle City Tacos, Michigan-made Ice Brand Ice Cream Bars, and drink craft beers, ciders, and non-alcoholic root beer on tap.

Tenacity Brewery  
119 N. Grand Traverse St., Flint

For more info visit [flinhandmade.org](http://flinhandmade.org).

## Flint Festival of Quilts

Oct. 10-12

Contemporary, historical, traditional and fiber art quilts displayed in many locations.

Flint's downtown entertainment district.

Visit [genesee fun.com](http://genesee fun.com) for more info.

## Buddy Guy at The Capitol Theatre

Oct. 10

7-10 p.m. Thursday

Blues guitarist Buddy Guy performs live with Jimmie Vaughan "making sure that the blues not only stays alive, but remains full of life and an inspiration to all who listen."

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

For more info visit [capitoltheatreflint.com](http://capitoltheatreflint.com).

Tickets: \$42.50-\$97.50.

## Flint Fright FilmFest

Oct. 12

Noon -7:30 p.m. Saturday

This one day film festival will feature "diabolical short films from around the world" and is presented by The Flint Horror Collective and Mott Community College.

A ceremony to award prizes

will be enjoyed after the films.

Admission: \$5 per person or free with MCC ID.

For more info visit

[flinthorrorcon.com](http://flinthorrorcon.com) or [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com).

## Music Around Town Concert Series

Oct. 17

7:00 p.m. Thursday

Flint Institute of Music presents "Meg Okura Jazz Trio ... New York-based violinist Meg Okura has become a wellspring of cultural fusion ... combining the deep soulfulness of Jazz, with Japanese and Jewish music."

Flint Institute of Music-  
MacArthur Recital Hall  
1025 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For tickets and to find out

more visit [thefim.org](http://thefim.org).

## Explore Ghosts in Flint & Genesee

Oct. 18

6-11 p.m. Friday

Tour "several of Flint's haunted attractions—The Capitol Theater, Avondale Cemetery, The Durant-Dort Carriage Company Building, and the Stockton Center." Busses take visitors but there's a lot of walking. This is a partnership with Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce and the book, *Haunted Flint*. Meet in Brush Park for registration.

Brush Park

120 E. 1st St., Flint

Admission: \$20

For more info email Courtney Irish at

[cirish@flintandgenesee.org](mailto:cirish@flintandgenesee.org).

## Jim Belushi and the Board of Comedy

Oct. 24

7:30-9:30 p.m. Thursday

Jim Belushi of both "Saturday Night Live" and Second City joins forces with members of the Board of Comedy to bring to Flint an "improvised comedy sketch show."

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

Tickets: \$45.50-\$60.50

## Halloween in the Gardens of Applewood Estate

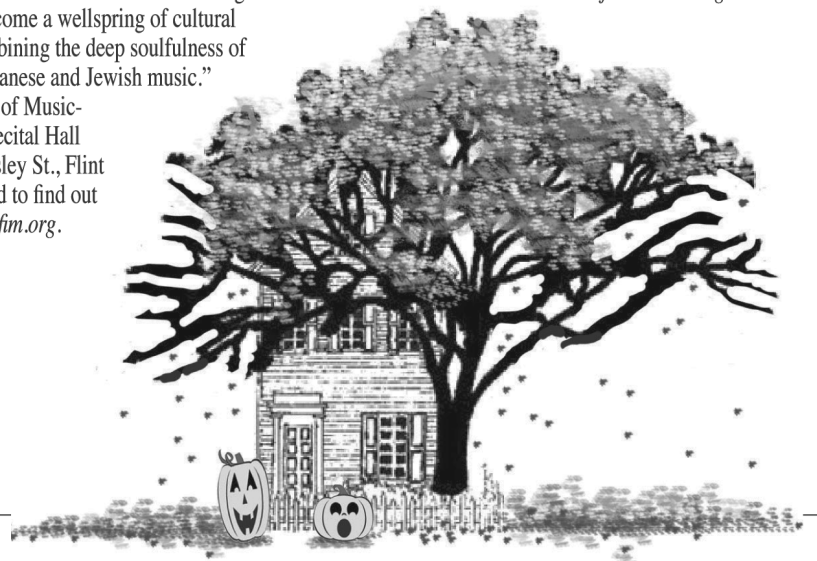
Oct. 26 and 27

11 a.m.- 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Dress in family friendly costumes for tricks and treats on the grounds of Applewood Estate in this final event of 2019. There'll be a costume parade, story time and crafts. Also enjoy "Taste of Applewood" made from ingredients grown at the estate and tour the estate house.

Free admission.

For more info visit [ruthmottfoundation.org](http://ruthmottfoundation.org).



## ... Weaver

(Continued from Page 8.)

shocks people—from Parliament Funkadelic to Tony Bennett. And don't forget Cher! [who donated 180,000 bottles of water in 2016] Sometimes I play Frank

Sinatra singing, 'I did it my way' in my car. Sometimes, working out in her basement, she says, "I need music with bad words, and sometimes I need a hymn. It all relieves stress."

Finally, Weaver says, as she gets up and rushes to her next meeting, "Despite

everything that we've talked about that can seem to be doom and gloom, Flint is a strong city ... with strong people, and we don't let things keep us down."

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

## ... Neeley

(Continued from Page 8.)

toothbrush and toothpaste and educates them about fighting cavities and fluoride protection.

It's all in the interest of making sure he "brings everybody into the work of government."

### "The most qualified"

Asked why Flint residents should choose him as the next mayor, Neeley replied, "I'm the most qualified and the best choice for the city. You don't have to prepare me for the job. I have a recovery plan which includes a plan to increase and strengthen public safety in our fire and police departments.

He said 911 calls go unreported

because residents have lost trust in the public safety that they'll even show up, and suggested people are not calling because of what he called "a lack of consistency in public safety," adding, "Our officers need better support."

EVM staff writer Tom Travis can be reached at [tomtravis@gmail.com](mailto:tomtravis@gmail.com)

## ... Council

(Continued from Page 5.)

### Recreational Marijuana proposal moves ahead

The council voted unanimously to approve a first reading of an amendment to the Flint City Code of Ordinances, which would prohibit recreational marijuana facilities.

Councilperson Eric Mays later commented about rescinding his vote, claiming it was made by mistake. "I wouldn't have voted to opt-out ... folks voted for the charter. Folks voted for marijuana. I'm not gonna vote against people."

To clarify, the vote was not to adopt the opt-out amendment, but only to approve a first reading of it. City Council members said they will reconvene at a

future meeting to decide whether or not to adopt this addition to the Flint City Code of Ordinances.

EVM Staff Writer Luther Houle can be reached at [lutherhoule@gmail.com](mailto:lutherhoule@gmail.com).



## ... Education

(Continued from Page 4.)

10th year; \$1,000/year starting at the end of the 15th year; \$1,250/year starting at the end of the 20th year.

Class size is reduced from a maximum of 36 students per classroom to the following: kindergarten — 25 students; grades 1,2&3—27 students; grades 4,5&6 — 28 students; grades 7&8 — 29 students; grades 9,10,11&12 — 30 students.

Nonetheless, many classroom vacancies led to a chaotic start for Flint schools. "We've had a rough start for various factors," he told MLive-Flint. "There are a lot of teacher vacancies which has caused a lot of discord around the students."

### "Guest teachers" help fill vacant classrooms:

Thirty-three new teachers were hired at the August and September meetings of the board of education. Ten "guest teachers" were hired at the September meeting at the pay rate of \$125/day.

Guest teachers, according to Lopez, are provided for in the newly ratified contract. They are college students with degrees that are still attending classes to attain their teacher certification.

The compensation package for guest teachers includes tuition reimbursement and the opportunity to join the teaching staff full-time after 60 consecutive days of service. According to Lopez, guest teachers are from local colleges includ-

ing Michigan State University, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Saginaw Valley State University, and University of Michigan-Flint.

"We are working to develop a (teacher) pipeline that is stable over time," said Lopez. Flint employs a total of 15 guest teachers in their schools, he said.

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

**FREE**

**ENROLLING NOW!**

**Call 591-KIDS**

or go to [www.geneseepreschool.org](http://www.geneseepreschool.org)

**PROGRAMS FOR AGES BIRTH TO FIVE**  
(must meet guidelines)

**Head Start**

**Clear Start Readiness Program**  
Michigan's Nationally Recognized Pre-K Program

**We welcome children with disabilities or cognitive delays.**  
A service of the Genesee Intermediate School District.

## ... Election

(Continued from Page 3.)

Neeley can also make a strong case for victory.

He has substantial governmental and political experience. He served on the city council for nine years, and is completing his third term as state representative from the 34th District. He won easily in a district that includes much of the city of Flint.

Over his political career he has made community outreach a major focus. He has hosted numerous events, forums, and workshops for a variety of causes, within his district and beyond.

As a member of the legislature, he was elected chair of the Black Caucus by other lawmakers.

When people are angry, those who challenge incumbents often have an advantage.

Charges have been raised, from Neeley's campaign and others, about unfair use of absentee ballots, and a "pay for play" atmosphere in city hall, with questions about who gets city

contracts.

To be sure, it's an unusual election, but both candidates are campaigning full blast as they try to mobilize their voters and get their messages out.

### An important election for the city

It may be an unusual election but it's an important one. The city is facing major decisions in the next few years. Will the water crisis finally be

Charter Clock  
**Oct. 1: 640 Days  
Without An  
Ombudsperson**

resolved? How will we move beyond the water crisis and restore trust in the system? What is the next step in Flint's rebirth? Will the city be able to make a smooth transition as it begins to implement the new charter? Will there be an ombudsperson on duty in the near future? How will the mayor work with a contentious and divided

city council?

All of those are important challenges and the voters' voices should be heard.

### Flint Public Library millage and bond issue

For all the attention that is devoted to the mayoral campaigns, that's not the only thing on the ballot. In Flint, voters will have the opportunity to vote for both an operating millage renewal and a 12-year, \$12.6 million bond issue to fund a major renovation of the Flint Public Library. If the bond issue passes, the average home in Flint would see a \$27 increase in property taxes. Donors are providing more than half of the cost of the \$27.6 million project.

The library is offering a series of open houses to inform the public about the plans

(Continued on Page 15.)

**COLLEGE CULTURAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**  
ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net  
**Neighborhood Watch meets Thurs.,  
Oct. 17, 7-9 pm, MCC's RTC Auditorium**  
**Members meet Thurs., Nov. 21, 2019  
7-9 pm in MCC's RTC Auditorium**

## Home for you in our new home!

# WOODSIDE CHURCH

NOW LOCATED AT 503 GARLAND STREET (AT SECOND AVENUE), CARRIAGE TOWN



11 AM EVERY SUNDAY. PARKING IN THE REAR. CHILDCARE PROVIDED.

## Whatever your story, you are welcome at Woodside Church!

WWW.WOODSIDECHURCH.NET | 810-767-4911 | PO Box 1109 FLINT MI 48501

## ... Election

(Continued from Page 14.)

for the renovated Flint Public Library. They are open to the public, and they are scheduled for Oct. 1, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. and Oct. 29, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. and 6 to 7:30 p.m. More information is also available at [www.YourNewFPL.org](http://www.YourNewFPL.org).

### Get out and vote!

This may be a low-profile election, it may involve only parts of the county, and

there may not be a lot of media coverage compared to a presidential or a gubernatorial election, but it's still important.

Local elections do matter. As a result of last year's ballot proposal, voting is easier than ever. Any voter can vote absentee, without giving a reason. Information on the new voting rules is available from the city or county clerk's office or the League of Women Voters at [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org).

Be sure to get out and vote. EVM political commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at [paul.rozycki@mcc.edu](mailto:paul.rozycki@mcc.edu).

## ... Two Flints

(Continued from Page 16.)

I attempted to drive over and get her out, but she was trapped among fire trucks and police tape that I couldn't cross to get to her. When I finally was allowed through just before dawn the next morning, we cried on her back porch as the sun came up over the ash that covered her patio furniture like so much fresh fallen snow.

That morning she finally decided to let us move her to Flushing, ending 30 years of our family's presence on Bennett Avenue.

Now I do feel safe in this serene little East Village enclave. The strange thing about living in one of Flint's safe neighborhoods is that the people here think that their Flint is the real one and

get irritated when people like me talk about the violence that plagues the rest of the city.

People here often seem to believe that if we ignore the violence and focus on some development in the downtown, the rest of the city will magically be alleviated of its traumas.

When former mayor Dayne Walling, who grew up in the Village, expresses shock at the Flint water crisis, it strikes me as amusing because this clearly isn't the first time the government has failed us at every level and allowed us to descend into a lethal public health crisis. How could we have trusted government professionals to keep us safe? They haven't in most of the city for all of my life. I doubt people who've grown up in neighborhoods like the one I grew up in share that level of faith



Left to right, Jennifer Hagensen, Linda Hagensen and Melodee Mabbitt at about age 7. Linda died in 2017 at age 67  
(Photo provided by Melodee Mabbitt)



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

### OCTOBER CONCERT

- Sunday, Oct. 27, 4:00 pm  
*Schmelter/Kivel  
Halloween Concert*

### NOVEMBER CONCERT

- Saturday, Nov. 9, 7:00 pm  
*The Brazeal Dennard  
Chorale*

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

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

*Artistic Director: Holly Richardson*

in the assurances of our government over the experiences of our neighbors.

So sometimes I feel more like an interloper than villager, but I do feel safe here, too, and recognize how complacency can set in when we can afford to isolate ourselves from the broader experiences of city life.

On Halloween, when kids from all over Flint flock to trick-or-treat in the safety of the East Village, I'll welcome them with enthusiasm and pricey chocolates and hope they get to experience a magical evening of only imaginary horrors.

I'm lucky to have lived 10 years here without having any tragedies at close quarters, while all over the city, among people like me, the real terror continues.

EVM Staff Writer Melodee Mabbitt can be reached at [melodee.mabbitt@gmail.com](mailto:melodee.mabbitt@gmail.com). She will be sharing her work with the publication *FlintBeat* in the coming weeks, joining a journalism project focused on gun violence.

# Village Life

## *No boundaries for fear: A tale of two Flints*

*By Melodee Mabbitt*

On Halloween, I'll have lived for 10 years in my house in the East Village, or what my mom referred to as "management's neighborhood."

I recently tried to explain to someone in the neighborhood how different my life was before I came here, when I lived on Bennett Avenue and later on M. L. King. I tried to explain the first violent crime I'd witnessed, and then the next one.

I don't even know if I got them right. Was that the first one? The second? Wasn't it in fact true that so much violence also took place before, between, and after? Why did I choose those two instances to retell?

There are two Flints in my experience.

One where you can try to explain the violence you've experienced by trying to categorize it: by murders? Attacks? By who died and you had to grieve? Or, by the more gruesome attacks you saw first-hand, but everyone lived? By how old you were when you went through it? Or by the age your friends were when they died? Or by the type of death? Guns or vehicular manslaughter or blunt force/stab wounds? Do overdoses even count among our losses?

And the Flint I live in now, in the College and Cultural Neighborhood, where no one has broken into our house yet, where the worst it's ever gotten was when somebody once knocked but then ran away.

Sometimes when I am falling asleep, I dream of a hard knock, gunshot, or running feet, but when I wake afraid it always turns out I was just dreaming, afraid. Ten years and less than a mile from where I learned to be afraid, all is quiet and well living here between the politicians and attorneys, the Chamber of Commerce and university employees, with our Mott police coverage and additional private security.

I could say that I started to feel unsafe around fifth grade, but I'm not sure if that is just because my awareness was dawning or because the late 80s drew in a new era of violence in Flint.

Either way, fear of violence felt like a more natural progression in my life than trying to relax in the safe places I've lived. One can only witness so many atrocities before it becomes impossible to leave



**Mabbitt's childhood home on Bennett Avenue, boarded up.**  
(Photo by Melodee Mabbitt)

those burdens behind by moving away. It widened my lens beyond any ability to simply focus on the positive and tuck in to material comforts.

An old friend from the east side thanked me for naming our experiences as trauma. For us, it was all a normal part of life at the time. Until I stop to reflect, it is easy to forget that people in this neighborhood spend their whole lives never knowing a murderer or someone who was murdered. I know several of each. People all over Flint do.

Each instance of violence carries its own haunts and ghosts in my mind, so it is hard to recall it all with a journalist's accuracy. It all feels more like something I wear than something that I passed through and left behind.

I think I experienced my first violent death in sixth or seventh grade when my classmate was taken to the riverbank by some other boys we all knew, his cousins who had been playing at gangster. We

were told that they'd cut out his tongue and shoved it up his anus before shooting him to death for talking to a rival gang. He was around 14, and I was around 12 when I heard all about it.

Maybe I experienced my next violent crime the summer after seventh grade. I was walking to the corner store with my best friend and we happened upon a teen I knew being disemboweled with what we later found out was his own knife. He walked, entrails dragging, right past us and around the corner to the gate of his family's fence before he collapsed.

He lived, but my mom organized a peace march in response. Mayor Stanley and Prosecutor Busch came to speak at Homedale Elementary where our march ended in a rally to stop the violence.

It, of course, did not stop anything.

In ninth grade, our house was robbed and a girlfriend of one of the kids who broke into our house showed up to class wearing my clothes. I picked a fight with her, lost, and then never went back to Flint Central again.

The next year, my mom sent me to live with my aunt in the township to attend Carman-Ainsworth.

Through high school, I missed some of the drive-bys, people trying to break in with knives, holding the neighbor's toddler who had just watched her father be shot for his weed stash, and many other events that my mother and sister experienced. I was just across town but it was a different world.

By the time of the arsons of 2010, I was already living in the Village when my mother called at 2 a.m., terrified that she was going to burn to death because she was disabled and trapped in our family home on Bennett as five houses immediately surrounding her had all been torched at once.

*(Continued on Page 15.)*