

# East Village

Magazine

January 2020

Photograph by  
*Elin O'Leary*



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# East Village Magazine

Vol. LVIII No. 1 January 2020

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## Commentary

# A few New Year's resolutions for 2020

By Paul Rozycki

The holiday decorations are put away, the presents have been opened, and the relatives have all gone home. New Year's Eve is history, and the next year welcomes us. It's a time for new hopes, new dreams, and all those resolutions that we hope will make 2020 better than 2019. Unfortunately, for most of us, we find that the resolutions we make in January are, all too often, forgotten by February. With that caveat in mind, here are a few suggested resolutions and hopes for those who will be leading us into the next decade.

### Local resolutions

1. For Mayor Sheldon Neeley, let's hope he resolves to reach out to all members of the Flint community, with the goal of restoring trust and sound management. May he find the resources and cooperation to continue the rebuilding of Flint. Let's hope he earns the support of the public, area foundations, and local businesses as he begins his first year.

2. For former Mayor Karen Weaver, may she realize that while she lost the election, she has contributed much to the city, and could have more to give. Let's hope she resolves to join in the effort to unite the city and build a working relationship with those who have been elected, and those who may have voted for other candidates.

3. For the Flint City Council: Obviously, let's hope they all resolve to find at least a shred of civility and common courtesy as they begin 2020. For councilmembers Eric Mays, Kate Fields, and Eva Worthing, (and others), 2019 has been a contentious year. Let's hope they resolve to make 2020 better. If the Christmas spirit didn't affect them, Valentine's Day isn't that far away. Maybe a card, and a heart-shaped box of candy between the three of you?

For the rest of the council, let's hope they resolve to end the meetings at a decent time, and then go home and get some sleep. It will serve all of us well — especially *East Village Magazine* reporters.

4. For the Flint Community Schools, Genesee County and the City of Flint: Resolve to make this the year you finally start taking care of your budgets. Each of you face serious financial challenges that won't be easy or painless to fix. But if they are not resolved in 2020, then in 2021, and the years beyond, they will be even more difficult to correct. In Genesee County, all local governments need to resolve to cooperate much more than they have in the past.

### State resolutions

5. For Gov. Whitmer and the state legislature, let's hope they resolve to "fix the damn roads," without relying on parliamentary tricks, stunts, or games. We know it's going to cost more money, and it won't be cheap or easy. But let's get it done without each party blaming the other, or trying to take all the credit. It won't be any easier to do it in 2021, and the roads will be even worse.

6. For the state legislature: Resolve to honestly reflect the voters' wishes. That's what you were elected to do. But don't use odd stunts or tricks, like doing most of your work in lame duck sessions, attaching appropriations to bills to avoid a public referendum, limiting voting, or gerrymandering districts. Those may give one party a temporary advantage, but democracy is the loser in the long run.

7. For Attorney General Dana Nessel: As you open your Flint office, resolve to either begin serious prosecutions of those who created the Flint

*(Continued on Page 15.)*





Photo of the Month: Gilkey Creek (by Edwin D. Custer)

## *Fifteen small businesses receive grants from MovingFlintForward program*

*By Jan Worth-Nelson*

From an espresso machine to snow plows, from drywall to parking lots, from a kayak launch to a flattop grill, from beauty supplies to fabrics, from TV marketing to landscaping, from outdoor lighting to pizza stones.

All these are among a diverse batch of practical projects awarded \$10,000 each to 15 small businesses through a new General Motors-funded small business program of the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce, under the MovingFlintForward (MFF) umbrella.

The small grants are an acknowledgement that the city needs more than downtown development, according to Tim Herman, Chamber of Commerce CEO, and needs to focus additionally on neighborhoods.

“Over the past two years, we have focused much of our efforts on redeveloping the downtown area, creating a more vibrant entertainment and business district,” he said in opening remarks at a press conference announc-

ing the grants at the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village.

“But we know that Flint’s rebound must extend beyond downtown and into our neighborhoods to see long-term, sustainable change,” he said, adding that the small business program “will create an important pathway.”

One aspect of the plan, designed to create expanding layers of sustainability, is that businesses receiving grants are required to partner with a local nonprofit organization serving the community, or to address an ongoing need from a long list of neighborhood issues, including transportation concerns, blight, infrastructure, housing, youth and senior services, education and health.

“Neighbors will be helping neighbors,” Herman said.

Terry Rhadigan, GM executive director of corporate giving, said, “In corporate philanthropy, we’re used to donating money to nonprofit organizations. This is a rare chance for us

instead to invest in small businesses, to help stabilize neighborhoods that are then more vibrant.”



**Barbara Culp with Terry Rhadigan, GM director of corporate giving (Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)**

Mike Perez, plant executive director for GM Flint Assembly, agreed.

“We now have a business that is really thriving,” he said, “and it is really important that the community thrives with us.”

“Partnerships like these will allow residents of our city to have hope again,”

*(Continued on Page 5.)*



## ... Grants

(Continued from Page 4.)

said Skeeter Holmes, owner of Holmes Building and Construction at Clio and Carpenter roads, and one of the recipients.



**Skeeter Holmes (l) with Mayor Sheldon Neeley**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

He said the grants would help — “build, develop, restore and bring our city to the wealthy place it once was. We can do this together.”

Barbara Culp, owner of N’Dapanda Consignment Shop on Martin Luther King Blvd., said the grant supports her

efforts specifically to be part of revitalization of the MLK business district. She will use her grant to help sustain a peace garden and to move her business from her home into a repurposed garage.

“I believe in Flint, bringing people to our neighborhoods,” she said. “I can make changes for myself and many others,” noting that “N’Dapanda” means “I’m happy” in Swahili.

“We are committed to revitalizing King Avenue and its neighborhood,” she said, noting that all over the country, “King Avenues are very neglected. And we in Flint, Michigan, we want to change that.”

When she first moved her business from a prior location, she said from her front window she could see 12 vacant lots on King.

“I challenged the group I was working with to do a Peace Garden that honors Dr. King. Now those vacant lots are a community space used for library story reading, weddings, readings and pulling weeds.”

The funds will help sustain and develop the garden, and her renovated space will provide a clearinghouse of

coordinating events and provide the business office for her shop.

Oaklin Mixon, owner of GoodBoy Clothing at 522 Saginaw St. #2, said the grant will “give us the supplies we need to get to the next level.” He said his company, which has four employees, recently expanded its retail to the Dryden Building and can now use his flagship location for production, cut and sew.

The neighborhood emphasis of the new program fits in well with his aims, Mixon suggested. What GoodBoy represents, he said, is “the restoring of good culture — families, community. As a business we want to use fashion as a megaphone to push that culture forward.”

Mayor Sheldon Neeley recalled he used to ride his bike near the Broome Center, and welcomed the return of a neighborhood focus. “Small business growth is important to the resurrection of any particular community,” he said, adding the grants will help the recipients “get a great start” with their ideas.

Recipients announced at the

(Continued on Page 6.)



**Banner photo: Grant recipients with Mayor Sheldon Neeley and officials from the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce and funder General Motors. Seeking ID confirmation on several of the below. From left:**

1. Fletcher Rheaves, Great Lakes Facilities Management
2. Cordell Beck, Beck’s Barber and Beauty
3. Mike Perez, plant executive director for GM Flint Assembly
4. Tim Herman, Flint & Genesee Chamber CEO
5. Bernard Drew, Liberty Way Holdings
6. Terry Rhadigan, GM executive director of corporate giving
7. Ellen Burgess, FlintPrints
8. Emily Burns, In & Out Complete Services
9. Josh Minore, FlintPrints
10. FlintPrints employee
11. Barbara Culp, N’Dapanda Consignment Shop
12. Kelly Sanders, FlintPrints
13. Pastor Dr. Herbert Miller II, Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle
14. Skeeter Holmes, Holmes Building & Construction
15. Dean Yeotis, Totem Books
16. Michael Herriman, Vern’s Collision
17. Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley
18. Teyana Sprinkle, Honey Bee Palace
19. Deborah Sprinkle, Honey Bee Palace
20. Oaklin Mixon, GoodBoy Clothing
21. Sisco Catering employee
22. Jason Caya, Tenacity Brewing
23. Thurmond Sisco, Sisco’s Catering
24. Deria Brown, Glam Box Boutique
25. Antoine Brown, Glam Box Boutique

## ... Grants

(Continued from Page 5.)

Thursday press conference, along with their project summaries, are:

**Totem Books**, 620 W. Court St., to pay for a new espresso machine, refrigerator, HVAC maintenance and water filter installation.

**Honey Bee Palace Child Care Center**, 642 E. Pierson Rd., buy equipment and furniture, including child lockers, tables, sleeping cots, teacher floor chairs and infant cribs.

**Great Lakes Facility Management**, 1428 W. Court St., parking lot repairs and landscaping.

**N'Dapanda Consignment Shop**, 3022 Martin Luther King Ave., bring a garage/outbuilding up to code to relocate business from its current location in the home. Electrical work, labor, materials; carpentry, installing insulation and fire-brick; drywall and painting.

**Beck's Barber and Beauty**, 1818 S. Averill Ave., to continue renovations at current facility, purchase salon/furniture and hot water heater; repave parking lot.

**Tenacity Brewing**, 119 N. Grand Traverse Ave., add gas fire pit in its biergarten; build landing base for kayak launch, upgrade Kayak Flint's shipping containing, upgrade Vehicle City Taco Truck; resurface and expand parking lot; improve building facade, outdoor lighting, landscaping and fence.

**FlintPrints**, 615 S. Saginaw St., to purchase a wide-format printer, hire part-time staff, expand location in the Ferris Wheel.

**Sherman's Lounge**, 4211 Fenton Rd., purchase flattop grill, countertop fryer, fire suppression unit, exhaust system and four pizza stones.

**Vern's Collision**, 2409 Davison Rd., upgrade its paint booth and outside lighting.



**Mayor Neeley congratulating Mike Herriman, longtime owner of Vern's Collision on Davison Road and an active member of the College Cultural Neighborhood Association. Herriman expects to use the grant to upgrade the shop's paint booth and improve outside lighting**

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

**GoodBoy Clothing**, 522 S. Saginaw St., expand merchandise line with fabric, supplies labor, overhead costs, table, display improvements, lighting, electrical, and marketing signage.



**Oaklin Mixon, owner of GoodBoy Clothing, said the grant will help "get us the supplies we need to get to the next level."**

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

**Liberty Way Holdings**; 1200 W. Court St., exterior lighting and cameras, parking lot repair and expansion, landscaping; neighborhood cleanup event, general contractor/consultant.

**Sisco's Catering**, 2202 Proctor Ave., down payment on a commercial kitchen loan; provide cooking and meal prep courses, pop-up inventory to cater at special events; marketing/promotional materials.

**Glam Box Boutique**, 620 S. Saginaw St., outdoor speakers, inventory, window vinyl, product development,

advertising, marketing.

**In & Out Complete Services**, 3010 Wilton Pl., purchase equipment for lawn and car/snow removal, including double-axle enclosed trailer snow plow, bagging system, snowblower.

**Holmes Building & Construction**, 7014 Clio Rd., complete renovations to open to the public — roofing, wood sheathing, flat wall panels, continue education course for Michigan Builders' license, promotional banner.

Chamber officials said they received more than 100 applications. Grant review coordinator Dr. Herbert Miller, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church, asserted, "These types of funds can make a difference when you are struggling to survive — to a positive effect" and urged those whose proposals were not accepted to try again in a hoped-for next round.

Recipients will receive the money in three installments, the last third delivered after final reports at the end of the first program period, May 31, 2020.

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

A stylized logo for 'Consolidated Barber Shop'. It features a banner with the word 'CONSOLIDATED' in the center, flanked by 'BARBER' and 'SHOP'. The banner is held by two figures. Below the banner, the address '107 W. Kearsley St. Downtown Flint' and 'Open Monday-Saturday' are listed, along with the Facebook URL 'Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop'.

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

**9,483**

Numbers provided by pipeline contractor ROWE Engineering are posted at [cityofflint.com](http://cityofflint.com) under Fast Start Replacement Program. Totals as of Dec. 6 were **24,594 pipes excavated** (wording changed to "explored" since returning to the "predictive model") and **9,483 replaced**.

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



# AG Nessel rolls out legal team at new Flint office. Now what?

By Harold C. Ford



A reminder: view of the Flint River from the new AG's office (Photo by Harold C. Ford)

***“The Flint water crisis is not over.”***

**—Fadwa Hammoud, Michigan Solicitor General, Dec. 19, 2019**

In front of several dozen citizens and a scrum of media, and with a panoramic view of the Flint River five stories below, Michigan Attorney General (AG) Dana Nessel rolled out a large team of lawyers and support staff at a new office in Flint on Dec. 19. The office, a first of its kind in Flint, is located at the State of Michigan Office Building, 125 E. Union Street.



**Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel (left) cutting the ribbon to the new AG office in Flint opened Dec. 19 with Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley and Solicitor General Fadwa Hammoud. Part of Nessel's 22-person team looks on (Photo by Paul Rozycki)**

Newly elected Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley introduced Nessel. “She said one of those commitments to

this community was about delivering justice,” said Neeley.

“I want to make sure that our criminal team can utilize these premises because they have a lot of work ahead of them,” advised Nessel. “You’re not going to have to go to Lansing to see somebody from the Department of Attorney General. The Department of Attorney General is going to come to you here in Flint.”

## **Large legal team and support staff**

Michigan Solicitor General Fadwa Hammoud introduced a 22-person legal team and support staff. “Words are only meaningful when they are backed up by action, and today is action,” Hammoud said.

The AG’s team included: two victim advocates “to be rooted in this community as advocates for your needs and to be a bridge to your government”; eight attorneys; one member of a “public integrity unit”; five investigators; a senior management assistant; three data analysts; and a communications specialist.

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy, not present at the event, was introduced as a “partner in this investigation. Worthy headed up the prosecution team when charges were dropped

against the final eight water crisis defendants in June 2019.

Hammoud also thanked the police departments of Dearborn and Detroit.



**Attorney General Dana Nessel in Flint (Photo by Paul Rozycki)**

“This has really been a statewide and a team effort,” she said.

“If we’re doing the work of government faithfully, our work should continue even after our investigation,” said Hammoud, signaling a new phase in Flint’s water story. “This incredible community is a priority and our hope is that our actions will say that even louder.”

*(Continued on Page 8.)*

(Continued from Page 7.)

**Now what?**

Despite the high profile ribbon cutting ceremony, Nessel and her team members have been tight-lipped about their next steps with regard to water crisis prosecutions. "A lot of questions you'll have, we'll not be able to answer," said Hammoud.

Nor does the AG's website offer up clues about where it's headed. Nearly all of the "press releases, memos, and reports," "news clips," and other information items currently posted were placed there during the reign of former AG Bill Schuette and are dated from 2011 through 2016.

The site reminds the reader that a total of 51 criminal charges were filed against 15 state and local officials in addition to a civil suit brought against multi-national corporation Veolia and Texas-based LAN. However, not a single person served a single day of incar-

ceration for offenses committed during the water debacle.

A statement by Fadwa and Worthy at the time of the June 2019 dismissals attempted to explain the restart:

"Legitimate criminal prosecutions require complete investigations. Upon assuming responsibility of this case, our team of career prosecutors and investigators had immediate and grave concerns ... After a complete evaluation, our concerns were validated. Contrary to accepted standards of criminal investigation and prosecution, all available evidence was not pursued."

Conversely, that same June 2019 statement by Fadwa and Worthy also indicated that their prosecutorial team had obtained electronic devices and uncovered millions of documents that were previously overlooked.

**Nessel signaled intent all along**

A review of Nessel's public statements shows her intent to pursue prosecutions all along.

In 2016, during her campaign for the AG office, she told listeners of WDET's "Detroit Today," "Whether or not there are bad actors that should have been charged or not, including the governor, I think that has to be reevaluated and reexamined."

After taking office, Nessel issued a public statement on June 28, 2019, that read, in part: "As essential as it is for the people of Flint to have their questions answered, it is equally important that they are assured they will receive justice."

It was noteworthy that the first attorney introduced to the public by Hammoud on Dec. 19 was Molly Kettler, a principal attorney in the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office headed up by Worthy. Kettler arrives at her new task with an impressive prosecutorial record in southeast Michigan spanning more than two decades.

Another Detroit-area attorney, David Cripps, told the Detroit News, "She's a zealous advocate for the prosecutor's office ... She is smart on her

(Continued on Page 14.)

# Community

through 4.19.20

This exhibition features works in multiple mediums from some of the most important artists from the 19th century to the present day, including Jacob Lawrence and Kara Walker, and explores themes of history and place, identity and representation, and social justice and self-expression.

## SUNDAY 2020 JANUARY 26

Join the Flint Institute of Arts and Flint Poet Laureate Semaj Brown to celebrate the opening of *Community*.



Jerry Taliaferro, Semaj Brown, 2016

At 1:30p, Brown, an accomplished author, dramatist, playwright, and educator, reads poetry inspired by Renée Stout's *Marie Laveau* and Whitfield Lovell's *Epoch* which are included in the exhibition, and performs selections from her new book, *Bleeding Fire! Tap the Eternal Spring of Regenerative Light*. After the reading, tour the exhibition with Brown and members of the FIA curatorial staff. A book signing concludes the presentation.

**This event is free and open to the public.**



1120 E Kearsley St  
Flint, MI 48503  
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flintarts.org





# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

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

## OHL Flint Firebirds Hockey Game

Jan. 10  
7-10 p.m. Friday  
Flint Firebirds battle it out against Saginaw Spirit.  
Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center  
3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint  
For more info visit [flintandgenesees.org](http://flintandgenesees.org) or [flintfirebirds.com](http://flintfirebirds.com).  
Tickets: \$12-16

## Family Day with the Flint Symphony Orchestra (FSO)

Jan. 11  
1 p.m. Saturday  
Activities begin with meeting FSO musicians, a chance to play real instruments, and going backstage. Family-friendly program notes and an education guide are provided.  
Concert follows at 2 p.m. with music by Dvořák and Brahms.  
The Whiting  
1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
For more info visit [thewhiting.com](http://thewhiting.com).  
Tickets: \$10

## OHL Flint Firebirds Hockey Game

Jan. 11  
7-10 p.m. Saturday  
Flint Firebirds battle it out against Windsor Spitfires.  
Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center  
3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint  
For more info visit [flintandgenesees.org](http://flintandgenesees.org) or [flintfirebirds.com](http://flintfirebirds.com).  
Tickets: \$12-16

## Chicago

Jan. 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, and 25  
7:30-10 p.m. Saturday  
Jan. 19 and 26  
2:30-5:30 p.m.  
Chicago tells the story of two rival vaudevilian murderesses locked up in the Cook County Jail during the "Roaring 20s" jazz age.  
The Tom and Bea Nobles Performance Hall at Flint Community Players  
2462 S. Ballenger Hwy., Flint  
For more info or to buy tickets call 810-441-9302.  
Tickets: \$20 and \$17 for students and seniors

## Fleetwood Mac's Album "Rumours" Live

Jan. 17  
7:30 p.m. Friday  
Classic Albums Live will recreate this classic album on stage.  
The Capitol Theatre  
140 E. 2nd St., Flint.  
For more info visit [capitoltheatreflint.com](http://capitoltheatreflint.com).  
Admission: \$23.50-\$48.50 per person

## New Works Festival

Jan. 17-19  
Fri. 7 p.m., Sat. 7 p.m. and 2 p.m., and Sun. 7 p.m. Event durations are approximate.  
Please check with the presenting organization or venue to confirm start times and duration.  
This event is the third annual presentation of staged readings of new plays and musicals.  
Flint Repertory Theatre/Elgood  
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
For tickets and more info visit [flintrep.org](http://flintrep.org).  
Admission: \$10 per performance or \$20 three-day pass; \$10 student three-day pass (with I.D.); Genesee County discount (with I.D.)

## PTAC: Proposal Development

Jan. 23  
9-11 a.m. Thursday  
Cut down on time and stress when developing proposals to government RFPs  
Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce  
519 S. Saginaw St., Suite 200, Flint  
Register at [center-gateway.com/103000/index.php?EVT=54602](http://center-gateway.com/103000/index.php?EVT=54602).  
No cost to attend.



# City Council Beat *Last Flint city council meeting of 2019 a panoply of democracy*

By Tom Travis



**Impeachment demonstration in front of City Hall**

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

It was a jam-packed evening of activity at City Hall on a chilly and snowy December Monday night, the last City Council meeting of a tumultuous year for the city's legislative body.

The Council meetings this year have been five, six, seven, eight and even nine hours long, some stretching past midnight. This year, there have been arms raised, voices yelling, threats made, name calling and numerous points of order and points of information — too many to count.

Beginning in January 2019, the then Finance Committee chairperson, Eric Mays (1st Ward), was ousted from that role. Fast forward to the fall of 2019, when he was reinstated and re-appointed as chair of the Finance Committee: he had been ousted from, by Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward).

Some citizens voiced weariness about the Council's frequent squabbles, among them resident Mezon Green, who donned a clown outfit at one meeting to make a point about a Council that struggles to get business done in an efficient way.

Now with a new mayor in the executive branch and a new Council president and vice president, the watchful citizens of Flint will have an opportunity to hold the Council accountable for its actions in the new year.

The Council year ended with three Council sub-committees — legislative, governmental operations, and finance, on which all members participate — meeting one by one in the Council chamber, followed by a mere one-hour official

meeting of the Council as a whole.

## **Council competed with pro-impeachment demonstrators.**

Some drama at the last meeting did not occur in the Council chambers, for once; this time there was action outside on the front sidewalk of City Hall. It was the day before the U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach the 45th President of The United States, and citizens of Flint gathered to voice their support and disdain for the impeachment hearings and process.

Members of the press left their seats several times to check the action from the Council's third-floor windows.

The two sides of the issue — anti and pro-Trump — bantered back and forth outside on the sidewalks, lining Saginaw Street. The overall Council proceedings lasted just over six hours, while the protest took up half that time.

## **Meanwhile ...**

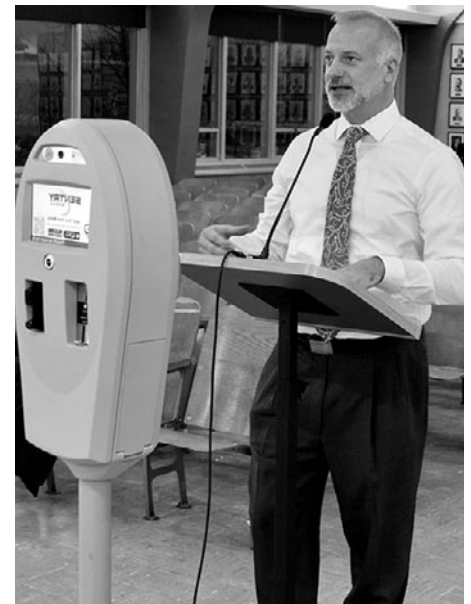
Meanwhile, the Council saw a demonstration of the contested new parking meters, heard concerns from the ACLU and a private citizen about a proposed camera surveillance ordinance, received a summary of Mott Community College's strategic plan, and reviewed information from the city administrator about leadership positions in the new administration.

## **About those parking meters**

Gerard Burnash, executive director of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), arrived with one of the new parking meters that have been installed in downtown Flint over the last few months.

Burnash set up the machine, plugged it into an outlet and fired it up for a demonstration. He summarized that the meters were installed downtown during the late summer and fall, and acknowledged the new meters have been fraught with complaints and frustrated residents complaining about them on social media.

Council members raised one specif-



**DDA Director Gerard Burnash demonstrating new parking meters**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

ic concern and proposed one resolution about the meters. They noted that in

(Continued on Page 11.)



## ... Council

(Continued from Page 10.)

years past, residents had one hour free to park in front of City Hall to pay water bills or do short drop-in business.

The new parking meters, in contrast, begin charging as soon as the driver pulls into the spot. The new system is high-tech and has a camera system that takes a picture of the vehicle license plate. City Attorney Angela Wheeler clarified that the City Council, not the DDA, sets the time for the parking meters.

Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter (5th Ward) moved to extend the free time for parking meters in front of City Hall up to three hours. Councilperson Eva Worthing (9th Ward) seconded the motion. Councilperson Maurice Davis (2nd Ward) then made a substitute motion upping the amount to four hours and Councilperson Kate Fields (4th Ward) seconded. Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) moved that resolution to the next council meeting for a decision.

### Concerns raised on business surveillance system proposal

Attorney Glenn Simmington voiced concerns, along with Genesee County and State of Michigan representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), regarding a pending ordinance calling for mandated camera surveillance at every business in the city.

Simmington said, "I'm not here to threaten a lawsuit. I'm here tonight because I've examined the ordinance and others with the ACLU have examined the lawsuit and there are some concerns."

Simmington said he and the ACLU as a whole believe the ordinance is problematic because as written it is mandatory that businesses install cameras.

According to Supreme Court rulings and other cases, he said, there is a distinction made in the level of scrutiny of businesses that do have mandatory surveillance with cameras compared to those using non-camera or non-mandated surveillance techniques. These two types of businesses are dealt with in legal matters when a crime occurs and

the camera system is used.

Another problem Simmington raised is that the ordinance would require 24/7 camera coverage from the surveillance system. The ACLU is concerned about business' rights to privacy. The ordinance would require cameras to be running even after the business is closed and no one is in the building.

Simmington raised privacy and 4th Amendment issues that the ACLU sees as problematic throughout the ordinance.

The 14th amendment, part of the Bill of Rights and sometimes referred to as the "Search and Seizure" amendment, covers "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward) stated the proposed ordinance is being properly processed through City Council committees. The surveillance system, he noted, was brought to Council by the previous mayor and police chief.

Councilperson Kate Fields (4th Ward) moved to postpone deciding on the resolution until the new mayor and new administration bring it back to Council.

## Mott Community College's "Mott Strong" plan

Mott Community College President Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea, the seventh president and first African American and first woman to lead the college, presented a three-year strategic plan, titled "Mott Strong," for the future of MCC. Representatives of MCC have been making the strategic plan presentation throughout the community.

Walker-Griffea noted that among the 1,100 community colleges in the country, MCC ranks among the top 150. She explained funding for MCC is tuition-driven, even more so as state appropriations have declined and because of shrinking local property taxes.

She stated, "We do not want our tuition to increase so that it becomes unmanageable for our students."

She noted the college adds \$440 million dollars to the Genesee County economy each year and provides over 6,800 jobs to the area. For every dollar MCC spends, taxpayers in Genesee County receive \$2.90 in return. "It's a better bet than the lottery," she said.

Wearing MCC logo colors of black and gold, Walker-Griffea explained the three-point strategic plan is built on the words "Commitments,

(Continued on Page 14.)

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## Education Beat

# Facing serious red ink, Flint schools coming to voters with millage request; considers closures

By Harold C. Ford

Following four meetings of its board of education in December, Flint Community Schools (FCS) will ask Flint voters to approve a March 2020 millage proposal designed to eliminate the district's massive deficit within seven years and provide funding for infrastructure.

The FCS board also inked a new contract with its paraprofessionals as staff attrition seemed to slow. Diana Wright announced she would not seek another term as the board's president. The district will move to develop a plan for its growing list of vacant buildings and unused properties.

### March millage

FCS will ask voters to approve a 4.0 millage proposal headed for the March 10 ballot. The millage proposal is designed to pay off the district's massive deficit within seven years and provide funding for infrastructure.

The ballot language had to be submitted to the City of Flint City Clerk's office by Dec. 17 and then sent on to the Genesee County Clerk's office by Dec. 19.

The proposal, according to FCS Superintendent Derrick Lopez, would not increase the current 4-mill rate assessed district taxpayers. "(The proposal) would keep the bonding at the same amount of 4 mills but 2.82 of those mills would actually be put towards debt elimination and 1.18 of those mills would be for the sinking fund."

Sinking fund millage is applied to business/commercial properties only, said Lopez. "The sinking fund is actually for infrastructure you cannot see; it's for your boilers, technology ... We'll actually replace all of the boilers in our district (except for the Southwestern and Scott buildings where boilers have already been replaced)."

A mill is one one-thousandth of a dollar, and in property tax terms is equal to

\$1.00 of tax for each \$1,000 of assessment. Thus, 2.82 mills is equal to \$2.82 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value; 1.18 mills is equal to \$1.18 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

FCS officials are working to reduce a massive debt that began with a nearly \$20 million loan taken out by the district in 2014. Lopez told the FCS board in November, "We've run about a \$5.7 million deficit every year ... for about five years."

The district's red ink has further been exacerbated by increased costs for special education and declining enrollment. According to Lopez, the FCS student count as of Oct. 31 was 3,809 students. Each lost student costs the district about \$8,100 in state aid.

Poring over student enrollment figures not released to the public, the board's vice president, Blake Strozier, noted "substantial losses" of students at Neithercut, Brownell, Eisenhower, Holmes, and Durant-Tuuri-Mott. "That's just a lot," said Betty Ramsdell, the board's secretary. "It's very, very sad."

District officials expect to decide the fate of several buildings by February 2020. Buildings targeted for closure include Scott School, Pierce Elementary, Eisenhower Elementary, and the former Northwestern High School that currently houses Flint Junior High.

### Board members urge caution

"We need to look really hard before we vote to put a new roof on a building," said Vera Perry, board trustee, "because we have voted to put new roofs on buildings and the next year we close them. That school has to stay open."

"I wouldn't say it's mismanagement," judged Strozier. "It was just improper planning." He recalled earlier decisions to install air conditioning and a new gym floor at the Northern High School building that was closed two years later.

### Advisory committee to develop plan for abandoned properties

The Flint board approved language that will establish an "advisory committee for development of plans for the disposition of vacant and unused school district buildings and property." As of Dec. 1, 2019, FCS possessed 22 closed school buildings and 16 vacant property parcels. Those numbers may soon increase.

### Flint millage to compete with Mott CC millage

The proposed Flint millage will compete with a countywide millage proposal by Flint-based Mott Community College on the March 10 ballot. MCC's board of trustees voted Nov. 25 to submit to voters a proposal that would continue the college's authority to issue bonds for capital improvements.

"The new bond millage," according to an MCC press release, "is estimated to be .79 mills for the life of the bonds. This means a homeowner whose house is valued at \$80,000 would pay \$31.60 per year under the proposed bond millage levy ..."

And the FCS millage proposal will confront Flint voters only four months after they approved "both a renewal of the current Flint Public Library millage, and a new millage for a \$12.6 million bond issue to redo the (Flint Public Library)."

### Paraprofessionals get first pay raise in 15 years

FCS paraprofessionals inked a new contract that provided them their first pay raise in 15 years. The previous contract for the 67 members of Local 517 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) expired in June 2018.

Flint's SEIU members will receive a 5 percent pay raise this year and an additional 5 percent raise next year. The new contract also provides improvements in

(Continued on Page 13)



## ... Education

(Continued from Page 12.)

longevity pay, more paid days when school is cancelled due to weather, and more money when paraprofessionals substitute for absent teachers.

"It has been a very successful and collaborative process," said Cassandra Washington, FCS executive director of human resources. "I want to say how important they are for the work they do in the classroom assisting the teachers and providing those services that are so greatly needed."

*(Writer's note: A most sincere apology is extended from this writer to Cassandra Washington, FCS executive director of human resources, for inexplicably misidentifying her in several previous stories despite accuracy in note-taking. During her short six-month tenure with Flint Community Schools, Washington has settled two major contracts with district employees.)*

### Paraprofessionals as substitute teachers

Apparently, paraprofessionals are being utilized as substitute teachers in Flint classrooms with increased frequency, as evidenced by recognition of, and remuneration for, subbing in the just-settled contract.

The tactic of utilizing paraprofessionals as substitute teachers is in addition to the newly adopted approach in 2019 of staffing classrooms with "guest teachers," many of whom are college students completing classes to achieve certification.

### Staff attrition may be slowing

Board documents reported the resignations of four more FCS educators with 32 years of experience. That brings to 76 the total number of departures in the first 11 months of 2019 (including one death), representing 965+ years of experience in Flint schools.

"This is a reciprocating issue," said Strozier in reference to two employees with very short tenures. "They just resign

or quit two months later (after hiring in)."

"We have seen a significant decline in individuals leaving the district," responded Washington.

### Distraught stakeholders plead with board

Kathy Moore, a former Flint student and FCS employee since 1993, pleaded with the board to address the challenges of working in FCS buildings.

"I love what I do," said an emotional Moore, "but I found myself in the corner crying like a baby. My heart hurts."

"You can't pay me my worth," said Moore. "There ain't been no teacher in my room all year. You want me to be the teacher but you don't want to pay me to be the teacher."

"I'm asking you (board members and administrators), what we going to do about all of these teachers that ain't in these buildings?"

Flint resident Alonzo Price followed Moore to the speaker's table. "I went to Northwestern as a volunteer," said Price. "I went over there and seen how these kids they say is challenging. Some of 'em ain't just challenging, they just disobedient, hardheaded."

"The teachers over there are suffering because somebody say you can't say nothing," reported Price. "When you get to a point when you can't say nothing to our kids, that's ridiculous ... It ain't right."

### Wright won't seek reelection to presidency

Diana Wright, board president, announced that she will not seek reelection as president at the board's organizational meeting on Jan. 8. "It has been a very difficult, but rewarding experience," she said. She noted that among the first duties as the board's president was the firing of one superintendent (Bilal Tawwab) and the hiring of another (Lopez).

Wright, with three years remaining on her term, does not plan to leave the board. "My goal is that I will not sit on this board and plan our (FCS) demise," she said. "My goal is to advocate for the advancement and improvement of Flint Community Schools."

### Funding for math and reading interventions

The board approved the adoption of a reading intervention program by the Baltimore-based Success For All Foundation at a cost of \$752,229.

Three math literacy programs provided by Young People's Project, Ohio Math Literacy Initiative, and The Algebra Project, Inc. was approved at a cost of \$773,081.

Title 1 monies from the U.S. Department of Education will provide funding for all four programs.

### Superintendent's New Year's message

Lopez sent board members and administrators off to a winter break with a holiday message. Some excerpted passages:

"Let us remember the principle, 'Peace to all and good will toward men.' What does that mean in our community and how can that feel and look?"

If you see a child, just greet him, because kids want to be seen and they want their humanity to actually be valued. Show them a little love and kindness."

"So give 'em a shovel to shovel your snow and give 'em a few dollars. They'll respect you more. They'll listen to you even better."

"This will demonstrate the value of work and the value of community. And this is important for their personal growth and their development."

"Just be mindful of our influence on our children within our community during this time. Your individual act may spark a flame in that child that will burn for a lifetime."

Students and staff return from the holiday break on Jan. 6.

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## ... AG

(Continued from Page 8.)

feet. She's well prepared and puts her blood into a case."

And Kettler has roots in Flint and mid-Michigan. She served as office manager for Michael Moore's Michigan Voice in the mid-1980s alongside this writer. She has degrees from Michigan State University and Howard University School of Law.

A quote from Martin Luther King presently displayed at Kettler's twitter site reads, "The time is always right to do what is right."

### Flint as an "arsenal of democracy"

In an interview with *East Village Magazine*, Flint water activist Mike Haley hinted the time might be right for a new round of prosecutions.

April 2020 will mark the sixth anniversary of Flint's infamous water switch. Barring new legislation or legal maneuvering, the statute of limitations for Flint water prosecutions would run out April 25, the date the Flint River water was turned on, and thus when the

alleged "crime" was first committed.

"The Flint water crisis can make Flint the 'arsenal of democracy' for a second time," Haley said with obvious reference to Flint's manufacturing role during World War II in the 1940s.

"It was Bill Schuette's strategy to blame low-hanging fruit in the departments of Environmental Equality and Health and Human Services and not more powerful decision-makers of the state bureaucracy (such as former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder)," Haley said.

Haley suggested a new round of prosecutions may target fruit hanging higher on the tree. "The voters wanted a 'tough nerd'," he recollected, "and this 'tough nerd' (Snyder) poisoned 100,000 people."

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## ... Council

(Continued from Page 11.)

Civility and Compliance."

"Commitments are to our students' success. Civility means that we have to work with each other with mutual respect and we have to trust each other. Compliance means that we are always seeking that we are legal and have physical obligations met and are at par with where they need to be," she said.

In the March 10, 2020, election, MCC will come to voters to support an \$80 million bond proposal, spread over 20 years. The .79 mil proposal will cost about \$31.60 per year for the life of the bond for the owner of an \$80,000 Caution-home.

According to MCC officials, the bond money will be used to renovate, remodel, improve, equip, and re-equip college buildings and sites for instructional purposes.

### City Hall leadership questions

City Administrator Clyde Edwards was present and has been present for every City Council meeting since assuming his role for new Mayor Sheldon Neeley. Edwards was called forward to answer Council's questions and clarify roles and appointments in the new administration.

Edwards said Amanda Trujillo is the acting finance director. Tamar Lewis, who had been in that position, is no longer employed by the City of Flint, according to an email from Marjory Raymer, City of Flint director of communications.

Edwards also clarified that there are two Department of Public Works (DPW) directors: Rob Bincsik is DPW director over water, and John Daly is interim DPW director — newly appointed by Mayor Neeley — in charge of roads and transportation.

Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) asked Edwards and the City Finance Department to find out if there is budget money for two DPW directors.

Also, Council members asked about Tyree Walker, presently serving as the city's interim human resources director. Walker presently works as VP of Human Resources at Hurley Medical Center and is on loan to the city of Flint, Edwards said.

The City Council challenged the reasoning for Walker being paid \$136/hour and working 28 hours a week for 60 days. Galloway said she's not judging if he's worth that amount of money, but just concerned that for a city like Flint in serious financial situation, if it is a wise expenditure.

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## ... Resolutions

(Continued from Page 3.)

water crisis, or offer an honest explanation of why it hasn't happened.

### National resolutions

8. For the Democrats, as you select a nominee from the dozen or more potential candidates, resolve to pick a winner. Even if your favorite candidate didn't win, be willing to work with others. Don't divide your party. This election is too important.

9. For the Republicans, resolve to remember who you are. You are the party of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan. Much of what they stood for is missing from the party today. Get some backbone. Trump will be gone someday. You are the Republican Party, not the Trump Party.

10. For the president, the Congress, and the media: Resolve to make the phrase "quid pro quo" one of the most overused mantras that should be banned for 2020.

11. For both parties, resolve to remember that while you were elected as a member of your party, you are also elected to speak for the nation, both those who voted for you, and those who did not. Winning for your party should not be more important than winning for the nation.

12. For Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg: Take your vitamins and do your exercises. Resolve to be around well beyond 2020.

### Voter resolutions

13. For the voters: This will be a big election year on the national, state, and local level. There are important elections coming up in January, March, August, and November. Make a resolution to end the apathy that we have seen in recent years. Voting is easier and more accessible than ever, and this election matters more than ever.

14. For the non-voters: Are you sure you want to sit back and do nothing?

If you are not registered, resolve to get registered. Unfortunately, those who don't vote are a larger group than either the Democratic or Republican voters, and they have been for a long time. It's time to resolve to change that, and let your voice be heard. Voting keeps democracy alive.

### And a few others

15. For everyone in Michigan: Resolve to answer the census this year. There are some who will discourage individuals from replying, but responding to the census means a stronger political voice for our state, and your local government, and more funds to support your community. Michigan may lose one member of Congress if our population hasn't grown, and each person who fails to respond could cost his or her city between \$2,000 and \$5,000 annually in federal funds.

16. For the Detroit Lions and the Detroit Tigers: I'm afraid your resolution will be the one used by loyal Chicago Cubs fans for decades — "Wait until next year."

17. Finally, for all of us, let us resolve to remember that while politics is important, it isn't everything. In this divisive year, give yourself a break from the conflict and turmoil of impeachments, tweets, committee hearings, elections, charges, and countercharges, and take time to enjoy all that life offers beyond the political arena.

Happy New Year!

*Political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu*

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## ... Wood

(Continued from Page 16.)

Karina, and new baby, Aurelia.

So he knows a lot about the place that is yielding raw materials for his art. "We love our trees," he said. "I like the stories behind them. They all have a story. Once somebody's had a tree in their yard for 50 or 60 years ... they're part of our home. We're accustomed to them. Losing a tree is like a missing tooth."

Taking a piece of a downed tree and making something of it — you can keep that forever," Dotson says. "It's like bringing a piece of that tree back."

In the meantime, Dotson has gotten to know his materials well and revels in their sensory idiosyncrasies.

Cherry and walnut are his favorites: walnut "looks like chocolate when you're working it," and when finished has a deep, dark glow; and cherry as a hard wood is resilient and strong but easy to work with.

"And I love how it smells," he says. Unlike apple wood, which does not smell like apples, cherry wood actually smells like cherries on the lathe. Walnut, if it's wet, smells like horse manure, and maple smells "terrible," he says, — "like dog pee."

As a matter of principle, Dotson never buys his wood, only using wood he finds or what is donated to his work. A local lumberyard sometimes lets him select from scrap wood about to be discarded. Friends and neighbors bring him burls and slices of stumps.

And when trees fall down, as in my own backyard, when a Bradford pear cracked and split onto my garage and had to be chopped up, Dotson — my neighbor — came over and got a chunk to turn. Several weeks later, he delivered us a bowl so beautiful I can't bring myself to put anything in it.

He likes the functionality of bowls and avoids coating them with anything more intrusive than linseed oil. "I want people to be able to feel that bowl," he says, "and knowing that they're touching wood."

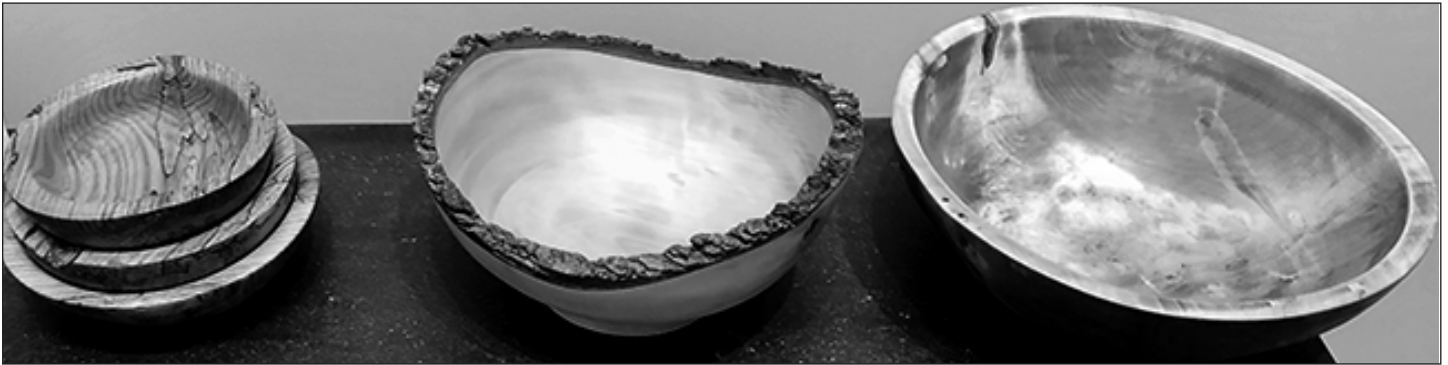
More information on Dotson's exhibit is available from Flint Trading Company, 810-820-7119.

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

# Village Life

## Flint's "found beauty" sculpted with love from city's cast-off trees

By Jan Worth-Nelson



**Bowl in the middle made from the downed pear tree in Worth-Nelson's backyard**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

After 22 years in the Navy, including tours of duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, and finally, Ethiopia, in 2015, Flint native Russ Dotson came home.

Casting about for things to do, he found himself watching a YouTube series called "Strangely Satisfying Videos" — described as "mesmerizing and hypnotizing" clips of the actions of (for example) weaving, frosting a cake, painting a perfect stop sign, peeling cellophane wrap — and turning a wooden spindle, the shavings dropping off, curled and serene.

Something about the wood turning caught his eye. "I could do that," he said. He collected an armload of cast-off wood and bought a \$100 Craig's List lathe.

He picked up more wood, "destroyed most of it," and the cheap lathe broke, he recalls with a chuckle. He bought a second cheap lathe, collected more wood, practiced his craft for hours, destroyed most of it, and broke that lathe, too.

"The things I was making were horrible — ugly and small," he said. But he found it relaxing and addicting, and kept going.

"It takes a long time to practice," he said, but in time, "I found a groove."

He finally bought a quality lathe and gradually perfected his craft — creating smoothly sensuous and gorgeous wooden bowls, plates and vessels, a stunning collection of which are on display now through Jan. 4 at Flint Trading Company, 629 1/2 Saginaw St.

Dotson figures he has made "hun-

dreds and hundreds" of wooden bowls — cherry, walnut, maple, apple, oak — and has given so many to family and friends, "They are sick of them — they don't want anymore."

He stays with it, he says, because it's relaxing and also, "If your wood is dry, you can finish a bowl in one sitting. If you like instant gratification, it's fairly instant."



**Russ Dotson**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Even more to the point, Dotson loves the act of rescuing and honoring the blow-downs and remains of Flint's old trees. His Flint Trading Company show is called "Flint's Found Beauty," and Dotson, who has seen the world and now works in human resources at Diplomat Pharmacy, asserts his hometown offers pleasures and rewards often little-known to outsiders.

Its trees, for one. He has a special eye and respect for trees cut down by the city and left at the curb or blowdowns in back-

yards or woods and sometimes beloved trees that have to be cut down because they've reached their expiration dates.

Sometimes the beauty is "hidden," Dotson says.

"Somebody might see a hoary old tree in a yard and just think, it's dead. I see a tree that might have been in that yard for 200 years ... think of all the things it's seen."

The process requires a steady hand, a face shield (splinters dangerously fly) and sometimes time — to get the moisture out of the wood as needed (he sometimes uses a microwave, in careful spurts) without cracking and to select just the right balance and shape.

"I'm not creating anything," he says. "I'm just revealing something — something that has been there all along. To take something that somebody was going to throw away at worst, or burn at best, to cut it up and burn it into a fireplace — well, I can make something nice."

Dotson's appreciation of Flint's histories of abandonment and recovered dignity runs deep. His father worked at Fisher One, as did his grandfather, who participated in the Sit-down Strike. His mother grew up on Dakota at Franklin streets and went to St. Mary's. He himself attended the recently demolished Holy Redeemer school and graduated from Grand Blanc High.

And when he came back he deliberately chose the College Cultural neighborhood, known for its leafy canopy of trees, where he lives now with his wife,

(Continued on Page 15)