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East Village

Magazine

February 2020



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East Village Magazine

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Commentary

An open letter to my Republican friends

By Paul Rozycki

While we may disagree on many things, there is no doubt that the Republican Party has a long and honorable history. It led the nation through a brutal civil war, ending slavery. It was an early advocate for civil rights and racial equality in the years following that war. It has been a strong supporter of fiscal and personal responsibility, both within the government and in personal lives. It has been the voice of those who wished to spread the American ideals of democracy and freedom around the world. It has been a leading force against those who would limit freedom and democracy around the world.

The legacy of past presidents

Your party is heir to the proud heritage of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan. It was your own party leaders who had the courage to tell Richard Nixon, that in spite of his political victories, it was time to leave. Yet today, many of those ideals are being erased as you become the party of Donald Trump.

You are the party of Abraham Lincoln, who held the nation together and ended the scourge of slavery, but support a president who says, “There are good people on both sides,” when responding to a white power march supported by neo-Nazis and the KKK. You are the party of Teddy Roosevelt, the “trust buster” of the early 20th century, but support a president who has given huge tax breaks to his billionaire friends and corporations, as the middle class continues to shrink and struggle.

Roosevelt was also an avid conservationist who led the early formation of national parks, and you have seen our president deny global warming and climate change, as he removed the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accords.

Dwight Eisenhower led the nation in war and peace, and believed that strong alliances protect America’s security. Yet, we have seen the current president work to weaken our most important and long-lasting treaty organizations, insult our allies, and cozy up to our enemies.

Ronald Reagan believed that the Soviet Union was “the evil empire” and set the stage for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet system. Our current president is willing to attack and insult nearly every world leader, with one exception: he hasn’t said a word to offend Russia’s Vladimir Putin.

Though he didn’t always follow his own advice, Reagan believed in a limited government, fiscal responsibility, and a balanced budget. The current president has given us trillion-dollar deficits well into the future, at a time when the economy is doing well. When the economy turns down, it could be a recipe for economic disaster.

The values Republicans support

You are the party of family values, yet you support a president who brags about assaulting women and boasts of his affairs — as he slips from one marriage to another — while he pays off porn stars. Under his direction, we have seen families broken up at the border and locked in cages.

You claim to be the party of constitutional law and limited government, yet you have supported a president who blatantly ignores the Congress and the Constitution when it suits him.

You claim to be the party of law and order, and yet you have supported a president who has seen at least 34 of his associates indicted (and some already convicted) for a variety of criminal acts. More than a few of his enterprises and charities have been charged with fraud.

(Continued on Page 14.)

Cover: Winter getaway



Photo of the Month: Cornwall Building (by Edwin D. Custer)

Census count effort launches with \$1,800 per person per year at stake

By Jan Worth-Nelson

\$1,800 per person per year.

That is the key number in why the upcoming national census matters. As Flint city officials explained in a kickoff press conference Jan. 24 at City Hall, the census determines how \$675 billion in federal dollars is distributed nationwide every year for the next 10 years.

Again, that means \$1,800 per person per year.

“Those are dollars that fund Head Start, road repairs, Medicaid, healthy school lunches, and so much more. We need the whole community to come together to make sure we get our fair share,” said Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley.

Neeley joined with a cadre of about two dozen city officials and local partners for what is being called the “Mayoral Complete Count Committee.”

County Commissioner Bryant Nolden, also executive director of Berston Field House, is chairing the committee. The group

will coordinate the city’s efforts, develop outreach initiatives and provide information to residents, according to a summary press release from City of Flint Director of Communications Marjory Raymer.

The City of Flint’s census efforts are being headed by DuVarl Murdock, deputy

leadership team as the 2020 census coordinator.

Neeley described the committee as “a bouquet of humanity” with representatives from schools, non-English speaking populations, neighborhood groups, and the media.

A total of 79.1 percent of Flint residents participated in the 2010 census, Raymer stated, adding that the federal agency expects Flint will be “increasingly difficult to count” and that participation will drop to 74.1 percent. In the 2010 census, Flint’s population was 102,400, but most local experts expect the 2020 total to be much lower.

The Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) is playing a significant role in the effort, partnering with the mayoral committee and distributing \$303,000 to

local nonprofits representing hard-to-

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Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley with Census Chair Bryant Nolden
(Photo by Tom Travis)

chief of staff, Anthony Turner, a retired partnership specialist for the U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, will round out the

It's beginning: Library renovation kicks off Feb. 29

By Jan Worth-Nelson

The Flint Public Library (FPL) has scheduled a celebration of its last day before a major renovation, a kickoff party from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 29. After 60 years at its Kearsley Street location, the library will be undergoing a \$27.6 million upgrade, facilitated by \$15 million from major donors and by a bond approved by 68 percent of voters in November that will raise an additional \$12.6 million.

The building's deterioration, along with a desire to bring it up to 21st century standards, is what propelled the successful campaign for a "like-new library," as Director Kay Schwartz described it in August.

Every system and piece of infrastructure in the library will be replaced and renovations will add 16,000 additional square f



Open design between first and second floors
(From OPN Architects)

Not just a facelift, the changes will double the children's space, double the tech learning space, provide two-thirds more space for local history and genealogy, and provide all new infrastructure systems and facilities.

The bond, designed for 12-year maturity, was accompanied by a 2-mill operating millage renewal costing the owner of a \$30,000 market-valued home about \$27 a year.

The library will be closed in March and April for packing and moving, according to library officials. It will be relocating to temporary quarters at Courtland Center, opening in May, with details to be provided soon.

Services that will continue in the temporary space include children's literacy programming, technology access, genealogy services. In addition to offering programs onsite, the library will branch out to partner locations that have space available.

Construction will start as soon as the library staff can get everything out of the building, Schwartz said. Photo updates will be posted as often as possible online at YourNewFPL.org. Clark Construction of Lansing was selected as construction manager from a statewide search in 2017 and has been with the project from the beginning, Schwartz said.

The project received major boosts from the C.S. Mott Foundation. In 2017, the foundation awarded the library \$500,000 to work with an architect and develop the renovation design.

Later, the library announced an additional \$1.2 million from the foundation to support the renovation effort. And in December, the Mott Foundation contributed an additional \$13.8 million, with the Ruth Mott Foundation granting \$1 million and The Community Foundation of

Greater Flint granting \$50,000.

Consistently a significant gathering place and hub of literacy, the love of books, and access to all kinds of information at no cost to the user, the Flint Public Library goes way back in the city's history. It was founded in 1851, and still serves about 500 patrons a day, Schwartz said.

"Many people don't know this, but Flint Public Library is the only building on the Cultural Center Campus that is completely owned by the people of Flint," Schwartz said during the August campaign. The library is not institutionally linked to the rest of the Cultural Center institutions, she



Director Kay Schwartz
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

noted, and does not receive funds through the arts millage approved by Genesee County voters in 2018.

OPN Architects of Cedar Rapids, Iowa was selected after a national search of "library specific" architects.

Toby Olsen, OPN project architect, was in Flint last fall for campaign open houses.

Olsen said the FPL design aims for an open, "democratic — small 'd' — feeling," in which "anybody who walks in the door will be treated the same, no matter your station in life. No matter who you are, you're welcome."

Plans show an open, "hub-and-spoke" design. When patrons come in the door, Olsen explained, "You'll have a clear line of sight to your destination."

The second floor will be opened up, with an added atrium, so that people on the first floor would be able to "look up at your friend on the second floor and wave," Olsen said.

Existing windows would be retained and more added — with attention to improved lighting and glazing and, of course, vastly improved infrastructure throughout. Olsen said OPN as a company is drawn to places where "we hope we can make a difference."

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

Education Beat *Flint's public schools face existential challenges*

By Harold C. Ford



Concerned citizens attending Jan. 23 Board of Education meeting

(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

“Education is the great equalizer ... You can never bring families to Flint unless we improve the schools.”

—Dana Dyson, Flint resident, Flint Board of Education meeting, Jan. 23, 2020

After seven meetings of its board of education in the first three weeks of calendar year 2020, Flint Community Schools (FCS) faces an existential challenge probably unlike anything since the opening of Flint High School at S. Saginaw and Third Streets in September of 1875, 145 years ago.

At its most recent meeting on Jan. 23, the Flint school board allocated \$20,000 for a voter education campaign in hopes of passing a March 10 millage proposal that would more quickly pay off FCS's massive debt. Yet, administration and board members are deeply divided about the details of proposed deficit elimination plans — including consolidation of schools — designed to reduce that debt.

The deep divisions are along geographic and racial lines as various school communities — notably those at Eisenhower, Pierce, Brownell, and Holmes — have packed board meetings in December and January imploring FCS board members to keep their schools open. To do otherwise, the schools' advocates say, would lead to the further abandonment of Flint's public schools by its students and parents.

Daunting challenges

FCS leaders face daunting challenges in 2020 that include:

- Convincing Flint voters to pass a 4.0-mill proposal headed to the March 10 ballot that would more quickly pay off the massive debt accumulated by FCS;
- Finding agreement on and implementing a deficit elimination plan that may include a plan for consolidation of buildings;
- Adopting a strategy to rid the district of at least 22 buildings already closed and 16 vacant properties;
- Continuing loss of student population — now reported to be 3,800, making FCS the 5th largest school system in Genesee County behind Grand Blanc, Davison, Carman-Ainsworth, and Flushing — and resultant loss of state financial aid;
- The departure of 78 educators in 2019, taking with them 1,014 years of experience in Flint schools;
- The staffing of several vacant classrooms with paraprofessionals and guest teachers still seeking certification;
- Continuing parent and staff reports of building climate challenges, both social and physical, especially at Flint Junior High in the Northwestern building;
- Two lawsuits by the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, one that challenges FCS disciplinary procedures, and another that seeks additional disability services for Flint children exposed to lead during the water crisis;

- Meeting the requirements of a three-year (2018-19 to 2020-21) partnership plan imposed by the State of Michigan to improve test scores by 10 percent, reduce suspensions by 10 percent, and increase attendance to 90 percent.

A district deep in debt

“The issue at hand is this,” said Derrick Lopez, FCS superintendent. “The district has a budget deficit of \$5.7 million a year resulting from a legacy debt (loan) of \$2.1 million a year and an additional \$3.6 million annually in special education services ... Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet to repair this massive deficit ... The cavalry isn't coming.”

Among the plethora of newly posted documents (about 50 in all) at the FCS website under “Superintendent's Office” is the “2019-20 Approved Budget” which shows the following:

- Beginning Fund Balance: -\$3,349,028
- Total Revenue: \$67,913,616
- Total Expenditure: \$70,833,059
- Ending Fund Balance: -\$6,268,471

Other financial data now found at the website (flintschools.org):

- Instruction expenditure (teachers): \$30,852,366
- Support Services (paraprofessionals, administration, maintenance, transportation, etc.): \$36,090,179
- Projected annual deficit in 2026-27:

(Continued on Page 7.)

... Challenges

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-\$25,952,246

- Projected annual surplus in 2035-36: \$744,444

Expenditure cut assumptions

Financial data showing some projected cuts, or “Expenditure Cut Assumptions,” by fiscal year 2021 that have generated little public controversy include:

- Middle Cities Liabilities Insurance: from \$1,288,620 to \$788,620, a cut of \$500,000, or 38.8%;
- Transportation: from \$3,183,700 to \$2,598,700, a cut of \$58,500, or 18.3%;
- Custodial/Maintenance/Security: from \$2,086,000 to \$1,397,560, a cut of \$688,440, or 33%;
- Legal and Audit Fees (likely, in whole or part, the Grand Blanc-based Williams Firm, P.C.): from \$857,028 to \$600,000, a cut of \$257,028, or 29.9%;
- Rehmann Services (a Troy, Michigan-based public accounting firm): from \$250,000 to \$120,000, a cut of \$130,000, or 52%;
- Workman’s Comp/Incentive Bonus Reduction: from \$748,500 to \$200,000, a cut of \$548,500, or 73.28%.
- School Administration: from \$2,055,970 to \$1,143,970, a cut of \$912,000, or 44.36% (includes reduction of seven administrators and four secretaries).

Building consolidation options

Nothing, however, has generated more community interest and controversy than consolidation options floated to the public that include, or not include, the following buildings:

- Flint Junior High School (grades 7-8), located in the former Northwestern High School building at G-2138 W. Carpenter Rd. (referred to as NW for purposes of this article, located on Flint’s north end);
- Southwestern Classical Academy (grades 9-12), 1420 W. Twelfth St. (SW, located on the south end);
- Accelerated Learning Academy (grades 7-12), 1602 S. Averill Ave. (ALA, located in the former Scott build-

ing, near southeast side);

- Brownell STEM Academy (grades K-2), 6302 Oxley Dr. (northwest side, next to Holmes);
- Doyle/Ryder Elementary (grades K-6), 1040 N. Saginaw St. (D/R, near central city);
- Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary (grades K-6), 1518 University Ave. (DTM, near central city);
- Eisenhower Elementary (grades K-6), 1235 Pershing St. (south side);
- Holmes STEM Academy (grades 3-6), 6602 Oxley Dr. (northwest side, next to Brownell);
- Neithercut Elementary School (grades K-6), 2010 Crestbrook Ln. (south side);
- Pierce Elementary School (grades K-6), 1101 W. Vernon Dr. (near east side);
- Potter Elementary School (grades K-6), 2500 N. Averill Ave. (east side).

The five consolidation options offered to the Flint Board of Education, simplified, include the following:

- Option 1: ALA students at Scott to SW; Eisenhower closed, students moved to DTM and Neithercut; Flint JH students to Holmes; Holmes students to Brownell; Pierce closed, students moved to D/R and Potter; projected budget surplus of \$2,117,263/year.
- Option 2: ALA students at Scott to SW; Eisenhower no action; Flint JH students to Holmes; Holmes students to Brownell; Pierce no action; projected budget deficit of \$887,370/year.
- Option 3: ALA students at Scott to SW; Eisenhower no action; Flint JH no action; Brownell students to Holmes; Pierce no action; projected budget deficit of \$1,357,610/year.
- Option 4: ALA students at Scott to SW; Eisenhower no action; Flint JH students to Scott with addition of modular units priced at \$160,000 to \$310,000 each; Brownell students to Holmes; Pierce no action; projected budget deficit of \$1,400,523/year.
- Option 5: ALA students at Scott no action; Eisenhower no action; Flint JH no action; Brownell students to Holmes; Pierce no action; projected budget deficit of \$1,767,263/year.

Further, Lopez reported that the

Administration Building at 923 E. Kearsley St., a frequent target of board members who urge its sale, has been appraised at \$1.65 million. However, the cost of removing and relocating the infrastructure with the building would cost from \$1 million to \$2 million.

“Low-hanging fruit”

Lopez described the options for building consolidation as the most reachable goals to trim the massive FCS debt. “The low-hanging fruit in this plan is the underutilization of space we use in the district and making sure that we are utilizing it most efficiently,” he said.

“We don’t like closing buildings at all,” he said. “But I tell you, that is one of the things we have to consider.”

As an example, Lopez cited the Northwestern building, which has seating



Elliot Milligan testifies at BofE
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

capacity for 1551 students but currently houses only 400 junior high students. He said that cleaning and electricity for the building alone respectively cost FCS \$141,500 and \$328,000 annually.

Board opposition to building consolidation

No matter the numbers or consequences, a majority of the seven members of the Flint board have expressed their opposition, in one way or another, to the consolidation of buildings:

- Casey Lester, president: “I don’t think anybody here would vote to close Pierce.”

- Diana Wright, vice president: “With my one vote I will not vote to

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... Challenges

(Continued from Page 7.)

close another school.”

- Betty Ramsdell, secretary: “I can’t vote to close any schools either.”

- Vera Perry, trustee: “I’m having a hard time with the closing of schools.”

- Blake Strozier, trustee: “In my heart and in my mind ... I cannot support this plan as it is.”

- Danielle Green, treasurer: “A vote to close Pierce is not happening for me.”

“To not make a decision about one school being closed, you are now saying that instead of putting the money in the pocket of a teacher,” argued Lopez, “it’s OK to put money into a space instead of into our teachers’ pockets ... The team we have assembled here has put us in a really fis-

cally responsible space.”

“A space of self-determination”

“We are in a space of self-determination right now,” advised Lopez. “People are looking to see if we are willing to make decisions that are fiscally responsible.”



Flint Board of Education hearing citizens
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

The “people” referenced by Lopez are likely State of Michigan officials at the Departments of Treasury and Education. Lopez read aloud a Dec. 13, 2019, letter

from the Department of Treasury (now posted at the FCS website) which states, in part:

“The State Treasurer determined that the (Flint) District is subject to rapidly deteriorating financial circumstances, persistently declining enrollment, and other indicators of financial stress likely to result in recurring deficits ... This letter of approval shall be invalidated if there is a failure to meet the reduction targets identified in the EDEP.” The legal basis for Treasury oversight and corrective actions is found in state law, specifically MCL 380.12, which, in part, speaks to “loss of organization and dissolution of school district.”

Anyone who doubts the existential consequences for a school district of declin-

(Continued on Page 14.)

SHEPPY DOG FUND LECTURES

To the House Without Exit

Explore the simultaneously fascinating and arcane dimensions of the afterlife! It’s thought that there is no more fundamentally religious idea than the afterlife. While ubiquitous in the western world, this concept is both historically and philosophically complicated: How old is this concept?



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

PART One

3.25.20 @ 6:00p

The Origins of the Afterlife

PART Two

4.1.20 @ 6:00p

The Flowering of the Afterlife

Both lectures stand alone, so attending each is not mandatory for understanding this intriguing religious subject. Additionally, both parts will be available for viewing on the FIA website.



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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

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

Improve Your Heart Health

Feb. 6
6-8 p.m. Thursday
Get information on preventing heart disease from cardiologists Dr. Ahmed and Dr. Alkotob
Holiday Inn Gateway Centre
5353 Gateway Centre, Flint
For more info visit hurleymc.com/services/hearthealth-event/
or call 810-262-4855
No cost to attend.

Bowling & Whatever It Takes!

Feb. 7
6-10 p.m. Friday
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Flint are gathering teams of six for a night of bowling and raising funds to support the NEW Peak extension on Bristol Rd. that will serve local youth everyday. Fees provide two rounds of bowling, shoes, pop and pizza.
B's Bowling
750 S. Center Rd., Flint
Visit bgclubflint.org/bowl
or call Nicole Goff at 810-249-3413
Fees per team: \$25

Galentine's Day 2020

Feb. 7
6-10 p.m. Friday
Gal friends will get together for pampering, signature drinks, food, karaoke, a photo booth, and more. This is for women 18 and over.
Longway Planetarium
1310 E. Kearsley St., Flint
Call 810-237-3427
Tickets: \$5 or VIP tickets \$10

6th Annual Valentine's Mini Market

Feb. 8
9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday
Shop for Valentine's Day gifts for loved ones from local artisans. There will also be make-and-take crafts brought by Flint Handmade.
Flint Farmers' Market
300 E. First St., Flint
Visit flinthandmade.org.
No cost to attend.

PTAC: Proposal Development

Feb. 11
9-11 a.m. Tuesday
Learn to do business with governments by using databases and learn how to design visuals to make your business stand out to the government.
Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce
519 S. Saginaw St., Suite 200, Flint
Register by visiting center-gateway.com/103000/index.php?EVT=54602.
No cost to attend.

Romance Under the Stars

Feb. 14
6-9 p.m. Friday
An evening of drinks and appetizers and a candlelit dinner in the dome of the Longway Planetarium provided by Redwood Lodge.
Longway Planetarium
1310 E. Kearsley St., Flint
Call 810-237-3427
Tickets: \$225 per couple

Pop-up Valentine's Day Dinner at Whaley Historic House Museum

Feb. 14
6:30-9 p.m. Friday
Begin with a tour of the beautifully decorated Victorian-era historical house museum followed by an elegant dinner from by Blackstone's Smokehouse at 7:15.
All profits benefit the museum.
Whaley Historic House Museum
624 E. Kearsley St., Flint
Call 810-471-4714
Tickets range from \$90 to \$125.

OHL Flint Firebirds Hockey Game

Feb. 15
7-10 p.m. Saturday
Flint Firebirds battle it out against Guelph Storm.
Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center
3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint
For more info visit flintandgenesee.org or flintfirebirds.com.
Tickets: \$12-16

TAKE3

Feb. 19
7 p.m. Wednesday
The Whiting presents this high-energy female trio of musicians performing all musical genres.
The Capitol Theatre
140 E. 2nd St., Flint
For more info visit tickets.thewhiting.com.
Tickets: \$16.50-\$35.50

PACKRAT

Feb. 21-23
Fri. 7 p.m., Sat. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m.
This multi-media puppetry play is about a rodent on a journey to discover us. It's co-produced with Concrete Temple Theatre.
Recommended for ages 6 and up.
The Rep's Bower Black Box
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint
Visit therep.com
or call 810-237-1530 for more info.
Tickets: regular \$20, senior (60+) \$18, teen \$18, and children (12 and under) \$16.
Genesee County residents enjoy a 30% discount..



City Council Beat Anti-Defamation League spokeswoman responds to Eric Mays' "Nazi Salute"

By Tom Travis

Editor's note: Since this interview, Eric Mays was ejected from the Jan. 27 council meeting and stripped of his committee assignments by unanimous vote of the other council members.

Two weeks after Flint City Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward) gave a Nazi salute, clicked his heels in Nazi soldier style and called Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) Hitler, the community continues to try to make sense of what happened in that moment. Social media lit up with comments both in outrage and in support of the incident.

Galloway was chided for what to some seemed her lack of response. A member of the community notified both the Jewish Federation of Flint and the Anti-Defamation League of Michigan following the January council meeting. Both organizations have had conversations with Mays and Galloway in the days following the incident.

EVM spoke with Carolyn Normandin, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of Michigan (ADL), michigan.adl.org, by phone on Sunday, Jan. 26. She said the Nazi salute incident was reported to her by someone in the Flint community who wanted the ADL to investigate it as an act of anti-Semitism.

Normandin said she watched the video and said she "was disturbed by the incident and so I reached out to Mr. Mays." Normandin stated that the ADL fights against behavior like this with people trivializing the Holocaust. Normandin said Galloway's lack of response in the moment is understood, that she [Galloway] was trying her best to not ignite the situation and move on with the meeting.

"I tried to help Mr. Mays understand when you make comments that evoke the name of Hitler and call someone a gestapo agent, you're minimalizing genocide and state-sponsored murder." Normandin said Mays did not know that people other than Jews were killed in the Holocaust. "He

learned that in our conversation," she said.

Normandin explained she thinks there is a big disconnect in society — an inability for



people to learn from their mistakes. Mays and so many others are like this.

"I would like him and all people to educate themselves on the dangers of trivializing the Holocaust. It's the normalization of this type of behavior that is a great danger to our society," she said.

Normandin continued that there is something called the "Oppression Olympics," which sets slavery and the Holocaust against each other, asking which was worse.

"For certain, slavery was an absolute dark time in American history, and so tragic," she said.

Details to support that assessment of both the Holocaust and the history of slavery have been exhaustively documented over the years; it is estimated that more than 12 million people were murdered in the Holocaust (some sources say up to 17 million). Author Ronald Segal, in his book *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside of Africa*, estimates that nearly 13 million Africans were shipped in the slave trade over a period of 400 years from the 1600s into the 1900s — not to mention the inhumane and cruel treatment they received over the years.

Unfortunately, there are people who say, "We should just get over the Holocaust," or "We should just get over slavery." Normandin pleaded, "Let's stop fighting about which was worse. We have so much in common."

She added that one way to move for-

ward is to ask, "How do we stop trivializing slavery and how do we stop trivializing the Holocaust?" The beginning step in moving forward in these issues is to educate ourselves about these tragic and dark times in our society, she said.

Finally, Normandin said Mays was polite to her and they had a good, lengthy conversation. Normandin invites all people to visit the ADL website, Michigan.adl.org. The ADL is not just a Jewish organization fighting against anti-Semitic behavior, but fights for equal treatment of all people of all races, she said.

Normandin offered education opportunities at the Holocaust Museum and the Charles H. Wright Museum, where she was formerly vice president. She said she ended the conversation with Mays by stating, "I hope you'll think twice before you make a statement or gesture like this again."

Editor: This story was first posted on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz death camp, Jan. 27, 1945.

Further education opportunities on the racial atrocities of slavery and the Holocaust are available here:

- The Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History located on the Wayne State University Campus, 315 E. Warren Ave., Detroit MI 48201, 313-494-5800, www.thewright.org.
- The Holocaust Remembrance Center, 28123 Orchard Lake Rd., Farmington Hills MI 48334, 248-553-2400, www.holocaustcenter.org
- The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, located on the Ferris State University Campus, 1010 Campus Dr., Big Rapids MI 49307, 231-591-5873, www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/index.htm
- The Anti-Defamation League of Michigan, 248-353-7553, michigan.adl.org.

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Bipartisan efforts reforming MI car insurance rates

By Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.

If you own and drive a vehicle in the Flint community, then you have likely grown accustomed to hefty insurance rates. This is because Michigan is the most expensive state for car insurance in all of the United States for the sixth consecutive year.

“The Wolverine State,” described in Insure.com’s 2019 edition of car insurance rates by state, “is in a league of its own when it comes to car insurance, with an average annual premium that is \$313 higher than that of Louisiana, which ranked second. A Michigan car insurance policy averages \$2,611, which is almost 80 percent higher than the national average of \$1,457.”

Downtown Flint has among the highest auto insurance rates in the state.

And our very own Vehicle City, according to estimates on LendingTree’s ValuePenguin insurance site, “is the fifth most expensive place in Michigan.” This means that if you are a driver in the city of Flint, your average quote is about “\$3,929 per year, about 35 percent more expensive than the state average.”

In an effort to change this, Governor Whitmer signed a historic bipartisan no-fault auto insurance reform bill. On May 30, 2019, the bill was passed in an effort to provide lower rates for Michigan drivers, to protect insurance coverage options, and to potentially strengthen consumer protections.

Currently, Michigan law requires drivers to carry unlimited medical coverage to pay for their expenses if injured in an auto accident. The new law, as outlined on the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services (DIFS) site, “allows you to choose a level of medical coverage when your policy renews after July 1, 2020.”

According to DIFS, the new law should allow drivers to choose a level of medical coverage on their insurance plans. The insurance companies should then reduce the premium for the coverage section Personal Injury Protection, known as PIP, coverage. The amount of savings will then depend on the PIP

option the customer selects.

As of now though, the new law is in a state of flux. “Every insurance company,” said John Potter of Potter & Roose of Flint, “had to first file new rating formulas, wait for approval, and then file new rates.” This means that most of the large insurance companies still don’t have the official rates approved by DIFS to offer their clients.

Potter also noted, “The last I knew, the commissioner was not approving the carriers’ request to do midterm changes on July 1. That could result in the rating changes not taking place until the first policy renewal following July 1.”

Is it the brick street that does it? DIFS’ site states that the new law requires that agents and insurers give their customers a form that describes the benefits and risks of the coverage options. Flintoids may also want to talk with an insurance agent to discuss their personal auto insurance needs.

Some other changes that may affect Michigan insurance policies are Residual Bodily Injury (BI) Coverage, changes in discounts, and Mini-Tort.

The new law under BI coverage, according to DIFS, “protects you from claims by other injured persons by



Saginaw Street in downtown Flint
(Photo by Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.)

increasing the minimum BI coverage limit an insurance company is required to offer you.” This means that this section of your rates may actually go up.

Potter states that, “the new law forbids the use of home ownership discounts, but still allows discounts for

multi-policy or Homeowners and Auto written with the same carrier. There are still discounts,” he added, “for quoting your coverage ahead of your expiration date, how long you are with your current carrier, and not cancelling in the middle of the policy period.”

The new law, under DIFS’ Elimination of Non-Driving Factors section, “prohibits auto insurance companies from using sex, marital status, home ownership, credit score, educational level, occupation, and zip codes in setting your auto insurance rates.”

Under DIFS’ section for Mini-Tort it states that the new law could increase the amount of money that could be recovered in small claims court for uninsured damages. This raises concerns about the potential rise in frivolous lawsuits and seems to turn Michigan’s auto insurance into a quasi-no-fault insurance.

“I’m afraid there will be people who move their insurance on July 2 for a small savings in the MCCA,” stated Potter about the uncertainties within the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association, “when they would get a much larger savings if they wait until their expiration date.”

Potter recommends, at this point in time, being patient. “I have spoken with representatives from four of the largest writers of auto insurance in the state,” he said. “The consensus seems to be they are hoping to be ready by the end of March,” adding policy holders should begin to receive their options sometime in May for their July renewals.

For further information, DIFS’ website will be updated on an ongoing basis to provide the latest information to Michigan drivers as the effective dates of the new law approach. Please check for updates and educational materials.

EVM Staff Writer Jeffrey L. Carey, Jr. can be reached at jlcareyjr@hotmail.com.

Mulch or compost leaves to make the earth happier, Watershed Coalition reps suggest

By Tammy Beckett

Neither bagging nor raking leaves into the street are ideal solutions for one of autumn's onerous chores, two representatives from the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC) told residents of the College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA) at their regular meeting in January.

In the past, Flint has allowed people to rake leaves into the street, but that is no longer the policy. Instead, leaves must be bagged and picked up once per week in the fall. Some citizens have been advocating for the return to street raking.

But Sarah Scheitler and Anna Darzi of the FRWC said science points clearly to serious issues created when leaves are put into drains or swept into creeks and rivers.

Also, because leaves are natural and good for the environment, it is helpful to wildlife if they are mulched or remain on the lawns. The reason that leaves in drains create problems is that there is far too much of it. It's not just the leaves falling into the nearby waterway, such as Gilkey Creek or the Flint River, but also there are the nutrients from the entire city that overload the system.

Green lawns support very little wildlife, Scheitler said. Keeping leaves or mulched leaves on lawns is much more preferable and hospitable for wildlife. Additionally, most grass has a very shallow root systems, so most of the rain washes off quickly into the street and drains. The Flint River Watershed Coalition encourages people to plant native species rather than grass. White clover is a good ground covering, as are mosses, flowers, and native Michigan grasses, Scheitler also noted there is a difference between sewer water, which also drains into the waterway systems, and street runoff. Sewer water goes to a

processing plant before it is released into the Flint River, she said, but "drains in the streets are directly discharged into the river or waterway."

Gilkey Creek winds through the College Cultural neighborhood and

system.

Residents who dispose of their leaves in Gilkey Creek are polluting, the FRWC spokeswomen pointed out, and are subject to fines. Illegal dumping can be reported to the Environmental Protection Agency at (810) 766-7210, Flint River Watershed Coalition at (810) 767-6490, or who will direct the complaint to the appropriate entity.

For residents who have bagged leaves in their front yards in spite of the pick-up having ended two months ago, Scheitler recommended contacting the Flint Blight Division or the Department of Public works or possibly the Ombudsperson (see below). Residents are responsible for easements as well as their own yards. Neighborhood safety officers (NSOs) can also write citations. Residents should contact Sergeant Rei,

the direct supervisor for the NSOs, at (810) 237-6892 on any blight issue.

Communication on leaf pick-up times has been unreliable, residents complained. Also, pick-up times do not align with when the bulk of the leaves fall. CCNA President Mike Keeler stated many of the trees along the streets are "the wrong kind of trees," which drop their leaves late in the year after pick-up has ceased. Residents can contact the Department of Public Works at (810) 766-7135 ext. 2605 or Keep Genesee County Beautiful at (810) 767-9696 to acquire leaf bags.

EVM Staff Writer Tammy Beckett can be reached at drtreesflintschools@gmail.com



For the healthiest practice, mulch leaves on the lawn, FRWC spokeswomen advise
(Photo on Maxine Street by Jan Worth-Nelson)

receives its drain water. This is already a problem when trash, oil, chemical, or other materials commonly dumped into the creek mix with the water. But, she said, "Yard waste and leaves create a special problem."

Piled leaves and debris can cause "flooding because of blockages," Darzi explained. Additionally, leaves disintegrate quickly and when there is precipitation, nutrients disperse directly into the water system. These nutrients, including phosphorus and nitrogen, deplete the oxygen and harm wildlife because those runoff nutrients are better for wildlife on land, not those found in the creek and river systems. This leads to less aquatic life like fish and also fewer bugs and plants.

"You end up having a less healthy water system when you add more organic matter toward the system," Darzi said.

Within 24 hours of a rainfall, research suggests, most nitrogen goes into the drain and ends up in the water

**COLLEGE CULTURAL
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**
ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net
**Neighborhood Watch meets Thurs.,
Feb. 20, 7-9 pm, MCC's RTC Auditorium**
**Members meet Thurs., Mar. 19, 2020
7-9 pm in MCC's RTC Auditorium**

At Mott Community College

our roots run deep, and so does our commitment to the communities we serve.

The College is a stabilizing force in Flint, Genesee County and the mid-Michigan region. We breathe new life into old spaces and create economic opportunity by developing our area's talent pipeline to promote economic growth.

At Mott Community College, we are dedicated to providing a high quality, affordable education close to home. It is our mandate to continue the work of those who came before us to improve the lives of those who will come after.

MCC has a bond proposal on the March 10 election ballot.

For information about the bond proposal, visit mcc.edu/bond



As an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution, the College encourages diversity and provides equal opportunity in education, employment, all of its programs, and the use of its facilities. The College does not discriminate in educational or employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, gender, gender expression, gender identity, national origin, veteran's status, age, disability unrelated to an individual's ability to perform adequately, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law. Title IX Coordinator Contact Information: 1401 E. Court St., Prahl College Center – Student Success Services Center (PCC-2280E), Flint, MI 48503, (810) 762-0024. Title II, ADA, Coordinator Contact Information: 1401 E. Court St., Curtice-Mott Complex (CM-1117, Flint, MI 48503 (810) 762-0373. Section 504 Coordinator Contact Information: 1401 E. Court St., Prahl College Center (PCC-2280A), Flint, MI 48503 (810) 232-2557.

Mott Community College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (hlcommission.org), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

... Republicans

(Continued from Page 3.)

His blatant lies and misstatements have surpassed 15,000 and grow by the day.

The Republican Party claims to be the party of tradition and patriotism — it seems that the flag is ever-present at public events — yet President Trump has attacked and undermined many key elements of the federal government, from the FBI, the CIA, the EPA, the Department of Education, to the military. He has insulted American veterans by saying he only liked those “who weren’t captured.” His recent military pardons have undermined the authority and respect of our military and its leaders. When he hasn’t attacked a department, he has often left it understaffed and unsupported.

During the Watergate scandal, it was the leadership of the Republican Party that decided that even though Richard Nixon had delivered a landslide victory for them in 1972, they had to stand on the principles of law and decency. In 1974, when Republican Senators Barry Goldwater, Hugh Scott and House Leader John Rhodes came to the White House and told Nixon that he had few votes in the Senate to protect him from removal, he resigned the next day.

The current impeachment trial

In recent weeks, the U.S. Senate and the American public have heard lengthy and extensive arguments for and

against Trump’s removal. But, at the time of this writing, the outcome seems all but certain, and by publication date, the Senate may have reached its conclusion. A two-thirds vote is required to remove an official, and right now there are only 47 Democrats who might vote to remove him. Even that number might be optimistic — a few Democrats may opt out. So it will take at least 20 Republicans to vote to remove Donald Trump. Perhaps some will. But it’s unlikely there will be anywhere near the required number. Even the witnesses who might (or might not) be called don’t seem likely to change that many votes.

Why not? Certainly, some truly believe that Trump is the new voice of the Republican Party, yet in private, many Republicans admit a long list of misgivings over Trump’s personality, his policy, and his competence. But in public, they remain silent and fear retaliation with an angry tweet, or a Trump-backed challenger in a primary election. The party seems to be solidly behind him because many of those who have misgivings and doubts about Trump are gone, either by leaving the party, retiring, or losing in 2018.

Yet it’s worth remembering that supporting this president is a risky gamble. He has shown no loyalty to any of his staff and supporters, except perhaps his family, and has shown a willingness to throw his former friends and associates

under the bus if they cross him on the slightest matter.

Finally, somewhere in the back of your mind, won’t you secretly be relieved when Trump is finally gone, so you won’t have to explain his crazy tweets, defend his personal behavior, attend his stream-of-consciousness, word-salad rally speeches, and try to make sense of it all?

So, whatever happens with the impeachment trial in the Senate, it might be worth asking — do you want to be the Republican Party, with all the values that you have supported for decades, or do you want to be the Trump Party, whose political values can change on a whim of a mercurial and uninformed personality?

It was John Kennedy who admired those leaders who could exhibit “Profiles in Courage” and go against popular sentiment by taking a principled stand. Though he was a Democrat, Kennedy wrote of leaders on both sides of the aisle, who could exhibit the courage to lean against their own parties, and even their own voters, when they stood up for what was right.

Though it’s a long shot, maybe it’s time for some “Profiles in Courage.” I suspect that the nation will be better for it, and so will the Republican Party.

Not that I wish you too much good luck. I’m still a Democrat.

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

... Challenges

(Continued from Page 8.)

ing enrollment and fiscal challenges need only be reminded of three Michigan school districts that no longer exist: Saginaw Buena Vista (2013 closure); Inkster (2013); and Albion (2013-2016).

“Decision-making phase”

“Those who sit on the board, including the current superintendent, did not create these problems,” reasoned Dyson, a frequent attendee at FCS board meetings. “These problems are indicative of changes

in urban America: closing GM, crime, people leaving urban areas, water crises, de-industrialization.”

“I have appreciated your hosting these meetings for the community to come together to express their concerns,” Dyson continued. “But it doesn’t stop now. Now we’re going to be moving into a decision-making phase.”

Editor’s Note: A longer version of this story is available at eastvillagemagazine.org, posted Jan. 29 under the same headline.

EVM Education Beat reporter Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

9,499

Numbers provided by the city are posted at cityofflint.com under Fast Start Replacement Program. Totals as of Jan. 24 were **9,499 lead or galvanized pipes replaced, 24,889 pipes excavated. A total of 15,390 pipes have been discovered to be copper service lines.**

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

Donations to EVM are tax deductible!

Flint Registry extends \$50 water crisis survey bonus

By Jan Worth-Nelson

The Flint Registry is extending a "thank you" offer to pay Flint residents \$50 each to fill out a survey detailing their experiences during the Flint water crisis. The deadline for receiving the bonus is now Feb. 29, extended from the end of January.

To enroll or learn more, information is available at flintregistry.org, by emailing CHM.Flint.Registry@msu.edu, or by calling (833) GO-FLINT.

The Registry is a public health reg-

istry for anyone exposed to Flint water because they lived, worked, or attended school in the City of Flint from April 25, 2014, to October 15, 2015. It was described in detail in several *East Village Magazine* stories.

Registry media contact Ebony Stith said more than 20,000 people so far have begun the enrollment process, and nearly 5,000 have fully enrolled in the registry. Of those 4,600, she said, more than 4,600 referrals have been made to

critical health and development services.

Registry officials have said they are hoping for a total of 150,000 completed surveys.

"The most common referrals are for health care access, neurodevelopment assessment, education services, lead inspection and abatement, and pipe replacement," Stith said.

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... Journalist

(Continued from Page 16)

caused me to see the significance of race in our society in ever-sharper ways.

My mind has gone back to one of the most eye-opening moments for me about race—a full 30 years ago—that I still remember vividly. While attending UM-Flint in the early 1990s, my best friend, Darrin, was an African American guy. He and I have remained good friends over the years even though we've both lived all over the country and even in different countries.

One day after class, my friend and I were walking from UM-Flint to his job at Genesee Bank in what was then Genesee Towers. We were standing at the corner of First Street and Harrison. All the cars were stopped for the red light. My friend chuckled and said, "Well, that's interesting." I asked him what he was talking about.

He said, "Every day when I stand at this corner and the cars stop, I hear all their doors locking, and I see all the drivers locking their doors or pushing the electric lock button."

I still didn't get it. I said, "Okay,

what does that mean?"

He said, "Because I'm black, Tom. But since I'm with you, a white guy, there's no locking of the doors." I will never forget this moment for the rest of my life. It showed me at that young age how people of color are treated every day in this white-dominated world. I think this is at the heart of racism — fear and control.

Fast forward 30 years to me sitting in a city council meeting, hearing professionally educated people calling out demeaning racist names. That makes my heart hurt. I'm a lover of people and don't understand why anyone would want to demean or intentionally hurt someone, let alone a colleague, with hurtful words or gestures.

Hand motions and words matter. Certain motions and words evoke memories of pain—even if done in fun. If you're not part of that particular culture you can't truly appreciate the pain and hurt that behavior evokes.

For the last 10 years I've had the pleasure of working at the largest homeless shelter in Genesee County, Carriage Town Ministries [carriagetown.org]. I've worked with people struggling with homelessness, mental health situations,

addictions and behavioral issues.

\$50 Flint City Council would do well to begin each meeting by committing together that they will treat each other with dignity and value each person during the meeting. They can agree to disagree but still honor each other as respected human beings.

As a journalist I've learned that not everyone likes you, especially politicians. They look at you skeptically and wonder what your agenda is. At *EVM* we have one agenda: we report what is said and done. We don't do "gotcha" journalism, which tries to trick someone into saying a particular answer. My editor's mantra to people who complain what we write about them is, "if you want us to write something else about you, then do and say something else."

So I'm leaving a job I've had for 10 years with a sense of peace and accomplishment, looking forward to telling the stories of this community with the dignity and respect that it deserves.

Tom Travis, who as of Feb. 1 is EVM's assistant editor focusing on our Democracy Beat, can be reached at tomtravis@gmail.com

... Census

(Continued from Page 4.)

reach communities in the county — with fund support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ruth Mott Foundation, and the Michigan Nonprofit Association.

The CFGF will serve as a hub for local nonprofit organizations to support the census effort, Raymer said.

"We are thrilled that the City of Flint has taken the leadership role on Census 2020 outreach efforts," said Sue Peters, CFGF vice president for community impact.

For more information or to be part of the mayoral committee, contact census@cityofflint.com. General information on the 2020 census is available at www.michigan.gov/census2020/.

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

Village Life

New life as community journalist opens up hard realities about Flint, hunger for respect

By Tom Travis

I have attempted to dissect the reasons why I chose to leave my job at 50 years old after more than 10 years. I think I've figured out the reasoning but it is deeply personal. And I'm more likely to tell you over a cup of coffee at Good Beans Cafe than in a published article. So let's have coffee.

In the meantime, I'm taking on a new adventure, as a community journal-

ist here at *East Village Magazine*. In my career of being a journalist, now at seven months, I've learned so much. My journalistic mentor, the editor of this magazine that you're holding in your hands, is a great teacher and offers a wealth of knowledge about writing and journalism.

Some things have come naturally for me in this new endeavor: I'm immensely curious, love the power of questions, I'm a very good listener and keen observer (sometimes too keen, but not overly keen).

In other parts of my journalistic training, I've needed a lot of guidance and continue to be mentored by my new boss at *EVM*. When I turn in a story there are things I often hear from her, albeit less and less with each story I write—but still she dives right in to correct my ways.

She'll say things like, "That's not the lead, Tom", "Where IS the lead of the story, Tom?"; "The paragraphs are too long, cut them down."; or "I don't understand this paragraph."; or "This needs a lot of work." Yet, she'll sometimes end our conversation by saying—"But, Tom, you're doing great."

Most of the stories I've been writing for *EVM* have been about city council. I've written a few others about different subjects, but I've been assigned Flint City Hall as my beat. I'm not a particularly political person and have watched almost zero news reports of the impeachment. I allow my friends who seem to be glued to the TV news stations and reading voraciously about the political wrangling in Washington to inform me.

Among the terms we've been using at *EVM* to describe the happenings at city council are "contentious," "debacle," and my personal favorite "brouhaha." I can now say in my extensive journalistic career I've covered two administrations at City Hall. And these two administrations are as different as

night and day.

I enjoyed covering Mayor Karen Weaver. She is a strong woman and didn't seem afraid or timid to lead. Like any politician, it takes time to be comfortable with the press. It took about five months for Weaver's administration to trust me and know that I wasn't "out to get them." Then, to the surprise of many, including me, in November, the Weaver administration was gone. Mayor Sheldon Neeley's administration leads differently. More on that in the months to come.

After my second or third city council meeting I began emailing my editor during the meeting saying things like, "I can't believe this?"; "I'm still here; it's been five hours now." The editor was encouraging and offered advice: "Use your observation skills and look for a nugget of a news story out of the chaos."

I was surprised mostly at the racist comments and words flung at each other in an ethnically diverse group of professional people. It has caused me to reflect on my own experience, as a white kid who grew up in Flint Township, of what race means. As I've lived, worshipped and worked in downtown Flint for more than 10 years now, I see Flint is a city very familiar with racism. Race—good and bad—surrounds me every day.

I've talked to a lot of you about this and I've continued to read, as I always have, in an effort to learn about race and racism. One fellow white friend recently told me that as white people we can't talk to people of color about race. We especially can't tell them how to experience racism, because we don't really experience it. I appreciate that and understand what she's saying.

What has struck me most in my first months of being the eyes and ears of the community is this: I have been shocked at how race is an overwhelming factor in the city. And that has

(Continued on Page 15.)

Winter

By Kimberly Pillen Brown

Out

On a barren

Field in winter

On a sunless day

At twilight

Twigs and grasses

Reach through snows

Gasping for icy breaths.

These heavy boots

Break into the surface

Crust of the hardened blanket.

The wind with the woods

At my back, I enter openness.

All is silent as the moon rises.

All is silent, just the sound

Of my breathing, heavy, labored

And the crunching bite

Of my boots on the ground.

No birds, not even an owl, just me,

The snow and a barren field

And all of the metaphor

That comes with it...

Spring will come again to this place

Soon enough. My seasons are

Permanent and passing.

Kimberly Pillen Brown is a retired teacher who worked at Flint Community Schools. She is currently working as a part-time tutor at Mott Middle College. She obtained both her BA and MA from the University of Michigan-Flint. Kimberly has been writing poetry since college.