

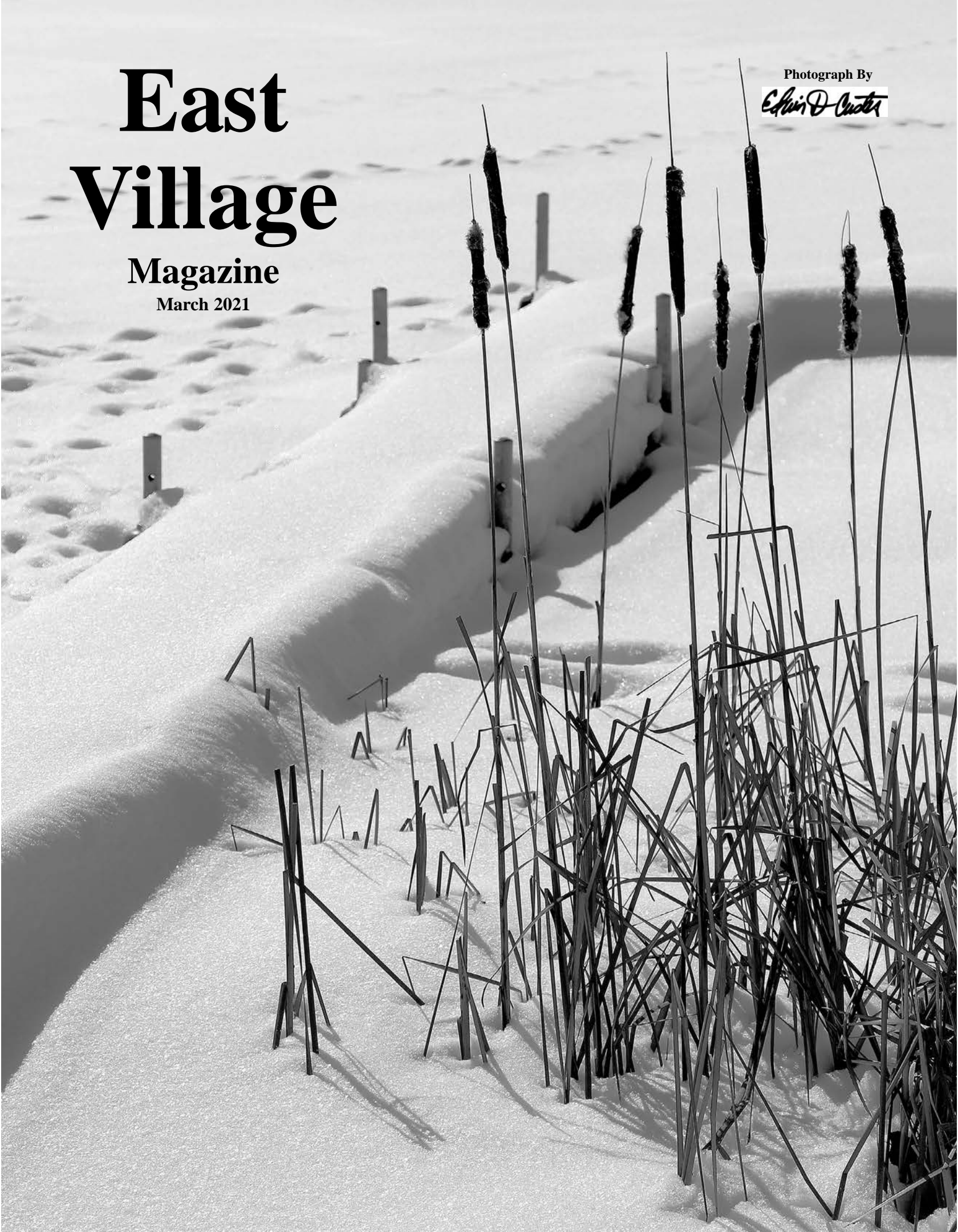
East Village

Magazine

March 2021

Photograph By

Edwin O. Carter

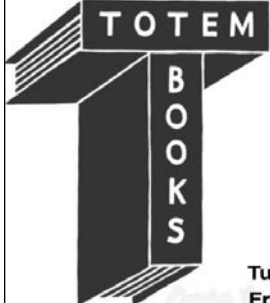


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Commentary

Can workshops bring “civility and decorum” to City Council meetings?

By Paul Rozycki

Imagine an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting that starts out with good, sober intentions, but concludes several hours later with most members passed out on the floor, littered with empty Jack Daniel’s bottles.

Now imagine a Flint City Council workshop aimed at bringing civility and decorum to the council’s often endless and tumultuous meetings. In the first minutes of the meeting, for all their good intentions, the Feb. 15th “civility workshop” quickly returned to the same name calling, race baiting, and bickering over the rules, that have become a routine part of the Flint’s contentious City Council meetings.

Sometimes well-intentioned plans don’t work out so well.

To be sure, the Flint City Council has more than a little history of turmoil and conflict over the decades, but the current council has emerged as a poster child of conflict and chaos. Other governing boards in the area have been warned that unless they get their act together, they could be “just like the Flint City Council.”

One can only wonder how many businesses or new enterprises have taken a look at the Flint Council and decided it might be wiser to locate in Burton, Flint Township or elsewhere. The Council’s negative image may deter qualified candidates from running, when they decide it’s not worth being part of the chaos and conflict in City Hall, and it may discourage the public from voting, or being involved in local politics.

The City Council’s recent workshop on “civility and decorum” was meant to inspire the council to become a collegial and functioning legislative body that can actually deliver for its citizens. While the workshop brought the return of the council’s typical conflict and turmoil, there has been at least some good news. At one committee meeting following the combative workshop, issues were discussed, and much of the division and conflict was

minimized, at least for a meeting.

The workshop was directed by Eleanor “Coco” Siewert, a trained parliamentarian, and former mayor of Birmingham, Michigan, who did her best to bring the disparate voices on the council together. Unfortunately the gathering turned into a typical council meeting with bickering, name calling and personal attacks.

A second session has been scheduled and it remains to be seen if the results are different.

But for what it’s worth, here are a few New Year’s resolutions, Valentine’s Day promises, or St. Patty’s Day toasts, that might bring some civility and greater productivity to the council meetings.

Put politics in its place

First, let’s hope the council will put politics in its rightful place. Politics is a great game. It’s often described as the game of “who gets what, when they get it, and how they get it.” It may be the greatest game in town, and I suspect that members of the council enjoy playing it. That’s one reason why they ran and won their elections. But there’s a time for politics and a time for policy. Sometimes it’s hard to separate the game of politics, where I want my side to win, from the making of policy. Now is the time for putting old-style politics aside, and creating policies that will set Flint on a new path as we work past the water crisis, the pandemic and our financial challenges.

Another definition of politics is “the art of the possible.” Let’s hope that will emerge as a working definition of politics for Flint. Those on the council bring considerable political skills to the table, and the same political skills that have led council members to be divisive can also be used to unite the council. Whatever the council’s individual political goals, let’s hope they

(Continued on Page 12.)

Cover: Snowy dock with cattails, Byram Lake



Photo of the Month: Empty Central High School tagged, its fate uncertain

(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Seven “trailblazers” from Flint’s black community receive city’s highest honor

By Tom Travis

Mayor Sheldon Neeley called them “trailblazers” in the African-American community of Flint as he honored seven at a presentation on Wednesday, Feb 24.



Pictured is the framed award and key to city presented to each honorees (Photo by Michael Clack)

The honorees were presented the “Mayor Sheldon A. Neeley City of Flint Ujima Award” and a key to the city. According to a press release from the mayor’s office, it is Flint’s highest honor. Ujima, [pronounced oo-JEE-mah] is the third principle of Kwanzaa and means “collective work and responsibility,” according to the press release.

“We honor these individuals for their leadership, for their bold and steadfast commitment to our community, and for their willingness to forge new paths and open doors for future generations. We honor them and their work to build better neighborhoods and stronger families, not just during Black History Month, but every day,” Mayor Neeley stated in the press release.

The honorees were:

Dr. Nathel Burtley (posthumous) the longest-serving and first

black superintendent of Flint Community Schools. Burtley’s wife, Kathy Burtley, accepted the award.



Kathy Burtley, wife of the late Dr. Nathel Burtley (Photo by Tom Travis)

Burtley explained, “We lost Nat one week before Easter Sunday in April 2020. He passed from COVID-19.” Burtley added that her husband was in the hospital for three weeks. “I felt isolated from him ... it felt like doomsday,” she said.

Burtley spoke about her husband’s passion for children and schools.

(Continued on Page 5.)

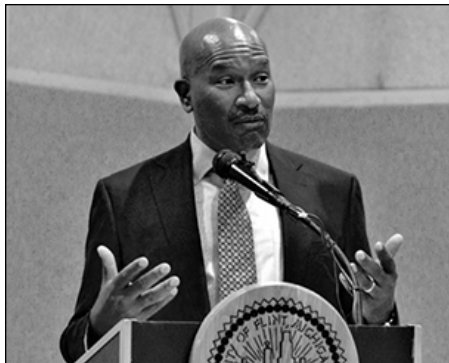
... Honor

(Continued from Page 4.)

She said, “Every time I look at a school building, I think of him.”

Thanking the mayor and the City of Flint, she ended, “This award feels like a big bear hug that I need.”

Ruben Burks (posthumous) A longtime community labor activist, Burks was a leader in Flint-Genesee Economic Development, a cooperative effort by labor and business. In 1998, he became the first African American International UAW Secretary-Treasurer.



Larry Young, son of Ruben Burks, accepts the award for his father who died recently
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Burks’ award was presented to his son, Larry Young, and grandson Omari Young. Larry Young spoke, emphasizing that the legacy of his father is important. He remembered hearing his father often say, “What about the workers? What about the people?”

Young reminisced that his father came up to Flint from “the impoverished Deep South” as his father “wanted something more, something better for his family.”

Burks’ grandson Omari Young recounted his grandfather saying, “When society said, ‘you can’t do it’ he always said, ‘you can do it.’”

Cleora Magee, a 57-year resident of Flint, served for 11 years as executive director of the City of Flint Human Relations Commission, and for 16 years as community organizer and neighborhood service center manager for the Urban Coalition and Flint NIPP (Neighborhood Improvement and Preservation Project).

Recounting the many leadership positions she’s held in Flint, Magee commented, “I’ve always said that the

Human Relations Commission is the soul of the city.”



Honoree Cleora Magee after receiving her award
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Magee acknowledged her longtime friend and co-worker Alice Rutherford’s recent passing, and her involvement in establishing Flint neighborhood block clubs.

Norm Bryant, founder and former owner of the historic Bryant’s Barber Shop, also founded the Greater Flint African American Sports Hall of Fame for Black athletes from the Flint area.

Bryant said of his life of service in the community, “The Bible speaks of hearers and doers. I’m a doer. I’d rather be doing something for someone else rather than someone else doing something for me.”



Honoree Norm Bryant speaks about his friendship with many of the honorees and his work and service in Flint
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Bryant, referring to black history, emphasized, “We need to know our history. We need to teach black history in the schools. History is what we’re made of. Flint is rich in history.”

Floyd and Brenda Clack were the only couple to be presented the award. Both served as Genesee County Commissioners and State Representatives

for the State of Michigan. Neeley introduced them as a “powerhouse couple.”



Floyd and Brenda Clack, with Mayor Sheldon Neeley
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Brenda Clack recalled teaching Black History Studies at Central and Northwestern schools and how she chose the textbooks for the course. She added, “We have to stop fighting each other. We have to recognize the ‘plusses’ and not the ‘minuses’.”

The final honoree was **Joe Davis**, Flint’s first African-American firefighter for the City of Flint Fire Department. Davis worked from 1961-1975 as the only Black firefighter in the department for almost 15 years before the next person of color was hired in.

In his remarks, Davis, 88, recalled he came to Flint from Macon, Mississippi, in 1956 and thought the city was “so small.” Davis joined the military after graduating high school. Davis turned while he spoke and proudly saluted the American flag painted on a mural on the gymnasium wall. “I like to salute the American flag,” he said.



Joe Davis with family members and Mayor Sheldon Neeley
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Davis said there has always been something within him calling him to move on, move forward. Davis thanked the city of Flint “for giving him so much.” Davis recalled how he took

(Continued on Page 11.)

Education Beat

Flint schools did not reopen Feb. 22 — district does about face

By Harold C. Ford

On Feb. 22, following a raucous board of education meeting lasting more than three hours, officials of Flint Community Schools (FCS) decided buildings would not reopen to students on that day, as previously announced. This follows months of preparation for reopening buildings for face-to-face instruction, during which FCS administrators assured FCS board members and the public that students would return to a safe and healthy learning environment:

- Anita Steward, FCS superintendent, Jan. 20, 2021: “We can do that (reopen schools) safely, with social distancing in our classrooms.”
- Kevelin Jones, FCS assistant superintendent, Feb. 10, 2021: “I definitely believe the buildings will be ready on the (Feb) 22nd.”



**FCS Superintendent
Anita Steward**
(Photo from NCS website)

Safe Return and Recovery Plan

At meeting’s start, at the 9-minute mark, Steward and other central administrators discussed reopening plans during printed agenda item “E. Superintendent’s Communique”:

- FCS would offer hybrid learning models to its students. In-person learning would be offered four days each week on Mondays, Tuesdays,

Thursdays, and Fridays. Students could also choose distance-learning five days a week. The buildings would be closed to all students on Wednesdays for cleaning and sanitation; and distance-learning would be provided to all students on Wednesdays.

- Students who opt for in-person instruction would be required to wear facial coverings on school buses, in hallways, and common areas except during meals.

- Students and staff would submit to daily temperature checks upon entering the buildings.

- Social distancing would include individual use of restrooms, traffic arrows in the hallways to help guide foot traffic, six-foot spacing of classroom desks, and discouragement of handshakes and hugs.

- Soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes would be ever-present throughout the buildings.

- Air filters have been replaced in all buildings; air handling equipment and boiler systems are being upgraded; the chiller at Doyle-Ryder is being replaced.

- Air conditioning equipment at six schools — Brownell, Eisenhower, Freeman, Holmes, Pierce, and Potter — is expected to arrive in about three weeks; installation will start shortly thereafter.

Steward reminded board members that the district’s “Safe Return and Recovery Plan” had received input from administrators, teachers, other staff, community partners, union reps, parents and board members.

Steward had previously reported that FCS leadership has relied on a team of local health professionals to guide its decision making during the pandemic:

- Eileen Tomasi, FCS health coordinator
- Gwendolyn Reyes, MD, pediatrician, Hurley Medical Center

- Bobby Mukkamala, MD, American Medical Association chair-elect

- Lawrence Reynolds, MD, medical adviser to Flint mayor Sheldon Neely

- Genesee County Health Department officials

Board members had no immediate response to Steward’s “communique.” That would come later in the meeting.

Board uncertainty and chaos

At the meeting’s 1:13 mark, Carol McIntosh, FCS board president, suddenly departed from the printed agenda following a report by Jones, “26.3 Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan Update – January 29, 2021,” by initiating a discussion of sneeze guards. The Flint board never got to the next agenda item, “26.4 Comparative Membership Report – January 29, 2021,” in the final 1:48 of the meeting.

The remainder of the board meeting was dominated by a rambling discussion of reopening preparations that devolved at times into terse confrontations and name-calling.

Board members expressed concerns about the installment of sneeze guards, water filters and cartridges, and the input of staff. Opinions on the matter were not unanimous.

The board’s newest member, Trustee Adrian Walker, had recently toured the Holmes and Brownell campuses. “I was pleasantly surprised by the things that I saw in place,” he said, undecidedly “Having gone to two schools ... and seeing what I saw, my mind jumps to the schools: ‘Do they have the right mitigating PPE in place to help when the students come back into the classroom?’”

“We’re really moving in the right direction,” observed Bruce Jordan, the Flint teacher’s union

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of Mar. 4. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city, which, due to the pandemic, is currently very limited. To submit events for our April issue, email your event to pisenber@gmail.com by Mar. 20.

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

Some people may be contacted by their health care facilities advising them to submit forms and make appointments. Also, pharmacies such as Walgreens, Rite Aid and Meijer are starting to provide the vaccine. Websites where further information is available:
michigan.gov/coronavirus/
and cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Flint Public Library

Open Tues. through Thurs. 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.,
Fri. and Sat. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Masks and social distancing are required. Capacity is limited. Plan on visiting one hour or less.
Flint Public Library
Courtland Center (corner of Center Rd. and Court St. (temporary location during renovation)
For more info visit fpl.info.

Flint Farmers' Market

Tues. and Thurs. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.,
Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m..
Safety measures and masks are required.
Flint Farmers' Market
300 East First St., Flint
For more info visit flintfarmersmarket.com.

Movies at The Capitol

"Ferris Bueller's Day Off" on Friday, Mar. 12
"Love Jones" on Friday, Mar. 19
"Toy Story" on Friday, Mar. 26
Doors open at 6:15 p.m., movies begin at 7 p.m.
Tickets are available at tickets.thewhiting.com.
Masks are required. Please maintain social distancing from those outside your group. We are offering limited concessions, even popcorn, but concessions are available only prior to the start of the movie and may be consumed only while you are in your seat. Please wear your mask at all other times.
The Capitol Theatre
140 E. 2nd St., Flint 48502
810-237-7337

"Faces of Flint"

This video created by a team entirely from Flint stars 130 faces of people you may know. Flint musicians, an inspirational message written by East Village Magazine consulting editor Ted Nelson, photography by former Flint resident Dan White, edited by Justin Brown and made possible by *East Village Magazine*, The League of Women Voters and other generous donors. Watch on your computer, TV or other device and share it with family and friends.
Available on YouTube or go to:
eastvillagemagazine.org.

Shopping and Eating in Downtown Flint

Many restaurants and shops are open with restrictions for shopping and eating, too many to list here. For information on what's available, simply google "stores in downtown flint mi" or "downtown flint restaurants." Convenient lists of these businesses will come up showing their addresses, ratings, websites, hours, services and phone numbers for each business.

The Towering Inferno

On several streaming channels is "The Towering Inferno," a 1974 disaster flick starring Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, Faye Dunaway, O.J. Simpson and many others. It's a good escape that can be enjoyed at home and lasts almost three hours. Roger Ebert called it "by far the best of the mid-1970s wave of disaster films." Watch a team of strictly male firefighters, see O.J. Simpson rescue a cat and see all of these actors in their youth. It's just fun and exciting for the whole family. Prime Video is one channel that has it. Just do a search.



Ed Custer's *East Village Magazine* logo is reimagined for each issue by Patsy Isenber.

... Schools

(Continued from Page 6.)

Uniserve Director. “Ms. Steward, and Mr. Jones, and the entire administration team, as well as the leadership of the UTF (United Teachers of Flint) have been working very collaboratively, very hand-in-hand in trying to get the district ready for in-person learning with kids coming back. We’re really moving in the right direction.”

“We’re so woefully ill-pre-



**Vera Perry, FCS Board
vice president**
(Photo source FCS website)

pared,” countered Laura MacIntyre, board treasurer. “We’re not ready to go back to school.” Her comments were in response to others made by Vera Perry, board vice president, and Diana Wright, trustee.

At this point, tensions boiled over.

“You better stop that heifer,” Perry declared.

“I’ve never been on a board before like this,” MacIntyre responded. “I’d rather have my kids home doing virtual learning rather than sick or dead.”

During sharp exchanges between MacIntyre and Joyce Ellis-McNeal, board assistant secretary-treasurer, McIntosh shouted, as she did many times during the meeting, “Order, order, order, order! Hey, hey, hey, hey!”

“We are definitely caught between a rock and a hard place,” McIntosh observed.

Walker noted that the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden was pushing for

elementary students to be back in schools, but not for high school students.

One staff member, Tyeisha



**Newly elected Flint Community
School Board member
Laura MacIntyre**
(Photo provided by Laura MacIntyre)

Cox, a mathematics teacher, submitted a public comment asking when teachers will receive personal protective equipment.

“When will teachers receive hand sanitizers, disinfecting wipes and additional masks for their classrooms?” Cox wrote. Neither the administration nor the board responded.

Biden nod to reopen schools

U.S. President Joseph Biden voiced his support for schools reopening — especially kindergartners through eighth graders — at a nationally-broadcast town hall Feb. 20 from Milwaukee. A key question, however, is: What power does the White House have over local school districts’ decisions to reopen schools?

The president could work with Congress to tie funding to school reopening schedules. Included in Biden’s proposed \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief legislation is \$130 billion to help schools implement safety measures.

Whitmer nod to reopen schools

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced on Dec. 19, 2020, that Michigan high schools could reopen for face-to-face instruction starting Dec. 21.

“Michiganders have done a really good job bringing down our seven-day average ... by wearing masks, avoiding enclosed gatherings and maintaining social distance,” Whitmer said.

Data provided at Whitmer’s Feb. 17 pandemic press briefing seemed favorable:

- COVID case rates continue to decline in Michigan at 113 cases per million, which is down 85 percent from the mid-Nov. 2020 peak.
- 3.9 percent of test in the state are coming back positive, a decline over the previous five weeks.
- 5.2 percent of hospital beds are being used to treat COVID patients, down 779 percent from the state’s late fall peak.

Uncertainty elsewhere:

The uncertainty about reopening schools is nationwide:

- Chicago: A standoff between Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) about reopening schools ended when more than two-thirds of CTU members backed a tentative agreement to reopen schools. Elementary students will return March 1.

- California: Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Feb. 19 that 10 percent of COVID vaccinations would be set aside for educators in an effort to kick-start the reopening of public school campuses.

Nonetheless, political leadership at the national and state levels are encouraging a return to school buildings.

Message from the office of FCS Superintendent Anita Steward posted at the district’s website on Feb. 19, three days prior to the previously announced reopening of schools on Feb. 22:

FLINT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PAUSE RETURN TO IN-PERSON

February 19, 2021

Dear Families –

At Flint Community Schools, we are highly confident in the return to school plan we have in place. Unfortunately, there were concerns

(Continued on Page 11.)

City Council considers waiving fee for brownfield assessment; James P. Cole public hearing set

By Tom Travis

City Council considered an ordinance at the Monday, Feb 22 council meeting that would waive an assessment fee for property owners with lots adjacent to a Land Bank brownfield property.

City of Flint Assessor Stacey Kaake (pronounced cake) was on the line and explained that property owners can contact the Assessor's office at 810-766-7255 to obtain the waiver form by May 1, 2021, once the council approves the resolution.

Genesee County Land Bank Executive Director Michael Freeman, also calling in online, explained that a

nated and abandoned properties to productive use," according to the website.

Public hearing set for James P. Cole brownfield March 8, at 5:30 p.m.

The fee waiver discussion was followed by two more brownfield-related issues on Monday's agenda. The first was to set a public hearing concerning a brownfield property at a James P. Cole project and a second was a special order to discuss the issue of combining lots where a property owner may own a lot adjacent to a landbank designated brownfield property.

The public hearing on the James P. Cole project is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at the March 8 council meeting. According to a project description document obtained by EVM that was prepared by Associated Environmental Services, LLC (Project No. 2019041501.01R) the James P. Cole project is described as:

A proposed Project comprised of a multi-tenant multi-building industrial park. The site includes approximately 110,578 square feet of existing building which will undergo renovations. A portion of the property will be demolished to make room for an additional 190,700 square feet of proposed new construction buildings. The proposed project sits on 17.99 acres of improved commercial and industrial land.

"The project is undergoing site plan and zoning review by the City of Flint Engineering Department



James P. Cole redevelopment site
(Photo source: Associated Environmental Services, LLC)

and Planning & Development Departments, and is therefore subject to change as part of the approval processes.

Combining lots with a brownfield

The second matter to be addressed by the council will be to consider the issue of combining lots, that is a lot already owned by a property owner that is adjacent to a landbank brownfield designated property. If a property is sold within a brownfield plan the purchaser is notified and the limitations are provided to the purchaser. That practice



City Council President Kate Fields (Ward 4) in a 2019 meeting
(Photo by Tom Travis)



Front entrance to the Land Bank of Genesee County at 452 S. Saginaw in downtown Flint
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Land Bank property designated brownfield is "a property that becomes functionally obsolete through environmental conditions or other conditions that render Land Bank properties obsolete."

The Genesee County Land Bank website further explains that the Land Bank and the Genesee County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (GCBRA), together "have secured millions of dollars in Brownfield funds to eliminate blight and improve abandoned and tax-foreclosed properties in Genesee County.

"Demolishing blighted structures and cleaning up brownfield sites helps to restore value to urban land and speed up the process of returning tax-foreclosed, contami-

(Continued on Page 15.)

Removal of more than 330 dead and dangerous city trees to begin soon, funded by Mott Foundation

By Melodee Mabbitt

More than 330 dead and dangerous city-owned trees are set to be removed later this winter in a process coordinated by the Genesee Conservation District (GCD) thanks to a \$208,579 grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through the Mott Foundation's Focus on Flint initiative, residents ranked dead and dangerous "street trees" — those in medians, traffic islands, and the spaces between the sidewalk and street — as "very high" as a concern for improving neighborhoods.

"Throughout many Mott Foundation community conversations and our Focus on Flint initiative, residents expressed their frustrations over dead and fallen trees throughout their neighborhoods," said Jennifer Acree, program officer at the Mott Foundation. "We hope this grant can help alleviate some of the blight and damage caused by these trees throughout the city."

Flint residents who live at a location where a street tree will be removed will receive a letter from the GCD this month explaining the process, Acree said.

GCD administrator Angela Warren explained in an interview with *East Village Magazine* (EVM) that the trees were originally assessed in early 2015 in an inventory produced by Knowles Municipal Forestry. That report ranked 6,200 trees for maintenance or removal based on viability and safety concerns. As a result, a software program documents every tree maintenance, removal, planting or pruning, which can be accessed at the City of Flint Planning Department website.

Since 2015, GCD and the City of Flint Street Maintenance Department

have removed more than 3,500 street trees and trimmed nearly 1,600 in Flint, Warren said.

Warren explained that as funds become available, the GCD addresses the next set of priority trees by sending out a team to reassess and make recommendations on trimming or removing trees — with the preference being to trim the tree.

Trees marked for removal this winter were assessed in the last two months and found to be dead or declining in health and pose a danger to nearby people or properties.

Warren said. "I would love for people to love and appreciate trees and we all can work on this together."

Neighbors in the East Village neighborhood challenged the process of street tree removal in 2017 after Mike Keeler, president of the College Cultural Neighborhood Association, noticed a marked increase in the number of stumps in his neighborhood — some belonging to formerly elderly but not unhealthy trees — and organized to improve the process of identifying trees for removal and to plant replacement trees.

After it became clear that the city did not have money to buy and plant replacement trees, residents of the CCNA raised \$4,000 and offered to do it themselves.

In an interview with EVM, Keeler said that the GCD seems to have improved their process of identifying trees for removal and notifying neighbors after neighborhood efforts led to the election of two supportive GCD board members and staffing changes at the GCD.

"Things started slowing down after that and when trees come down now, there is a legitimate reason that they are coming down," Keeler said. "Mott is going to fund another

round of tree removal, which is a good thing, but we would really like to see where they are going to start putting trees back in. In our neighborhood, some streets have only one tree on the whole street."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Keeler and his team of volunteers were raising money and planting 30 to 60 trees a year. He said the effort was interrupted by the pandemic because social



Linwood Avenue silver maples
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Warren encourages residents to report trees suspected of being dead or dangerous, or to request that a tree be inspected, pruned or have its canopy raised, by contacting the City of Flint Street Maintenance Department at 810-766-7343.

When it is time to plant more trees, residents will be invited to provide input, Warren said.

"I want trees planted everywhere. I love tree-lined streets,"

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...Trees

(Continued from Page 10.)

distancing is not possible while planting trees.

Keeler intends to take up the effort again once the pandemic passes, but said to see real impact in the number of trees being replaced across the city, additional grant funding would be required.

“I’ve planted 350 trees in the neighborhood and 70 percent are still there and some are getting big and make me grin when I drive by,” Keeler said. “This would be an excellent opportunity for an entrepreneur to come work on replacing these trees.”

EVM reporter *Melodee Mabbitt* can be reached at melodee.mabbitt@gmail.com.



Late-winter hawthorn at Pierce Park
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

...Trailblazers

(Continued from Page 5.)

construction classes and glass blowing classes that were funded by the Mott Foundation and how these opportunities “helped my family,” said Davis.

Referring to a phrase he has used in recent months, Neeley said Flint is at “an intersection of crisis” with a water crisis, social upheaval for social justice and the worldwide pandemic.

“It’s easy to look at Flint and see a city of victims, but we are more

than victims — we are victors,” Neeley said. “This group that has been selected today has a special DNA and we need to resurrect that group of victors. It’s going to take all of us to fight.”

The event, at the Flint Development Center on Martin Luther King Boulevard, was closed except to the honorees, city officials and the media, but can be viewed at the City of Flint’s Facebook page.

About 25 city officials and visitors sat in the bleachers on the back

wall of the gymnasium while socially distanced groups of two and four chairs were spaced on the gym floor for the presentation. The mayor and honorees spoke from a podium that stood between two tables with black tablecloths where the awards were displayed. The 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were printed on large poster boards displayed near the podium as well.

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...Schools

(Continued from Page 8.)

regarding the sneeze guards — an additional safety measure that, while not a requirement for in-person learning, is something our Board members, families and staff have expressed a strong desire to have in place. For that reason, we are delaying the return to in-person learning until the issues regarding the sneeze guards have been resolved.

We apologize for any inconvenience this causes. We appreciate the patience and understanding of our families and staff members. The

safety of our scholars and teachers is our number one concern. We will keep the community updated and announce a new date for the return as soon as possible.

In the meantime, all scholars should plan to continue with distance learning on Monday, February 22.

When we do resume hybrid learning, we will be adhering to all of the health and safety guidelines outlined in our *Safe Return and Recovery Plan*, which was developed with the input of administrators, teachers, staff, community partners, Board of Education members, union representatives and parents. It is our belief that this plan will guide the continued aca-

demic, social and emotional growth of our scholars while maintaining, first and foremost, our commitment to safety and well-being.

We hope to continue to resume some sense of normalcy soon and are eager for our scholars’ return. Thank you for allowing us to serve your family, for your continued commitment to Flint Community Schools, and for remaining Flint Focused.

Your Partner in Education,
Mrs. Anita J. Steward
Superintendent

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... History

(Continued from Page 3.)

can create policies that will lead to a better Flint, and work with others. Members of the council should be a voice for the city and not just themselves. It won't be easy, but Flint will need them to do it.

Develop solid policies

Second, let's hope the council will develop policies that will lead to a renewal of Flint. And some of those policies may be difficult and painful for council members and their constituents. We face many of the same problems that cities up and down the I-75 corridor face, loss of jobs, loss of tax base, declining state aid, aging infrastructure, rising crime rates and large legacy costs. When we have gone from a city of nearly 200,000 to a city of less than half that today, and when we have gone from having nearly 80,000 well-paid auto industry jobs, to barely one tenth of that, we are lucky that things aren't worse. No city could face those losses, without enormous consequences. There is no single, simple policy that will "fix Flint." It took us three or four decades to get to where we are today and things won't change overnight. The council's job is to work together to bring use to their foresight, wisdom and creativity to create policies that will lead us to a better Flint city government.

Make meetings more productive

Third, there are a number of things that could be done to make the lengthy and conflict-ridden council meetings more productive.

The council should use its committees to do the primary work on policy and legislation. Those committees should work out the details of any policy and present it to the full council for approval. The full council should not spend time redoing the work of the committees. A recent committee meeting shows some sign of hope.

Robert's Rules of Order, and the council rules, should be a working frame-

work but it shouldn't be a means to tie up the council in endless wrangling about the rules or points of order. No book of rules will work if there isn't personal respect among the council members. A council with respect for each other can make almost any rule book work well, and a council without respect for each other can make even the best rule book fail.

Members of the council should do their homework and be informed before the meetings begin. Information should be made available to council members well before the meetings so they can come prepared.

Meaningful time limits should be set for debate and discussion. No one is likely to be alert, civil, and cooperative after sitting through a seven- or eight-hour meeting.

The council should learn to rely on outside resources such as the Michigan Municipal League for future guidance. They have been a voice for effective local government in Michigan for many years.

Restore personal respect

And finally, let's hope that the council will conduct itself in a civil way that can work towards real solutions. Flint has a reputation ... a reputation as a "tough town." We've had a long history of labor-management conflicts, racial conflicts and city-county conflicts, among others. That is a major part of Flint history. And all too often that "tough town" approach is reflected in our politics. This "tough town" aspect might be entertaining, exciting, and might generate news stories, but it's not productive. It's time to turn the page. There are going to be many issues that will be divisive, and many issues where council members will disagree. But they need to be resolved.

Particularly in an age of polarized politics, when so little seems to be accomplished on the national or the state level, I'm reminded of the stories of Democratic Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill and Republican President Ronald Reagan. They differed on most issues, and fought the good fight in Congress and beyond. But when the day was done, they could sit down, have a drink and treat each other as

friends. The council's job is to work together for the whole city, as well as each member's own ward. It's not always going to be easy, but it's critical to changing the image of Flint and the council. More than anything else, whatever differences that exist between council members, there needs to be personal respect.

At the recent workshop, *EVM* Managing Editor Tom Travis quoted Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter where she said, "We need to get to the root of the problem. It's not about council rules, it's not about Robert's Rules, it's about respect and treating others like you would want to be treated."

So let's hope that the workshops, Winfrey-Carter's words, and a recent committee meeting are a sign of things to come, and that "civility and decorum" will return to Flint's council.

But if you are watching, you still might want to keep the Jack Daniel's handy — Just in case things don't work out.

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

**COLLEGE CULTURAL
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**
ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net

Stay home, stay safe!

Watch for meeting updates at
www.eastvillagemagazine.org

Flint Northern Vikings' Class of 1972 is looking for schoolmates to inform and invite them to the upcoming 50th Class Reunion in August 2022. Please contact a member of the Planning Committee with your information:

Eleanor Wicker—
mamawicker@yahoo.com (810)577-3341;
Samuel Green—
sgreen4u@aol.com, (615)630-4183;
or Pat Hamer—
patriciahamer1@gmail.com,
(810) 964-0030;
flintnorthernvikings@gmail.com

Volunteer Distributors Wanted

The East Village Magazine is looking for volunteer distributors in some of the residential blocks bounded by E. Court, Franklin, Tuscola and Meade streets. Less than one hour of exercise a month ensures your neighbors get the magazine. Contact ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write to 720 E. Second St. Flint, MI

Flint on track to eliminate lead by 2022, Flint Lead Free 2021 report shows

By Melodee Mabbitt

The multitudes of efforts to eliminate lead in Flint before children are exposed are working, according to a new report issued by Flint Lead Free.

Flint Lead Free is a group of community partners created by the Flint Registry in 2017 that includes Flint residents, nonprofits, landlords, governmental agencies and more. Organized in response to the Flint water crisis, their goal is to eliminate lead in Flint's environment by 2022.

Their new report suggests that Flint is uniquely positioned to eliminate lead exposure because of programs like lead service line removal, lead fixture replacement, finding and removing lead in family homes, water testing, and community-wide efforts to increase lead awareness.

"From pipe replacements to home abatements, Flint is leading the nation in efforts to remove lead from homes before kids are poisoned. We have more work to do to eliminate this systemic inequity, but we are definitely moving in the right direction," said Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, associate professor of pediatrics at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine and director of MSU-Hurley Children's Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative.

The Flint Lead Free report shares lead-related trends up to the end of 2019, emphasizing primary prevention efforts currently underway in the city of Flint. Despite challenges such as a time lag for obtaining data, the trends year over year show significant decreases in lead risks.

Lydia Starrs, co-chair of the Flint Lead Free workgroup and program officer at the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, said in an email interview with *East Village Magazine (EVM)* that their success

in referring people to use programs like Flint Lead Safe Home Program and the Flint Lead-Based Paint Hazard Program comes from using trusted community voices and organizations.

"Broad outreach and education on lead exposure is critical to build knowledge and awareness to help identify potential risk of exposure," Starrs said. "Our Flint Lead Free members provide consistent messages and information to families to



Lydia Starrs, co-chair of Flint Lead Free workgroup
(Photo source CFGF)

improve awareness of all potential sources of lead exposure, not just water, and help them connect to programs to reduce exposure. Expanding education and outreach will help us reach more residents and families."

According to Starrs, the work in Flint can be used to inform other communities as they shape their own strategies to eliminate lead. "The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Lead Safe Home Program expansion, through the use of Medicaid funding, has been a significant boost in resources for mitigation and abatement efforts in Flint homes. Other states have used our expansion as a model to increase funding resources for primary prevention in their communities," she said.

The 2021 report builds on Flint Lead Free's initial 2018 study that created a baseline for the work and shows positive trends across indicators.

In addition to the positive benefit of lead elimination for health and development, the Flint Lead Free report notes the economic benefits. Preliminary economic analysis of Flint's lead elimination efforts estimates that lead prevention activities will generate \$53.3 million in future economic benefits for children when considering the number of pipes replaced and homes abated from 2016-2019.

The Flint Registry contributes to lead elimination efforts by convening Flint Lead Free partners, enrolling individuals exposed to the lead-contaminated Flint water, screening for ongoing environmental lead exposure via a survey of environmental risks and connecting individuals to lead-eliminating services like the Lead Safe Home Program. The Lead Safe Home Program is a free program that finds and removes lead in a child's home.



Nayyirah Shariff, executive director of Flint Rising
(Photo source Nayyirah Shariff)

Nayyirah Shariff, Executive Director of Flint Rising, a community

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... Lead

(Continued from Page 13.)

activist group deeply involved in the water crisis responses and citizen advocacy, told *EVM* she believes the Lead Safe Home Program and efforts to address lead in the home are the most important interventions on which to focus.

“The majority of Flint’s housing stock was built before laws were passed against the use of lead paint and lead in fixtures like faucets,” Shariff said. “Any time you can work with people in their home where they feel empowered and safe, you can have better outcomes. I would like to see more programs that reach people in their homes rather than expecting everyone to go to the services to access them.”

“I always look at these reports admiringly because I know that we do the due diligence and use the best data we have,” said Dr. Richard Sadler, director of methodology c



Dr. Richard Sadler, director of methodology for Flint Center for Health Equity Solutions
(Photo source HFRCC)

for the Flint Center for Health Equity Solutions in an interview with *EVM*. “With someone like Mona at the helm, it is encouraging because she has boundless drive and energy.”

Sadler supports Flint Lead Free by geographically mapping health data so that interventions are able to be targeted in neighborhoods that are most impacted.

“I am happy to see year to year

that the levels are going down because we can remove lead from the environment. It is hard. We can’t remove all of it. There is naturally occurring lead. But we can get back to where we were 100 years ago,” Sadler said.

“A lot of cities have these issues. What happened in Flint was tragic and the attention paid has really given us the opportunity to exceed and excel and erase lead as one of our primary concerns,” Sadler said. “We might still be concerned about vacant housing and the educational system and crime, but maybe we’re not going to be as concerned about lead because we have been so closely focused on it for the last five or seven years.”

COVID-19 has also created additional challenges as more kids have been inside homes with potential lead exposure, blood lead screening rates have decreased, and pauses have occurred in lead abatement work.

“Our local organizations are amazing at keeping things moving and are skilled at adapting quickly,” said Starrs. “The pandemic has definitely impacted lead testing rates and the timeline for environmental investigations and remediation, but our local partners continue to reach families providing referral and navigation to health care services, help with applications for available programs, and support families as needs change. Flint Lead Free continues to meet and discuss how we can work better together to leverage the resources and fill gaps.”

To learn more or to enroll in the Flint Registry, visit flintregistry.org, email flintregistry@hc.msu.edu, or call (833) GO-FLINT. After successful completion of enrollment, participants are connected to services like Lead Safe Home Program and mailed a \$50 appreciation check.

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... Staszewski

(Continued from Page 16.)

qualified to turn around media’s popular perception of Flint as an undesirable place to live. “I’m building a brand around “Flint 360” that will allow the people here in Flint to upload their own videos,” he said. “So, think of a Netflix for the town of Flint.”

Drawn to Flint by diversity, opportunity and people

Staszewski’s life journey landed him in nearby Davison, building an audiovisual studio for the local Louhelen Baha’i Center of Learning. His wife, Maria, serves Louhelen as its executive assistant. “I thought my wife would be perfect here because she likes to serve our faith and she likes to be of service,” Staszewski said.

“I started to come into Flint and I started to see this is where the diversity is,” Staszewski recalled. “So, why wouldn’t I come here? I wanted my kids to learn about diversity.” Six-year-old Zophia and Zachary, 12, now attend Flint Cultural Center Academy.



Staszewski and kids
(Photo by Boyd Staszewski)

Staszewski became a Flintstone for other reasons as well. He wanted to impact a community. “I hadn’t had the impact on a small (community) scale where I could say, ‘Who’s going to come to my funeral?’”

Further, Staszewski was drawn by Flint’s possibilities and its people. “I met awesome people here,” he said. “I see a Flint that has a lot of opportunity.”

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... *Brownfield*

(Continued from Page 9.)

began in 2005 moving forward, Freeman explained. There are no properties sold without the purchaser being made aware that the property is in a brownfield plan.

Council breaks down into a brouhaha again and removes President Kate Fields

In Mondays council meeting there were periods, some beyond 30 and 45 minutes, of breakdown in decorum while heated discussions,



Councilperson Eric Mays (Ward 1) in a 2020 Council meeting
(Photo by Tom Travis)

arguments and interruptions ensued. During one back and forth, the council voted to remove Council President Kate Fields (4th Ward) because some believed she ignored Eric Mays' (1st Ward) point of order.

According to council rules, the chair of a meeting can be removed from a meeting if the chair ignores a point of order from a council member. Mays accused Fields of ignoring his point of order in a discussion between Mays and Mayor Sheldon Neeley. Neeley had suddenly appeared on the call and voiced his presence.

Mays has called for the mayor to be present at numerous council meetings to question him on a number of topics. Mays seized the moment to question the mayor and that is when his point of order took



Michael Freeman, new director of the Land Bank of Genesee County.
(Photo by Michael Freeman)

place that he said he believes Fields ignored.

After Fields chose to remove herself from the meeting, Mays attempted to have the council consider having Fields reenter the meeting. Mays put a motion forward for the council to have Fields allowed back into the meeting. However, none of the remaining six council members seconded the motion to return Fields to the meeting, so the motion died.

Fields remained out of the meeting for the rest of it. Councilperson Eva Worthing (9th Ward) was absent from the meeting.

Council takes a moment of silence for 500,000 Americans that had died from COVID-19

In a more somber and touching moment, Freeman explained he is recovering from COVID-19 and spoke of a meeting he had attended earlier in the evening which observed a moment of silence to honor the 500,000 deaths in the country from COVID-19 that had been announced that day. Mays suggested that the council take a moment of silence to honor the 500,000 as well.

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Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

9,912


Totals as of Feb. 13 were 9,922 lead or galvanized pipes replaced, 26,781 pipes excavated, according to reports from the City of Flint.

A total of 16,838 pipes have been discovered to be copper service lines.

Unclassified ads

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*Happy
Saint Patrick's
Day
(March 17)*

Village Life

From Athabasca to Flint, Boyd Staszewski a cheerleader for his new home

By Harold C. Ford

Propelled by the nearly inexplicable energy exuding from his protoplasm and spirit, Boyd Staszewski typically arises each morning at 5 a.m. without the aid of an alarm to creatively ponder the yet untapped potential of Flint and his place in it.

At his downtown home on East Court Street, Staszewski is stoked by his lifelong love affair with sound and video production, the tenets of his Baha'i faith tradition, the principles espoused in the 36-page book *Detox, Declutter, Dominate* by author Perry Marshall and unabashed enthusiasm for his adopted hometown of Flint.

Hardly a 9-to-5 kind of guy, Staszewski walks the walk as evidenced by a thus-far \$50,000 investment in audiovisual studio and control rooms where he envisions for-profit and non-profit ventures in Flint and the world—"the area we serve"—according to his website.

Staszewski was drawn to Flint, in part, by what he sees as its yet-to-be-realized potential in a post-industrial era. "There was no shortage of people with great ideas in Flint," he said. "We don't tell a good story about what's going on here ... We need to do a better job of that going forward."

Staszewski, 55, intends to trumpet Flint's story with his Court Street business, Changing Productions, that offers diverse "cutting-edge video marketing": videography; live video mainstreaming; multicamera video production; video ads; social media video advertising; You Tube channel management; Facebook live video production, webinar creation and production, and more.

A million miles from Flint

Staszewski's state-of-the-art Flint studios are a far cry from the more primitive studio he built as a youngster in

Athabasca, Alberta, Canada. Athabasca (Cree for "grass or reeds here and there"), with a 2016 population of less than 3,000, is situated 91 miles north of Edmonton, just over 2,000 miles from Flint. Culturally, it might as well have been a million miles from the Vehicle City.

There were just two minority students in his very Anglo high school: an Afro-Canadian and a Native American. The lively arts— theater, art, and music—kickstarted Staszewski's imagination.

"It was a natural progression to start exploring the world ... going overseas, getting on a plane and seeing ... the rest of the world," Staszewski recollected. "I couldn't wait to get out of the small town I was in and see the world."

It was music, more than anything, that fired his desire to see more of the world. "It really gave me the background when my friends didn't work out," Staszewski said.

"The first memory I ever had on



Boyd Staszewski in his workshop
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

TV was Elvis Presley," Staszewski recalled. Then came the Beatles, KISS, the Eagles, and others. He picked up the guitar and started strumming heavy chords that drove his parents to repurpose a tiny cabin on the family's 1,000-acre farm as a sound studio.

"That's where all this started because that was my sanctuary," Staszewski said. "It was also my place of meditation." So music jump-started an "inner journey" that led to globe trekking.

"I recognized that I had to leave my environment and explore the world," he recalled.

Searching for truth

"All of us are responsible for finding the truth for ourselves," Staszewski declared.

Thus, in his early 20s, Staszewski left Athabasca headed for Toronto, Ontario. The journey took him to Detroit and a jaw-dropping experience there. A stop at a McDonald's restaurant put him in the midst of an African American crowd of people—a first for the Alberta native. "You don't know how to act," he remembered.

Besides Detroit and Toronto, Staszewski's globetrotting took him to Illinois, Maryland, Virginia, and Florida. During a hitchhike through Europe, he discovered and adopted the Baha'i faith. "That literally changed my life," he said.

Staszewski also journeyed to China and Brazil, where he met his wife. "I was immediately smitten by her," he fondly remembered. "We knew (but) ten words of the same language."

Informed by faith

Uncomfortable with the Roman Catholicism of his youth, Staszewski has embraced the Baha'i faith. "Each of us has a purpose, I believe, that God has given us and it's our job to figure out what it is. Each of us has something unique to give to the world."

Staszewski's personal history, embrace of technology and the Baha'i faith tradition, have made him uniquely

(Continued on Page 14.)

LIX: 3 (695 issues, 7,200 pages)