

East Village

Magazine

July 2021

Photograph By
Edwin D. Carter

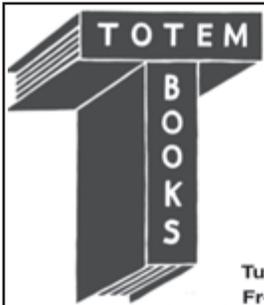
The Tom Sumner Program

Produced live weekdays from 9 to noon

Ways to listen...

- ★ **STREAM IT ON-LINE:**
www.tomsumnerprogram.com
(810) 339-8255 (TALK)
- ★ **ON THE RADIO:**
WFOV 92.1 FM in Flint
- ★ **ARCHIVED:**
Episodes & Podcasts





**Books
Vinyl
Cafe**

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

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

VERN'S COLLISION INC.

Free Loaners

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

More than 40 years at the same location.

(810) 232-6751
2409 Davison Rd.



Healthy Home Cooking!

810-235-1968
Flint Farmers' Market

MaMang

VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Located inside the Flint Farmers' Market

Weichert REALTORS | Grant Hamady



Mark Fisher
Your College Cultural Realtor

Buying or Selling?
I'm here to help!

810-285-8624
markfishersells.com

4265 E. Court Street, Burton MI 48509





FREE Home Warranty

Flint's Resident Realtor
The Name Trusted in More Neighborhoods

Ryan Eashoo
(810) 234-1234
www.RyanEashoo.com




**107 W. Kearsley St.
Downtown Flint**
Open Monday-Saturday

Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE ULTIMATE INTERACTIVE FLIGHT EXHIBITION

PRESENTED BY **BOEING**

YOUR MISSION DATES NOW THROUGH SEPT. 5



Design and test-fly your own supersonic jet, spread your wings and experience flight as a bird, and take an elevator ride to the edge of space!

4198 E. COURT ST. BURTON, MI 48589

CALL **810.237.3458**

VISIT **SLOANLONGWAY.ORG/ABOVEANDBEYOND**

FOLLOW US  



Vol. LIX No. 7 July 2021

Founder Gary P. Custer

Managing Editor Tom Travis
Consulting Editor Jan Worth-Nelson
Consulting Editor Ted Nelson
Copy Editor Danielle Ward
Reporters Harold C. Ford, Madeleine Graham, Patsy Isenberg, Melodee Mabbitt, Coner Segren
Columnist Paul Rozycki
Photographer Edwin D. Custer

Distribution Staff

Director: Edwin D. Custer. Staff: Sue Bailey, Kim Bargy, Jacob Blumner, Connor Coyne & Ruby Coyne, Casey Custer, Caroline Fechik, Christine & Patrick Figgins, Marabeth Foreman, Charlie & Linda & Patrick & Terrance & Christan & Jillianne Goldsberry, Patsy Isenberg, Carol Larzelere Kellermann, Stephen Kellermann, Jo Larzelere, Mary LeRoy, James & Lillian & Livia Londrigan, Alan & Julie Lynch, Ron & Mary Meeker, Robert & Nancy Meszko, Ted Nelson, Dave & Becky Pettengill, Dick & Betty Ramsdell, Julian Rodriquez, Paul Rozycki, Mike Spleet, Kim & Ronan & Jude Streby, Holly West, and Karen Wilkinson.

Board of Trustees

- FaLessia Booker • Edwin D. Custer
• Alec Gibbs • Jack D. Minore
• Paul Rozycki

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

Website:

eastvillagemagazine.org

E-mail:

eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com

Layout by Patsy Isenberg. Printing by Riegle Press Inc., 1282 N. Gale Rd., Davison, Mich. 48423.

East Village Magazine is a program of the Village Information Center Inc., a nonprofit corporation. We welcome material from readers, but all submissions become the property of the publication and if published will be edited to conform to the editorial style and policies of the publication. All inquiries about the publication should be mailed to East Village Magazine, Village Information Center, 720 E. Second St., Flint, Mich. 48503. Distribution is the first Thursday of each month. Display advertising rates are \$34 a column-inch plus any other costs. Unclassified ads are \$2.50 a printed line or part of a printed line. Rates subject to change without notice. The deadline for advertising is 10 days before each publication date.

© 2021 East Village Magazine

Commentary

For the Aug. 3 city council primary, take the time to learn about your candidates, and vote!

By Paul Rozycki

They typically have eight- or 10-hour meetings that often last until dawn.

They spend hours bickering and attacking each other personally.

They failed to approve the current city budget on time, a violation of the city charter. Only after the city faced the prospect of a shutdown was the budget finalized.

Some have faced personal threats.

They have become the poster child of dysfunctional local government in Genesee County.

And yet, in spite of all this, or because of all this, more than 40 people took out petitions to be elected to the Flint City Council.

Of the initial 43 potential candidates, 25 had their petitions certified to appear on the Aug. 3 primary ballot. Several of those whose petitions were not approved are running as write-in candidates as well.

Who is running?

In seven of the city's nine wards, incumbents are seeking reelection. Two incumbents, Eric Mays (1st Ward), and Eva Worthing (9th Ward), won't face an opponent on the ballot in either the primary or the general election, though write-in candidates have emerged in both cases. In the Fifth Ward, both Joseph Schipani and incumbent Jerri Winfrey-Carter will advance to the November election.

In all the remaining wards there are more than two candidates, and the top two will face each other in the November general election.

The candidates are:

Ward 1: Eric Mays, incumbent, is unopposed.

Ward 2: Incumbent Maurice Davis faces Ladel Lewis, Arthur L. Woodson, and Audrey F. Young.

Ward 3: A.C. Dumas, Quincy Murphy, and Kerry Nelson are running to replace Santino Guerra, who is not running for reelection.

Ward 4: Incumbent Kate Fields, faces Michael D. Doan and Judy Priestley.

Ward 5: Incumbent Jerri Winfrey-Carter and Joseph Schipani will run against each other in the November election.

Ward 6: DelTonya Burns, Chris Del Morone, Terae M. King Jr., and Claudia E. Perkins-Milton are competing to replace Herbert Winfrey, who is not running for reelection.

Ward 7: Incumbent Monica Galloway is being challenged by Allie L. Herkenroder and Shannon A. Searcy.

Ward 8: Incumbent Louis A. Griggs is opposed by William C. Harris Jr., Dennis A. Pfeiffer, and Thomas W. Ross.

Ward 9: Incumbent Eva Worthing is unopposed.

In addition to those on the ballot, several candidates are running write-in campaigns. So far, they include Tanya Rison (1st Ward), Richard Jones (3rd Ward), Lakeisha Tureaud (7th Ward), and Steve Barber (9th Ward).

The August primary

If it's typical, the Aug. 3 primary will probably be a low turnout affair, where we'll be lucky to

(Continued on Page 16.)

Cover: Applewood Estate



Photo of the Month: Applewood Estate rose garden (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat

Documents detail rapidly deteriorating relationship between Flint school board and superintendent

By Harold C. Ford

East Village Magazine (EVM) has received information from a source who chooses to remain anonymous that documents a rapidly deteriorating relationship between the Flint Community Schools (FCS) Board of Education and FCS Superintendent Anita J. Steward.

On Jan. 7, 2021, Steward received from the Flint board a Superintendent Evaluation (covering the period July 2020-December 2020) that concluded “the superintendent’s job performance was highly effective,” the best rating possible.

A June 16, 2021 document warned Steward that “continued unacceptable performance, and/or conduct, could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.”

January 2021 performance evaluation

The mid-year evaluation issued in January evaluated Steward in four categories: Community Relations; Staff Relations; Instructional Leadership; and Governance and Board Relations. Steward’s performance was rated “highly effective” in all four job performance categories.

Steward’s mid-year evaluation did not include a rating in a fifth category: Business and Finance or Student Data.

Choices of job performance ratings on the evaluation form include: Highly Effective (the best); Effective; Minimally Effective; and Ineffective (the lowest rating possible).

Also included in the 17-page evaluation form was the following

statement:

“Superintendent Steward received an overall rating of ‘Highly Effective’ by the Board for the mid-year evaluation. The Board agreed unanimously that Superintendent Steward (sic) first six month’s job performance was excellent. She brought knowledge, professionalism and calm to the District during a period of transition.”

Board Vice President Diana Wright signed the form as the board’s previous president, Casey Lester, had just retired from the panel.

June 2021 reprimand

The June 16, 2021 document, titled “Flint Board Expectations of Superintendent,” indicated “the Superintendent may not fully understand

(Continued on Page 5.)

... Schools

(Continued from Page 4.)

the expectations from Board members relating to her communications with, and dissemination of information to, the Board of Education members..."

The board "resolved that it is the Superintendent's responsibility to inform the entire Board of Education, collectively and in a timely manner, of all information that is pertinent regarding the school district..."

The board "further resolved that the Superintendent must cease all communication, as well as meetings (in-person, virtually, or over the telephone), with all partners and community foundations as well as affiliates of partners and community foundations, without the presence of the Board President and his or her designee."

The document is signed by Carol McIntosh, board president. Issuance of the document was approved by the FCS board on a 4-3 vote.

Steward's first year

On July 1, 2000, Steward and the Board of Education of School District of the City of Flint signed an Employment Agreement effective through June 30, 2021 "unless it (the Agreement) is terminated..."

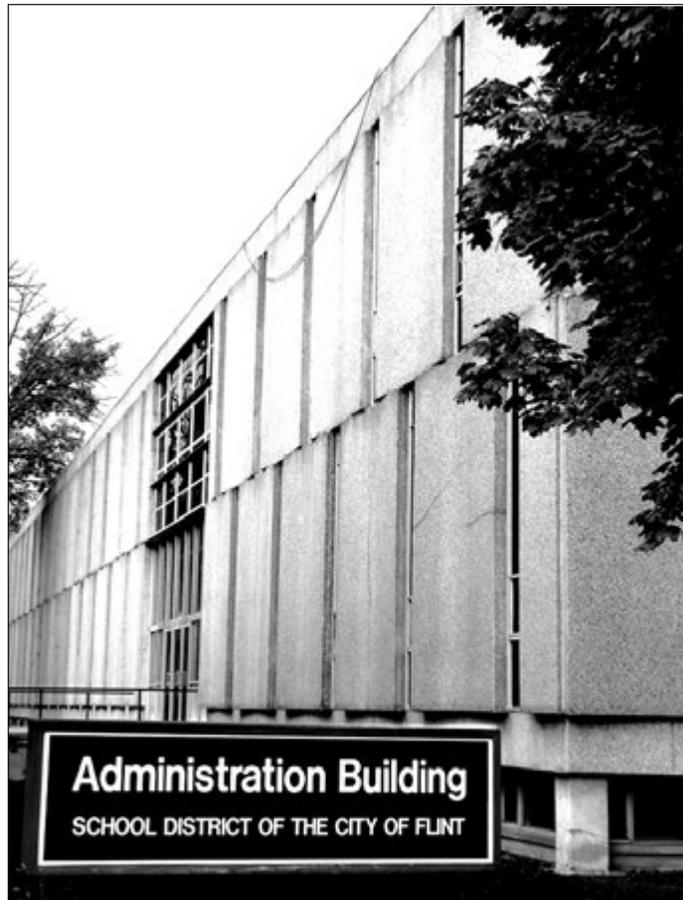
Steward had become Flint's Interim Superintendent only a few months earlier on April 15, 2020 after the board terminated the employment of her predecessor, Derrick Lopez. Thus, Steward became the seventh FCS superintendent in 15 years, 2005-2020.

Heading up Flint's public schools would have been a daunting task for anyone.

The district's challenges included: rapidly declining student enrollment and resultant loss of state aid; staff attrition; low test scores; outstanding lawsuits; unsettled employee contracts;

an immensely disruptive pandemic; long-standing debt and annual deficits; a community upset by possible school closures; deteriorating infrastructure; 22 abandoned buildings and a dozen vacant properties; and a three-year state-imposed plan to reduce suspensions by 10 percent, increase student attendance to 90 percent; and increase test scores by 10 percent.

According to the January eval-



Flint Community Schools Administration Building
(Photo by Ed Custer)

uation, Steward was satisfying the board with her performance.

Bumps along the way

Nonetheless, careful watchers of Flint board-administration dynamics would have detected bumps in their relationship.

In June 2020, the first month of Steward's superintendency, with McIntosh now serving as the board's newly-elected president, the board quickly turned down the Steward

administration's plan for reopening schools and its pick of Stacey Watson to head up the Holmes building as principal.

On Feb. 17 2021, the board again turned down the Steward administration's plan to reopen schools four days later on Feb. 22 despite administration assurances that "the buildings will be ready."

In February 2021, Steward's administration was admonished by the McIntosh-led board about its interactions with the Harvard group in exploring possibilities for the long-abandoned Flint Central campus.

Degrees of separation

The rejection of Watkins' appointment to the principalship at Holmes may have been the most ironic decision by the board during Steward's first year as superintendent.

Watkins was rejected by a 3-2 vote (four votes needed for approval) with McIntosh the first person to raise concerns about Watson because he attended the same schools (Beecher High School and Michigan State University) as Ernest Steward, FCS central administrator and husband of the superintendent.

"We should know ahead of time if you're interviewing your friend," admonished McIntosh.

It's been reported to EVM that FCS Board President McIntosh and Superintendent Steward are cousins.

Editors' Note: EVM has reached out to Steward, FCS Board President Carol McIntosh, and FCS Board Vice President Vera Perry for comments and interviews.

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

Flint Neighborhoods United meeting covers high-speed internet, lifting of pandemic restrictions and rodent control

By Coner Segren

At the most recent Flint Neighborhoods United monthly meeting, residents heard from Gary Jones, Flint community liaison for Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Office of Community Outreach about the state's lifting of pandemic restrictions. They also heard about a new federal program to allow for high-speed internet for communities lacking access and got tips from a local conservation group about how to control rodents.

"Flint Neighborhoods United (FNU) is a coalition of block club, neighborhood association and crime watch captains and presidents who come together on the first Saturday of each month to share information and leverage their resources to create positive change in the Greater Flint community. The group's focus is from a city-wide perspective versus the focus of the individual members of a specific neighborhood or area within the city," according to FNU's website.

During the pandemic FNU has

been holding its monthly meetings by Zoom session. Residents can join the meetings by going to the FNU website (www.flintneighborhoodsunited.org) to obtain the link. The meetings take place on the first Saturday of each month. The next meeting will be 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 7.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's new plan lifts some pandemic restrictions

As more Michiganders get vaccinated, the Whitmer administration will be easing pandemic restrictions that have been in place for the past year. The Back to Normal Plan, released in April, outlines goals for the state to meet as it continues re-opening.

According to Gary Jones, Flint community liaison for Whitmer's Office of Community Outreach, the plan consists of two phases. The first began June 1, when outdoor capacity limits were lifted and limits for in-

door gatherings increased to 50%.

People who are not vaccinated must continue to wear masks indoors. Curfews for restaurants and bars will



Gary Jones, Flint community liaison for Whitmer's Office of Community Outreach
Photo source: Gov. Whitmer's office.



Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist (at podium) and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (in background)
Photo source: Gov. Whitmer's office

remain in place through to at least the end of June, Jones emphasized.

Beginning in July, under the second phase of the plan, broad mask requirements and gathering limits will be lifted. From then on, the state government will monitor and may reinstate mitigation on an as-needed basis.

Jones also stated the state may impose targeted mitigation measures to protect vulnerable communities.

New Federal Program aims to reduce cost of high-speed Internet

A new federal program known as the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) is making \$3.2 billion available nationwide for communities with lack of access to high-speed in-

(Continued on Page 18.)

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of July 1. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city, which, because of the restrictions starting to be lifted, are beginning to expand. To submit events for our August issue, email your event to pisenber@gmail.com by July 20.

Flint Mural Plays

Presented by Flint Repertory Theatre

Now through August 31

All around the city.

Listen to 25 new micro audio plays by various playwrights, each corresponding with a different mural around Flint. Listen on the PixelStix app on phones or online at FlintRep.org.

Special events on 4 consecutive Saturdays beginning June 5. All begin at noon.

For more info visit

flintrep.org/flintmuralplays.

Flint City Bucks Soccer Game

Saturday, July 10, 7:30 p.m.

National Champion (2019) Flint City Bucks against Oakland County FC (Clawson)

Atwood Stadium

701 University Ave., Flint 48503

For more info visit

flintcitybucks.com/2021-schedule.

Flint Public Library Used Book Sale

Thursday, July 15, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Flint

Farmers' Market, Pavilion

The Friends of the Flint Public Library are selling a variety of used books, CDs, DVDs on the third Thursday of every month.

Flint Farmers' Market

300 East First St., Flint

For more info visit fpl.info.

Movies at The Capitol Theatre

Fridays 7 p.m.

July 2, “Captain America First Avenger”

July 16, “First Kid”

July 23, “National Treasure”

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. Second St., Flint

For more info visit capitoltheatreflint.com

or call 810-237-7333.

Tickets are \$3-\$10.

World Marching Band of Hip Hop

Sunday, July 11, 1:00 to 5:30 p.m.

This event includes a parade, pop up shop, artist performances and a fashion show.

Riverbank Park, downtown Flint

For more info email

dwalker19930@gmail.com

or call 810-493-7532.

Tickets are \$30 (adult) and \$20 (child).

Art Walk

This popular event continues in downtown Flint on the second Friday evening of each month.

Tunes at Noon

Mon. - Fri., July 23-27

Live performances during the lunch hour.

Mon., Greg Ellis (blues/rock)

Tues., Karley Davidson (variety)

Wed., Standard Issue (jazz)

Thurs., Mott Jazz Combo (jazz)

Fri., Smooth Illusions (jazz/R&B)

Willson Park

Free

Buckham Gallery

June 25 through July 24 Selvaige” by Jim Arendt and “At Home” by Candace Compton Pappas

Open Wed 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Thurs and Fri 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Sat. 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Sun. 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

For more info buckhamgallery.org

or call 810-239-6233

Free



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

Education Beat

District Superintendent Steward reprimanded by Flint School Board; she responds

By Harold C. Ford

“I’m just so happy we got the homegrown girl. I think this is going to be beneficial for our district.”

—Carol McIntosh, Flint school board trustee, June 25, 2020, upon the appointment of Anita Steward to the Flint Schools superintendent position

“I don’t feel like this board is being respected. It is my hope to get Ms. Steward on track so we can move forward.”

—Carol McIntosh, Flint school board president, June 16, 2021, upon the introduction of a resolution to verbally reprimand Anita Steward, Flint Schools superintendent

What a difference a year makes.

Anita Steward, Flint Community Schools (FCS) superintendent, was issued a verbal reprimand by the FCS board of education at a special meeting June 16, 2021. The measure passed by a 4-3 vote.

The very public reprimand came

almost one year after Steward’s appointment to the FCS superintendent’s office by a unanimous 5-0 vote just one year ago, on June 25, 2020. Voting then in the affirmative were board members Blake Strozier (now resigned from the board), Vera Perry, Diana Wright, and Carol McIntosh.

The notion—it never became a motion—to issue a reprimand, or “verbal warning,” was introduced by McIntosh but was never voted on during another display of parliamentary confusion by the Flint panel. Later, a vaguely-worded motion “to advise the superintendent of the...expectations of her” was supported by McIntosh, Danielle Green, Laura MacIntyre, and Joyce Ellis-McNeal.

Voting against the motion were Perry, Wright, and Adrian Walker.

Most of the discussion (incorrectly, from a parliamentary perspective) preceded introduction of the motion with McIntosh, MacIntyre, Ellis-McNeal, and Green making comments critical of Steward’s performance in the superintendent’s office:

- McIntosh: “Ms. Steward has a clause in her contract that she is to keep the board informed,” McIntosh said, “I don’t feel that has been the case. It’s just like pulling teeth from a lion’s mouth.”

She cited what she characterized as unresponsiveness to an overflowing recycling bin at an unidentified school, a search for employment that was halted, a driver education program that failed to come before the board, and failure to provide certification qualifications for an HR person.

- MacIntyre: “I too agree that we’re working with an increasingly hostile administration department,” MacIntyre alleged. “It’s almost becoming untenable to get the work of the district done.” MacIntyre listed withholding of requested information, complaints about facilities and maintenance, concern about water filtration systems, trash not being picked up, lack of a strategic plan, nonprovision of disability accommodations, and a vacant “director of public services” position as additional reasons for her

(Continued on Page 9.)



**FCS Superintendent
Anita Steward**
Photo Source: FCS website



FCS President Carol McIntosh
Photo Source: FCS website



**Newly elected Flint
Community School Board member,
Laura MacIntyre**
Photo provided by Laura MacIntyre.

... Schools

(Continued from Page 8.)

support of the reprimand.

- Green: “They (supporters of Steward) don’t have trouble getting information from Ms. Steward,” Green said. “Getting information from Ms. Steward can be very difficult.”

- McNeal: “It’s getting to be embarrassing when the people on the outside know more than the board,” McNeal said. “And most of the problems we’re having in our schools is the lack of administration skills.”

Spirited defense by Steward

Steward, who declined the offer of a closed meeting, gave a spirited defense of her administration:

- Monthly administrative updates were provided to board members in March, April, May, and June, she stated.

- Steward said that she was informed of the overflowing recycling bin on June 10 and “immediately went into action to contact the company.” The district was transitioning from one recycling vendor to another.

- The information about driver training was emailed to board members “as soon as I got the flyer from Youth Quest,” she said.

- Steward said her administra-

tion was scrambling to provide information about contracts, qualifications, and job duties within the 30-days contractually allowed while “in the midst of closing out a school year, working on summer school, and then trying to prepare for the 2021-22 school year.”

- A “parent was turned away” happened while Steward was on vacation. She said Kevelin Jones, FCS assistant superintendent, handled the matter that turned out to be a misunderstanding that was quickly resolved.

- Steward was “thrown back and surprised” by comments about a hostile administration at the June 16 board meeting as she had requested a closed session on May 12 to address the matter.

- “We don’t have a director of public services,” Steward said. “We have a director of operations.” She said the position was posted as soon as it became vacant. “We did interviews last week for this position. I’m not just sitting around not doing anything.”

Steward said she had requested training for the Flint board and administration from the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) but the MASB had yet to respond. “My understanding is that the board is governance and mine is management and there’s so many gray areas and there’s so many areas of crossing over,” she said. “The both of us are new to our positions.”

Voices of support:

“Anita Steward has done a great job for employees and students alike... who are encouraged by her vision and her consistency,” said Chris Martin, senior pastor at Flint’s Cathedral of Faith. “She has worked her way up through the ranks in this district and has become...a hope, not only for children throughout... the city alike, but also for these educators who attend my church.”

Martin spent eight years on the Flint school board, two years as its president.

George Wilkinson, pastor at Flint’s Word of Life Christian Church, spoke on behalf of Alfred Harris, president of Concerned Pastors for Social Action.

“The work by Anita and her staff ... wouldn’t attract parents to send their children to Flint Community Schools,” Wilkinson said. “We support her with confidence and conviction as the superintendent for today and into the future.”

Events foretold fallout

Despite the board’s initial embrace of Steward as Flint superintendent, several setbacks in the first year of her administration foretold a falling out:

- June 2020: In the same month as her appointment, and with only five

(Continued on Page 15.)



**FCS board secretary,
Danielle Green**
(Photo source: FCS website)



**Newly-elected Flint
Community School Board member,
Joyce Ellis-McNeal**
Photo provided by Ellis-McNeal.



**Pastor Chris Martin, of the
Cathedral of Faith Church
in Flint**
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Flint's Poet Laureate, Semaj Brown, receives \$50,000 award from the American Academy of Poets for civic project

By Tom Travis

The American Academy of Poets has chosen Flint's Poet Laureate, Semaj Brown, as one of 2021 Poet Laureate Fellows. Brown joins 22 other Poets Laureate from across the country. Each of the winners will receive \$50,000 for their literary work as well as a project of their choosing with a "civic focus."

In a note posted on her website, Brown stated, "I thank you all. Also thank you to the Academy of American Poets (AAP). To the dreamers, and the dreamless, to the faithful and the faithless, to those who know, and to those who seek to those who turn things up downside in, and to those who carry tradition in gnarled knuckles.

"Poetry is my 2nd language, spiritual dialect, way of being; it is a cultural life raft for our community – the golden root tip of blood, of bones, and that combustible joy ignited in the spine of fire laughter. Thank you for accepting my offerings, as my service is my practice," Brown wrote in a thank you note to Flint.

Brown has been sharing her talent and passion for language in Flint for three years. She became Flint's first Poet Laureate through proclamation in September 2019 by then-Flint Mayor Karen Weaver.

A complete list of all 23 AAP Poet Laureate fellowship recipients can be found at <https://poets.org/academy-american-poets>.

Celebrating with a "cacophony of sound"

Brown said she found out about the award in a phone call from Jennifer Benka, president of the American Academy of Poets (AAP). Benka told Brown that they have been "watching her and seeing her work" and the AAP

had chosen her to be one of the recipients of the 2021 award.

Brown described that phone call by saying at first she was quiet. "I couldn't believe it!" she said.

Then Brown, gasping, said "I just started acting goofy and all of us on the phone were celebrating." There was a cacophony of sound."

Civic focus for Flint's Poet Laureate



Flint Poet Laureate Semaj Brown
Photo source: S.B.

The Poetry Pod Project (P3) will be the civic focus of Brown's AAP award.

On her newsletter, Brown describes the project like this: "To understand the structural and systemic, seemingly insurmountable scourge of illiteracy, and yet despite barriers organize and implement sustainable poetry programming throughout the city of Flint is the goal. To ignite, to foment a culture of poetry, and thus literacy is the mission. To impart

programming designed to increase reading and writing skills while integrating arts and sciences is the innovation."

According to Brown, the P3 project consists of four initiatives:

1. Flint Reads Poetry/Poetry Voices of Flint

"Verse enthusiasts, individuals, and organizations are invited to videotape themselves reading poems from various eras: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, Transcendentalists, Romantic Poets, and more. These recordings will present as an online poetry gallery. Each season new readers will offer a selection of noted poems. The poetry gallery will serve as an audio/visual, sensory resource for students, educators, after-school programmers, and parents. Mostly, it will be a community space to engage in active listening, laugh, validate, destress, heal, revive, and celebrate the awesomeness of poetry."

2. Poetry Paints

"Poetry Paints is an inter-genre workshop between the literary art-form, poetry, and paintings, works on paper, and sculpture. The source of these works of art: Flint's own, Mott Warsh Collection, Director/Curator Stephanie James, art educator Janice McCoy. Poetry Paints workshops are designed for Freeman Elementary school students, Principal Mrs. Anna Johnson. Guided by Flint's poet laureate, students will respond to the art works in the language of poetry, thus composing poetry letters, utilizing poetry as a second language.

3. Poetry Pen Pals

"Poetry as a 2nd Language is Poetry Pen Pals, a poem exchange project

(Continued on Page 11.)

... Poet

(Continued from Page 10.)

– letters written between participants. The Flint community will be invited to participate as Poetry Pen Pals. These poems will be posted on P3’s social media platform and published in the column, Poetry Confessions: Tea Time with the Poet Laureate – Flint Courier News. This method of communication promotes a culture where poems are the currency of language. This virtual happening provides participants with a community space for sharing poetry into the future.”

4. Poetry in the Garden with Brownell Blvd. Coalition, Ladel Lewis, PhD.

“Brownell Blvd. Coalition’s Storytime in EJ’s garden. This Ruth Mott and community -sponsored initiative takes pride in being a highlight of the Sarvis Park Neighborhood. Since its inception, they’ve provided a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables to the community while promoting literacy. Many readers have graced our garden to entertain youth and adults alike,” writes Ladel Lewis.

“My hope is that people’s lives will be changed and the poetry will add to their lives.”

She clarified this project is for “people” not just for children. Brown said children are people and people are children, adding, “I haven’t ever met a grown person who wasn’t a child.

“A lot of things that we’re taught are just false. The first step is to recognize everything you’ve been taught about poetry is probably wrong. Poetry is the essence of your being, but expressed in words,” she explained.

Brown recalled some things she hears from audience members of her poetry readings: A lot of people say, “I hate poetry but I like your poetry. Are you sure it’s poetry, what you do, Semaj?” She said she responds, “I’m really sure.”

“Your poems aren’t like

any poems I’ve ever heard,” some of Brown’s audience members say. “That’s because of the barriers that have been constructed when you don’t hear poetry that speaks to you,” she replies.

“My mother did this to me” – Brown

Brown recalled as a small child that often her mother and sister, nine years her elder, would read to each other at night. Brown said that her mother, a classically trained pianist and scholar, would always ask her and her sister after reading, “What does that mean?” If Brown said, “I don’t know,” her mother would challenge her by saying, “Well, let’s find out.”

Brown said the “finding out” would become like an adventure.

“We would go to the dictionary, we would draw it out,” she recalls, and then her mother would say “Now read it again now that we have this better understanding about it.

“So she really drew me into this and she encouraged me,” Brown said.

“Poetry is a way for people to connect with what’s inside of them.” Brown remembers going to Stratford, Ontario as a young person to study Shakespeare during the summer. “Like the dialect of English, that is used in Shakespeare plays, poetry too is a dialect,” Brown explained. “It’s my second dialect,” says Brown.

Local sorority receives \$10,000 to assist Poet Laureate

The AAP asked each of the Poet Laureates to name a non-profit in their respective communities that could assist them in reaching the project’s objectives during the fellowship year. Brown chose Zeta Beta Zeta (ZBZ) Flint Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority.

“ZBZ Chapter was already a partner to the Poet Laureate Poetry Pod Project (P3). I went to the

chapter, of which I am a member, and presented P3 about a month after my appointment [as Flint’s Poet Laureate],” Brown described in a follow-up email.

ZBZ Chapter will assist with administrative duties, marketing, organizing events such as online Zoom and Facebook live events, readings, shopping for supplies, etc. In turn for their in-kind services, the Zeta Foundation of Flint, Michigan, not the chapter, is awarded \$10,000 from the AAP.

Semaj and husband, Dr. James Brown, work and perform together

Author of the 2019 book *Bleeding Fire: Tap the Eternal Spring of Regenerative Light*, Brown has brought literacy through hard-hitting poems of empowerment. In her 2012 book, *Feasts and Fables from the Planted Kingdom*, she combines whimsical original tales and advice on cooking, science and nutrition which began as supports to the family medical practice of her husband, Dr. James Brown.

With Dr. Brown, she has led more than 70 workshops on diet, and nutrition in Genesee County. In 2018 she began teaching and consulting for the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint.

Brown graduated from Wayne State University with a degree in biology and taught science in the Detroit Public Schools, creating innovative science education curricula statewide and nationally.

“Science is my work; art is my work — I really don’t see the difference,” she said in a September 2019 EVM article about her appointment and when asked to reflect on her omnivorous background and body of material. “It is all one—it’s all connected in my world.”

Brown’s husband also is a musician and composer, often joining her in her performances. At the Flint Public Library he accompanied her on bongo drums and played

(Continued on Page 19.)

Profile

30 years later, Ben Hamper remembers Rivethead, his legacy of “that one story, that one guy”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

At a back corner table at Churchhill’s, escaping to AC on a muggy Tuesday afternoon in Flint, Ben Hamper takes a swig of his signature Jim Beam and Diet Coke and reflects on the 30 years since the country came to know him as an exuberantly profane, honest, and hilariously irreverent blue collar bard.

He was The “Rivethead.”

His 1991 book *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line*,” is a raucous, scathing and sometimes heart-wrenching account of his almost 10 years in the 80s as a General Motors “shop rat” at Chevy Truck and Bus. The book was a surprise bestseller, and the resultant hullabaloo around it changed Hamper’s life.

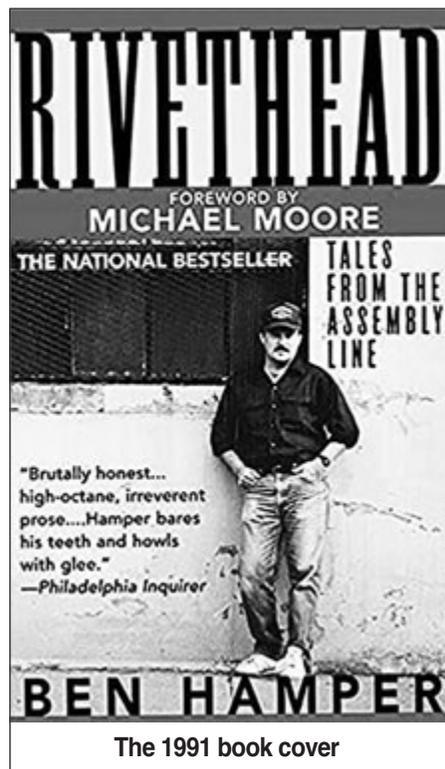
Hamper, now pushing 66 and a longtime resident of Sutton’s Bay, was recently featured at a book signing at Totem Books in observance of *Rivethead*’s 30th anniversary. His mother and many relatives still live in Flint.

Spinning off initially from his relationship with Flint’s other ‘80s bad boy, Davison native and filmmaker Michael Moore, Hamper put Flint on the map yet again as the birthplace not just of its cars and catastrophes, but a fertile ground for startling assembly-line anarchy and bitter dark humor about working-class life at the tail end of the GM boom times.

“The factories weren’t looking for a few good men,” he writes in the book’s opening chapter. “They were dragging the lagoon for optionless bumpkins with brats to feed and livers to bathe. An educated man might hang on for a while, but was apt to flee at any given whistle. That wasn’t any good for corporate continuity. GM wanted the salt of the

earth, dung-heavers, flunkies and leeches—men who would grunt the day away void of self-betterment, numbed out cyborgs willing to swap cerebellum loaf for patio furniture, a second jalopy and a tragic carpet ride deboarding curbside in front of some pseudo-Tudor dollhouse on the outskirts of town.”

The national media of the 1990s couldn’t get enough of Hamper’s story.



The book was reviewed in dozens of publications, from Fortune Magazine to the Christian Science Monitor to the Village Voice. He was called “the blue-collar Tom Wolfe,” and “as corrosively funny as a whoopee cushion filled with acid.” He was compared to the poet Charles Bukowski and hailed as a new talent emerging from the working class.

He was on the cover of the *Wall*

Street Journal; his writing was picked up by Harper’s and the *Detroit Free Press*; and he did appearances on radio and TV around the country from east to west.

Within a month of the book’s publication, Hamper signed a contract to option it for a movie, receiving a six-figure check, one of several, as prospective director Richard Linklater tried to make it happen. Actor Matt Dillon came to town to scope out Hamper’s favorite haunts and try on the “Rivethead” persona. But the project never made it.

A 1973 Powers High School graduate who’d spent his whole life in Flint, Hamper was hardly ready for the attention his book attracted.

The whole time, Hamper was wrestling with severe panic attacks, anxieties, agoraphobia, and alcoholism. During his last few years at GM, he was off work for repeated extended periods, some of it spent as an outpatient at a Holly Road mental health clinic, where he was shown playing basketball in Michael Moore’s film “Roger and Me.”

“I wasn’t prepared for it,” he said of his *Rivethead* notoriety. “To compensate, I doubled medication and drank more. It was touch and go for awhile – I was not doing well. To go on these TV shows and book tours I would stay loaded.

“It should have been a pretty joyous time in my life, but I don’t remember most of it,” he says.

His portrayal captured shop rats on the sweaty, loud rivet line at Chevy Truck and Bus on Van Slyke Road as subsisting on booze secreted in barrels and car parts, “doubling up” on jobs so that they could cover for each other while the other took off to Mark’s Lounge across

(Continued on Page 13.)

... Rivethead

(Continued from Page 12.)

the street or simply imbibe 40-oz brews in the parking lot – Hamper’s Camaro, for example.

He and his fellow shop rats, fighting boredom and repetitive tasks, incorrigibly staged pranks, made up endless games like Rivet Hockey and Dumpster Ball, driving foremen crazy, drew strings of penalties, threats of firing and unceasing interventions by union reps.

The hijinks come across vividly as acts of resistance and a way of adapting to an onerous situation, the ludicrous infantilizations of management strategies, and the tyranny of the clock.

Contrary to preconceived notions about him, Hamper said he actually liked working on the line, at least at first — adding he was relieved and felt lucky to get in on the last waves of GM factory hires in the late 70s. Having been barely employed and as a struggling husband and father of a small child, Hamper said the good pay meant that he could relax and support his family. He says he figured out how to make it work—it was a realm designed for people who didn’t want to think, underachievers who would just show up and do what they were told.

“In some ways, it was like being paid to flunk high school,” he recalls. “You could horse around, and instead of a teacher, you had a foreman. I got into the flow of it.”

Eventually, though, it began to bother him that his forefathers, his grandfather, his father and uncles, worked for many years in the shop but had nothing to show for it. For Hamper, the chance to write about his rivet line experiences gave him a purpose, a goal, something beyond the boredom, repetitiveness and physical demands.

And Michael Moore fortuitously provided him just the outlet for all that scribing. “It was so en-

riching,” he says.

“Without Michael Moore, there would have been no *Rivethead*,” Hamper notes. Moore was “hugely supportive.”

Hamper, whose first love is music, sent a music review to Moore in 1981, and Moore not only ran it in the *Flint Voice*, Moore’s “underground” magazine of the time, but lured Hamper into writing regular features — at first about music, but eventually describing life on the line. Hamper’s columns quickly became the most popular page in the magazine, eventually forming the heart of the book.

Rivethead included a foreword by Moore — who never worked in the shop himself — and was



Rivethead author Ben Hamper in June with his mother, Barbara Goodhue, at the Totem book signing. (Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

blurbed by one of Hamper’s literary idols, the late novelist and poet Jim Harrison.

Placing the factory narrative in a heart-wrenching sociological and emotional context, the book also described Hamper’s childhood as the oldest of eight children in a Catholic family with a devout mother and shiftless, flamboyantly alcoholic father who worked briefly in the factory but didn’t last, shifting from job to job and disappearing for days, weeks, and sometimes months at a time.

“He worked at probably every factory in Flint — back then you could get fired at one plant and go across the street to another one and nobody would ask any questions,” Hamper says. “He was a railroad man, car salesman, everything.”

“I was really angry at the time I was writing the book,” Hamper says of the searing depictions of his family, sharing cramped space in a three-bedroom house at the corner of Dayton and Lawndale streets in Civic Park. As the oldest kid, Hamper took over for the often-missing dad, doing much of the cooking and child care while his mother, Barbara, a devout Catholic, held down two jobs.

“My mother, she just loved kids and loved us and was totally dedicated to compensating for my dad,” he says.

When his dad read the book, he said, “Why’d you have to tear me an a**hole so big?” but admitted it was true. Eventually his father got sober and Hamper said their relationship was good the last few years of his life. He died in 2005.

“I truly did love him,” Hamper asserts. “He had moments when he was very good, instilled my love of baseball and music.” Both parents were voracious readers and passed the love of reading to Hamper. The family lived a block from the Civic Park library, and Hamper went there every week, sometimes bringing back books for his dad — war stories, his favorites.

While many “shop rats” who read Hamper’s column and later the book affirmed he hit the nail on the head, Hamper’s portrayal did not please everyone. Once he was physically threatened on the line itself by another shop rat who took exception to his less-than-flattering characterization of deer hunters.

Once on a radio talk show, conservative host Michael Reagan (the late president’s son) reamed Hamper for admitting to the row-

(Continued on Page 14.)

... Rivethead

(Continued from Page 13.)

dy behavior. A caller angrily piled it on, saying he had problems with his GM car, and when it was investigated the mechanic found an empty vodka bottle in the engine.

"That wasn't me," Hamper says he cracked to Reagan. "I drink bourbon."

But throughout all his years on the rivet line, Hamper maintains, the shop rats produced quality cars. Though there was copious consumption of booze and drugs on breaks and lunch, Hamper says if a worker couldn't keep the work flow going, everything else fell apart.

Hamper followed Moore from what had become the *Michigan Voice* to *Mother Jones Magazine* in the Bay Area, garnering them both even more national attention — and then, as Moore got fired after only his third issue, the publisher complained that one of Hamper's columns was "tasteless" and "offensive."

"Since when does tastelessness preclude good writing?" Hamper wrote that he grumbled. "I swear they oughta change the name of that rag to Mother Teresa. I say screw 'em" — and he followed Moore right back to Michigan.

Nonetheless, Hamper says he cringes now at some of the language he used in the book — the "really sexist stuff" in particular, he says.

"Maybe I was trying to ham it up," he said, "but it's just cro-mag frat boy stuff ... it's just too knuckle-dragging, and I don't like the way it sounds," he says.

What does he think about General Motors today? Hamper says he doesn't think about it "one iota" — and he didn't much when he wrote the book, either.

"I was just dealing with what I saw every day — it's the story of one guy in one department, 40 people on the rivet line— and the clock. The

clock was our enemy."

"Writing never was easy for me, and that's one reason it was easy for me to give it up. I'm really a perfectionist. I would observe these things, that's heavy, that's funny, that's sad, I would keep a pad in my pocket."

When he got home, often half-drunk, he fleshed out his notes on his mother's old Underwood electric typewriter, and then when he got up in the morning, when he was sober, he would refine what he'd written. A three-step process, day after day.

Sometimes it was one paragraph ... it was like a jigsaw puzzle, he says.

Just as we're into the third round, Hamper's daughter Sonya joins us at the table after her job at Steady Eddy's Café at the Farmers' Market. She is his only child, born to his first wife Joanie when they were only 17.

"So she won't be self-conscious," Hamper ducks out to smoke a Marlboro 100 on the street.

The book came out when she was a teenager — she didn't read it then, but did later, as an adult. She says it was exciting when national attention came his way. She was, and is, proud of the book, proud of his success, and proud of him.

"He was a perfect father," she says. "He was only 17 when I was born but he never missed a weekend, never missed my birthday; he and my mom never said a bad word about each other to me. I think he wanted to do better than his father did."

At almost 66, Hamper says he is happy living alone with his cat Haddie, after two divorces, in a house *Rivethead* proceeds helped buy years ago in Sutton's Bay. He's a grandpa with five grandchildren — Sonya's kids — three of whom, now of legal drinking age, he notes, incredulous, he took to the White Horse during his Totem Books appearance. On the way out, he carted

four coney's to go—a Flint specialty in short supply in Sutton's Bay.

Hamper says he and Moore are not close now — they last played golf about a dozen years ago, Hamper says, with Moore mostly living in New York City and Hamper satisfied to be mostly anonymous in Sutton's Bay.

"I want to stress that I'm fine talking about *Rivethead*," Hamper says as he finishes his last Jim Beam, "but I am still doing things that aren't *Rivethead*" — I'm comfortable with that — I like to think about the present."

He has a part-time job as a dishwasher/prep cook at Sutton Bay's Village Inn.

"I really enjoy it," he says. "In so many ways it has the feel of the assembly line, just being one of the guys — I'm the oldest guy in the whole place. Just being off by yourself ... I've always liked mindless labor, blue-collar work, just being off by yourself when you can think your own thoughts."

He also spends much of his time planning his two radio shows on WNMC -FM, 90.7 in Traverse City — indulging in music, one of his great loves.

One, on the air 8-10 p.m. Fridays, is called "Soul Possession." It started out as soul and funk but now features obscure rock 'n roll. The other, "Head for the Hills," is on the air 10 a.m. to noon Sundays. It's described as "a two-hour-long exploration of American country music, mainly focusing on the hill-billy and honky tonk genres of the '50s and '60s — it features Ernest Tubb, Wanda Jackson, Webb Pierce, Louvin Brothers, Kitty Wells, Del Reeves, Skeets McDonald, Connie Smith, Hank Thompson, Eddie Noack, Maddox Brothers & Rose, and Wynn Stewart."

(When he still lived in Flint Hamper's late night show "Take No Prisoners," which ran 1981-1991 on the long-gone public radio station

(Continued on Page 15.)

(Continued from Page 14.)

WFBE was wildly popular among certain music geeks and late-night drunks and insomniacs.)

“Being a disc jockey, being a radio host, was always my true love,” Hamper says, “And I’ve grown to love other genres along the way. I take so much joy out of that.”

It’s a quiet life, and there will be no more books, he says.

“Rivethead is a story about the factory—it’s not the only story, it’s one story. one guy and one department. That was the story I wanted to tell and was inspired to tell. If that’s my legacy, that one book, that’s fine.”

His last day at GM was April 7, 1988. If he would have stayed, if he had survived all the plant closing and layoffs and replacements by robots, he’d have retired in 2007. He can’t imagine what that would have been like.

As he left the factory for the last time, he writes in the *Rivethead* epilogue, “I drive away feeling lucky, or something like it.”

“Rivethead’ was part of my job description – it went hand in hand with when I worked in the factory. So when I quit *Rivethead* I effectively quit writing ... I never believed in writing for the sake of writing. I gotta feel something.”

“I am happy without writing,” he says. “I don’t even think about it. When I wrote I was a writer, and when I don’t write, I’m not a writer.”

“I’m probably more content than at any other point in my life,” Hamper says. “Once you get to a certain age, you just don’t care about a lot of things. It’s a glorious apathy.”

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

Unclassified Ads

Apartment for Lease

Large (1600 sq. ft.) two-bedroom, apartment on Crapo St. just off Kearsley St. available mid-August. Enjoy concerts, dance, art galleries, theaters, planetarium, library, museum, horticultural gardens and art classes, charter school all across the street. Five-minute-or-less walk to UM-Flint, MCC, downtown, Cultural Center, Farmers’ Market. Featuring sunroom, smokeless fireplace, hardwood floors, laundry, storage, garage car space and on-site management. \$745 per month includes water. References and credit check requested.

E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write:

Apartment
502 Crapo St.
Flint MI 48503.

Apartment for Lease

(1,200) sq. ft.). A unique, large, one-story space for a two-bedroom apartment available in mid-August. It’s on E. Second St. in historic East Village. Walk 5 minutes or less to UM-Flint, Downtown, MCC, Library, Cultural Center, Farmers’ Market, horticultural gardens, three parks, bike paths, with quick expressway access, laundry, and off-street and gated parking. Can be furnished. \$650 per month includes water. References and credit check requested.

E-mail ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write:

Apartment
Box 22
502 Crapo St.
Flint MI 48503.

Apartment for Lease

Spacious one-bedroom apartment (1200 sq.ft.) in historic Central Park on cul-de-sac Avon St. near Kearsley St. Available in August. Walk three blocks or less to UM-Flint & MCC campuses, Cultural Center, Downtown, Farmers’ Market, four parks, bike paths, Applewood horticultural gardens and easy freeway access. Deck onto large back yard, laundry, off-street parking. References and credit check requested. On site management. \$625 per month plus electricity. Heat and water included.

No pets.

E-mail ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write:

Apartment
Box 1A
720 E. Second St.
Flint MI 48503.

(Continued from Page 9.)

weeks until the start of the 2020-21 school year, the board rejects the Steward administration’s plan for reopening schools.

• June 2020: The board turns down Stacey Watson’s appointment to the principal position at Holmes Elementary. Some board members question Watson’s ties to Ernest Steward, FCS director of parent/student intervention, safety, and Title IX coordinator. Watson and Steward both attended Beecher High School and Michigan State University. Ernest Steward is also the husband of the FCS superintendent. “We should know ahead of time if you’re interviewing your friend,” said McIntosh, board trustee at the time.

• June 17, 2021: The board votes to not to return students to the school buildings on Feb. 22, ignoring the advice of the Steward administration. “I definitely believe the buildings will be ready on the (Feb.) 22nd,” said Kevelin Jones, FCS assistant superintendent. “We can do that (reopen schools) safely,” Steward said, adding she was “taken aback” by the board’s last-minute decision.

• Feb 2021: Steward is admonished by the board about interactions with the Harvard Group to explore possibilities for the long-abandoned Flint Central campus. The heated discussion led Steward to declare: “I want board members to know that it’s not in my heart to be disrespectful to anyone. And...if I disrespected anyone tonight, I apologize to you.”

Seven superintendents in 15 years

With the appointment of Anita Steward in June 2020, Flint had been led by seven superintendents in a 15-year span: Walter Milton (2005-2007); Linda Thompson (2008-2012); Lawrence Watkins (2013-2015); Bilal Tawwab (2015-2018); Gregory Weatherspoon (2018); Derrick Lopez (2018-2020); Steward (June 2020-present).

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

Primary?

(Continued from Page 3.)

see a 20 percent turnout. Because it's an off-year election, the city council primary is likely to get less attention than it might have if it were held during a normal election year. That's one of the reasons the new city charter will hold future city council contests during the years when we elect a governor.

Yet for voters in the city of Flint, the choices for the city council are critical, not only because of the need to end the discord and conflict in the council, but because of the new city charter, this council will serve until 2026. After that, the council will be elected for four-year terms, in the same years as the governor.

Voters in Fenton, Linden, and Birch Run will also be voting on school millage proposals.

The voter's responsibility

The unusual nature of this year's election gives the voters an even greater responsibility.

First, be sure to register and vote. It's easy to forget about voting when summer vacations are on the horizon, and we're all itching to break loose from the pandemic. Even if you are going to be gone, voting is easier than ever, either in person, or with a mail-in absentee ballot, in spite of attempts to make it more difficult.

Second, learn about the candidates. There will be a number of opportunities to find out who deserves your vote in the weeks to come. The League of Women Voters (LWV) will be posting candidate information on their Vote411.org website. Though it's not certain yet, they may also host candidate forums in the future. FlintBeat.com is running a series of articles on each ward in the city, and the candidates running in those wards. The Tom Sumner Radio Program may also invite can-

didates for interviews. The program is broadcast on WFOV, 92.1 from 9 a.m. to noon, Monday through Friday, and programs are available on Sumner's website, tomsumnerprogram.com. Many of the candidates have their own websites where voters can learn their views and contact them.

Several of the candidates have already become involved in their communities by leading neighborhood clean-ups or similar activities. Recently, *East Village Magazine* covered an event at Kearsley Park where five candidates worked together on Memorial Day to clean up the park. Others are likely to be scheduled in the future. Joining with any of those efforts will not only clean up your neighborhood, but will also give you an opportunity to meet the candidates. Many will be going door-to-door, to meet voters over the next month.

Key questions for the candidates

However you do it, take the time to learn about who is running in your ward. Each voter may have their own concerns and questions, and there are a thousand questions that any of us could ask, but here's a short list of some issues that all of the candidates should be willing to address.

- What personal skills do you bring to the role of councilperson?
- What solutions can you offer to end the division and conflict in the city council?
- What do you see as the major problem facing the city of Flint today?
- What do you see as the major problem facing your ward today?
- Do you see yourself primarily as a voice for your ward or the whole city?
- How much do you know about the city budget? Where does most of the money go? Where does most of it come from?
- How should Flint work

with other governments in Genesee County?

- Are you familiar with the Michigan Municipal League and the resources they can offer to local officials?
- And finally, how can your constituents contact you?

What to expect and what to hope for

Whoever is elected to serve on Flint's next city council, we should hope for the best, but we should also be realistic. Some of the same problems that we face today will still be there. There will be personality conflicts. There will be racial conflicts. And most significantly there will be the challenge of dealing with Flint's shrinking population and tax base, as many of our problems continue to mount. It's easier to govern when everything is growing and there is plenty of money. It's a lot tougher when a council is trying to deal with a shrinking city.

Let's hope the next city council can face the problems realistically and honestly, and step back from the rancor and conflict that we've seen in recent years, and begin to lead the city of Flint in a positive direction.

To make sure that happens, take the time to learn about the candidates, and get out and vote on Aug. 3.

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

Support community journalism!

Donations to *East Village Magazine* are tax deductible.

For easy giving, go to: eastvillagemagazine.org

July Humor

Kofi Brown artist/author – houseofkofi@gmail.com



“There appears to be some confusion as to who is the center of your universe!”

**Lead/galvanized
tainted pipes replaced
so far in Flint:
9,997**

According to city sources as of May 21, 2021, there have been excavations of pipes at 27,007 homes and 9,997 lead and/or galvanized steel pipes have been replaced.

**COLLEGE CULTURAL
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**
To get notice of CCNA Zoom meetings,
send an email with your name to:
www.ccnafint@gmail.com



WRITERS WANTED

Writers are the life-blood of *East Village Magazine*. They are the story tellers, the analysts, and the truth tellers.

If you have writing skills, we need you. We publish daily in our online edition and monthly in our hard copy edition. As an *EVM* writer, you would work with other staff members to determine writing assignments, report on community events, and improve your skills through training, feedback, and editing.

AND YOU WOULD BE PAID A SMALL STIPEND (\$50) FOR EVERY ARTICLE PUBLISHED.

For more information, contact Ted Nelson:
810-235-2977 or
mainegame@aol.com



SHOWING THROUGH SEPTEMBER 5, 2021
4:00 PM TUESDAY-SUNDAY
7:00 PM THURSDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY

**Thank you to our sponsor,
The Whiting Foundation**

**Reserve tickets at
SloanLongway.org/SeaLions**

Dive into the world of a rare Australian Sea Lion pup and meet the people who are trying to save her species. Great for adults and kids 6 and older.

Sea Lions: Life By A Whisker is funded in part by the Genesee County Arts Education and Cultural Enrichment Millage. Your tax dollars are at work.

1310 E. Kearsley St. Flint, MI 48503 | 810-237-3400

... Neighborhoods (Continued from Page 6.)

ternet. Qualifying households could receive up to \$50 to help pay for internet access. For Tribal Lands, this benefit could extend to \$75.

According to a May 12 press release from Gov. Whitmer's office the EBB will also provide for a one-time device discount of up to \$100 for a laptop or desktop computer or tablet purchased through an eligible provider. Consumers receiving the discount are required to make a co-payment of more than \$10 and less than \$50.

"With children learning online and parents working from home, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how great the need for reliable and affordable high-speed internet access is in Michigan, just as it is everywhere in our country.

"Internet service is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity. I'm committed to making sure that we level the playing field so that everyone in our state has an equal opportunity to take advantage of online resources and participate fully in our society and economy," according to Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist.

Some of the criteria for eligibility are as follows:

- Has an income that is at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid or the FCC's Lifeline program;
- Approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school year;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Experienced a substantial loss of income through job loss or furlough since February 29, 2020

and the household had a total income in 2020 at or below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers; or

- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program.

In addition to federal money, Gov. Whitmer has dispersed more than \$20 million in Connecting Michigan Communities grants to approximately 12,000 homes and businesses. According to Gilchrist, the economic impact of these services is estimated to exceed \$25 million.

Beginning May 12, 2021, eligible households can enroll in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program through a participating broadband provider or directly with the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) at getemergencybroadband.org. Mail-in applications will also be available. Additional information about the Emergency Broadband Benefit is available at fcc.gov/broadband-benefit, or by calling 833-511-0311 between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. any day of the week.

No Two Stripes Alike offers tips on animal control and conservation

With the arrival of summer, Flint residents are reporting upticks in encounters with animals such as deer and groundhogs. Shekinah Wagner Lee, a zoologist for the conservation group No Two Stripes Alike (N2SA), offered information about animal control services and tips for dealing with rodents and other animals.

Zoologist Shekinah Wagner Lee from the conservation group No 2 Stripes Alike (N2SA). (Photo source: Lee's Facebook profile photo.)

According to Lee, one good way to keep rodents from invading your lawn is to use pellets or sprays to repel them. These can be found at any large chain store, such as Walmart.

Another method for keeping unwanted animals out is by keeping yards free of woodpiles, overgrown bushes, or pet food. "If there is space for them to hide and run under, these are the yards they're going to want to be in," Lee said,

"So, anything that's clean-cut



**Zoologist Shekinah Wagner Lee
from the conservation group
No 2 Stripes Alike
Photo source: Lee's Facebook profile**

or free of debris, they're not going to want to stick around." Odors from garbage cans, even ones that are empty, are also very attractive to animals and so N2SA recommends spraying down garbage cans or keeping them in the garage.

To frighten off unwanted creatures, Lee said the biggest deterrent is having a dog with free run of the yard. Lee also said that simple things like sprinklers and even small pinwheels that turn in the wind can be helpful.

"Absence of movement in a yard is a welcoming sign to them," Lee said. "If you can have motion-activated sprinklers or motion-activated lights, all of these types of things keep these animals away, as well."

EVM reporter Coner Segren can be reached at csegren@umich.edu.

... Worms

(Continued from Page 20.)

tists don't really know that much about them.

Composting worms are not necessarily the same as bait worms, but people raise all kinds of different worms for all kinds of different reasons. Mostly, people farm worms for the casting, the final product we end up with in a very complicated dance of nature decomposing. Some people feed their worms their vacuum debris, hair clippings, mowed grass, and raked leaves, maybe just to experiment with what works best and what doesn't work at all.

Everybody does it differently and everybody swears by their particular methods. *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof and Joanne Olszewski is a good source too, arguably the standard guide since 1982. Worm farming, it turns out, is huge, it's all over, YouTube is full of videos, and you can see a lot about it on TV.

Once I received my worm bin and the worms I ordered, I put it all together and got it going. Soon, I saw them multiplying. I figured I was doing it right and so bought two more, bigger worm bins because it was so fun and easy, such a great experience. Who would have thought shredding boxes and feeding it to worms would be so thrilling?

There's a little work to it, but that's a lot of the fun, getting in there, flipping things around, seeing the worms, finding their cocoons, harvesting castings, adding grit. I got a little crazy and picked up some ground oyster shells, a box of crab meal, Azomite, biochar, and throw in a little from time to time. It reminded me of the way my sister and I would cook up imaginary

concoctions in the sandbox as children, in some of my most primal memories.

Everything is working out very well to date. I have a bunch of castings when I bother harvesting, which is just sifting what was once shredded cardboard and vegetables and coffee grounds and pencil shavings through a half-inch gold pan into a quarter-inch gold pan — still daydreaming the sandbox memories.

Next it goes through an eighth-inch gold pan and into a five-gallon bucket — it's black gold, good dirt for planting, good for making liquid fertilizer tea, desirable to those who grow plants and take a microbial approach. It looks like black mulch in the landscaping of people's backyards, and it's good for small talk. It turns out, I have no use for the castings, but I have them, so I'll share.

My worms thrive on neglect, so throwing lettuce and vegetable scraps in once a week might be over-feeding them, but I might forget to check on them one week here or there, giving them time to move around and populate different sections of the bins, maybe. I can't see them.

When I go digging (I prefer to leave them alone) I see capacity-level populations and lots of cocoons, everybody hungry, plenty of food rotting on top as the decomposition process takes place among bacteria with a pleasant, soil-scent like a spring rain. Among all my weird COVID online purchases, the worm farm has been the most actively interesting and has now become my go-to topic of awkward social interactions.

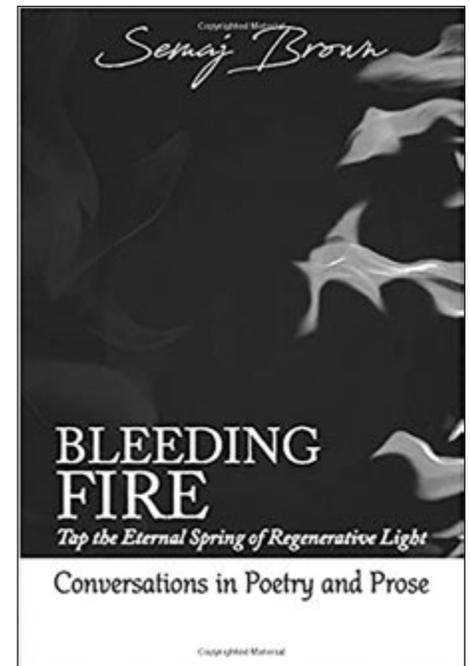
EVM Reporter Ernie C. Thayer can be reached at eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com.

... Poet

(Continued from Page 11.)

an "arborlune" — a stringed instrument he literally made from backyard branches.

Brown has performed widely in Flint and Detroit, including at the launch of *Bleeding Fire* at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. She was part of the 2017 "Women of a New Tribe" exhibit at



the Flint Institute of Arts and created a poem inspired by the show called "Mother Ocean." This biographical information is from a November 2019 article by *EVM* Consulting Editor, Jan Worth-Nelson.

More information about Flint's Poet Laureate Semaj Brown can be found at www.semajbrown.com.

EVM Managing Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomtravis@gmail.com.



Village Life

Worms in Lockdown: my “dark, silent, lazy hobby” rescues me in socially awkward scenes

By Ernie C. Thayer

As the world came quietly back to life this spring, an awful lot of people have been showing me their flower beds and gardens to share their recent efforts. I’ve always been partial to artificial burbling brooks and little fountains or waterfalls in a garden, like the garden around the Koi pond in my family’s backyard. I grew up with the waterlilies and flowering lotus.

Nothing can compare to the gardens of my childhood as I remember them. So, this spring, standing around looking at other people’s flowers, I find myself in a socially awkward situation. I get the impression nobody wants to hear about the enchanted gardens of my childhood, or my inability to plant, grow, or maintain a garden of any variety myself. But something has to be said, to at least to show that I’m interested and listening,

So I tell them about my worms.

Oddly enough, any time I find myself talking about my worms, I get mixed responses.

There’s nothing particularly rare about the hobby, nothing strange or unique; everybody knows somebody who raises worms, I’m sure. I’m usually met with some small talk about composting, the environment, natural fertilizers, but I mostly get questions like: “Really?” “How did you get into that?” “Why?”

So here’s how it happened. Last year during the lockdown, by some trick of luck my income tripled in the summer months; \$600 checks kept showing up in my account, and in the back of my head I began to figure the plague was a natural response from the Earth. As I filled up garbage bags weekly, in my stasis, I wondered what would decompose and what would float forever. I felt guilty about my carbon footprint and thought I should make an effort to replace my divot.

Maybe it was some strategically placed advertising about worms when

the timing was just right and my bank account heavy with coin, but my fascination started long before that — in the sporting goods section of K-Mart in 1987, specifically, where I saw a bait-box starter kit with food, bedding, and a place to house the worms right there next to the mini-fridge full of live bait.

A worm farm, a perfect pet, a hobby, a little something to occupy my young imagination. I was fascinated by things I couldn’t see. I thought worms would be a perfect addition to my otherwise spoiled life. But my father disagreed. Claiming there was no way I



Red Wigglers

Photo Source: vegasworms.com

would collect worms off the driveway after a rain to keep in a box, he probably bought me a book and we went on our merry way. I wasn’t used to being told “no” to one of my wants; I have remembered that moment for decades.

In grad school I did manage to pursue my worm fascination and got myself a bait-box — the same one I had asked for 20 years earlier. But I didn’t have much luck raising something I couldn’t see, after all.

Still, my dream of being a worm farmer didn’t die. I tried again a decade later with a DIY setup made with big plastic totes and a very thorough misunderstanding of worms, soil, and

management.

For a minute there, I produced a thriving and explosive population of worms with a few cups of bait and some vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, and leaves from the yard.

Then one day they all died. A little part of me did too.

I wonder, what kind of connection can be made between mortality, wasted time, worms, and a man’s midlife? Probably very much so, but it would take some thinking. What was the power of these worms? It might have been a need to cure some deep failures on my part, or the extra cash, or high hopes or, for that matter, a lack thereof.

Truth be told, it’s a dark, silent, lazy hobby,

Whatever, an all-in-one, fail-me-not ad that popped up in the corner of the screen was too damned tempting: A worm farm, simple enough for a child, complete with a little yellow rake, with a space efficient counter-top compactness in a bright green and terracotta bin. Just add worms and food scraps, made in the U.S.A. It hooked me. I couldn’t resist and ordered it.

Somewhere along the line, I joined a Facebook group about indoor composting/worm farming and found no shortage of contrarians, jokers, and digital online ne’re-do-wells in the comments. But I also found lots of information and different perspectives.

I got red wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*) specifically, but whatever you get when you order is what you get -- they could be some kind of nightcrawler, or blue worm, or whatever. According to Worm Facts, there are 2700 different kinds of earthworms, yet ... most earthworms look pretty close to the same, and, as Amy Stewart documents in her book *The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievement of Earthworms*, scien-

(Continued on Page 19.)