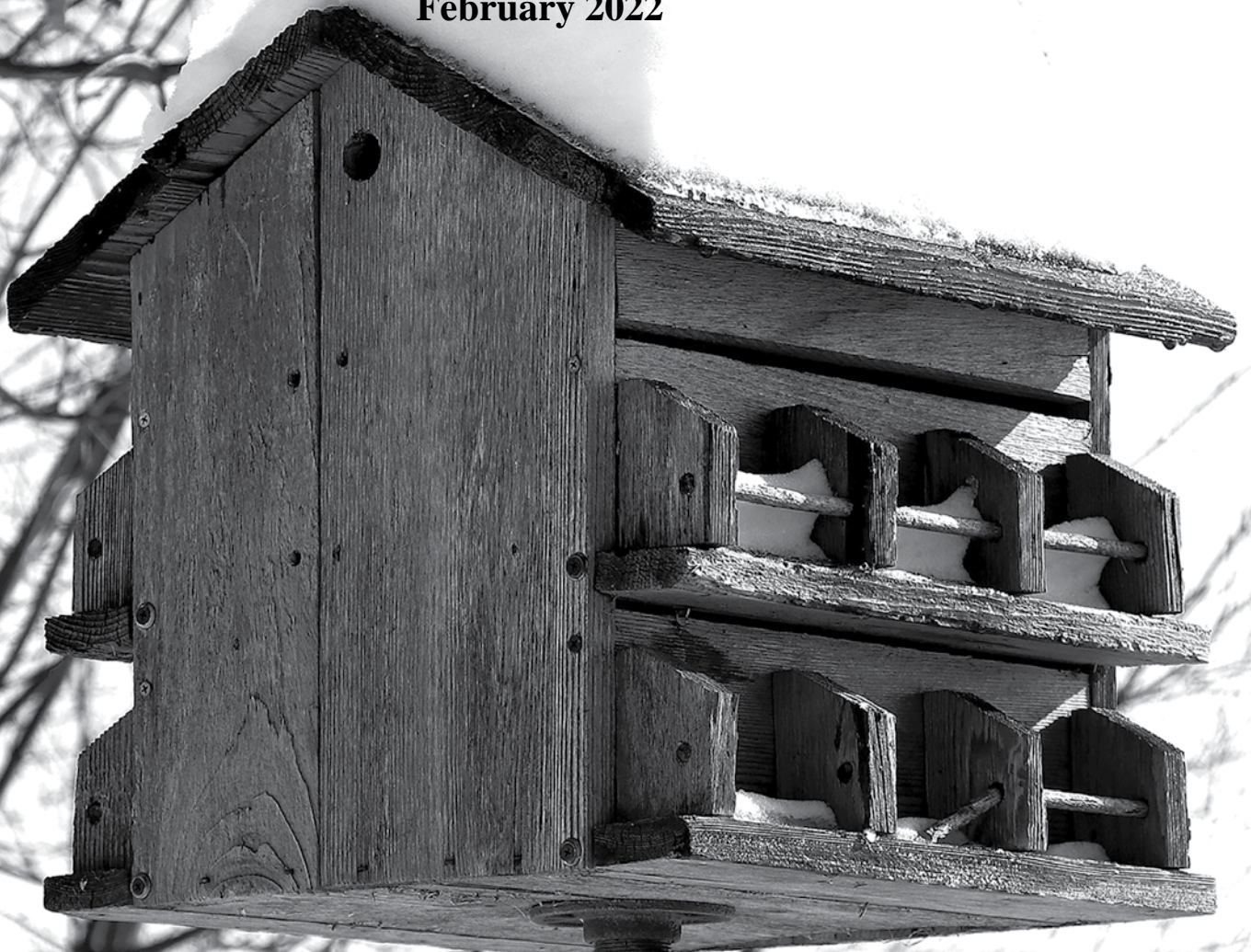


# East Village

Magazine

February 2022



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# East Village Magazine

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## Commentary

# American democracy is facing serious threats: Let's make sure it survives

By Paul Rozycki

*"The ship of democracy, which has weathered all storms, may sink through the mutiny of those on board." — Grover Cleveland*

*"While democracy in the long run is the most stable form of government, in the short run, it is among the most fragile." — Madeleine Albright*

**D**emocracy isn't easy. It's not easy to make it work well. And it's not easy to keep it.

In our place and time in history, we assume that democracy is the best way to govern a nation, and given the choice, anyone would prefer a democratic government. As Winston Churchill famously said "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others."

But it hasn't always been that way. More than a few serious political philosophers thought that democracy was a poor way to govern (Plato, Thomas Hobbes). For most of recorded history, democracy was very much the exception rather than the rule. More than a few nations tried to make democracy work, only to fall back into an authoritarian dictatorship when the going got tough. (Ancient Rome, 1990s Russia, 1930s Germany, and several Eastern European nations today)

Even in our own nation, it took some time before we gradually welcomed 'all the people' into the democratic system. It took a century and a half before non-property owners, African-Americans, women, and 18 year-olds, were allowed to vote.

Yet, with all the changes and growth in the idea of democracy, it will work only if we have trust in the system. Those who are governed need to believe that, win or lose, the system is "fair."

### Declining trust in democracy

Today trust in our democratic institutions seems shakier than ever.

The election of 2020, the events of Jan. 6, and the charges that the election was "stolen" or unfair, are only the most current signs of the weakening of democracy in the U.S.

The trust in many of our institutions have shrunk in the last half century. In 1964, 77 percent of the public believed that the government would do the right thing most of the time, but by 2021 only 24 percent were willing to say the same thing.

The reasons for that are many. The Vietnam War, Watergate, presidential scandals, economic challenges, rant radio, and social media, which amplify the angriest and most conspiratorial of voices, all fostered distrust and cynicism of government. On the local level, the Flint water crisis, and the endless conflict in the Flint City Council, are additional reasons distrust has grown.

But even with the growing cynicism and distrust of the system, at least one thing seemed to remain true: the belief that the people could govern themselves by electing their officials. Whatever the details, trust in the electoral process is the essential core of any democratic system.

Within the last few years that core belief is under attack as never before.

### The January 6 insurrection

On Jan. 6, 2021, a riotous mob attacked police and smashed windows and doors, as they stormed the U.S. Capitol when the 2020 election results for Joe Biden were about to be certified.

*(Continued on Page 16.)*

Cover: Multi-family bird condo in winter



**Photo of the Month: Winter branches in their coats of frost**

**(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)**

## Education Beat

### *Leadership teams reshaped at Flint Community Schools – McIntosh out, Green in as board president; Supt. Jones proposes new look for central administration team*

*By Harold C. Ford*

The frequent makeover of board and administrative leadership teams at Flint Community Schools (FCS) was front and center at the board’s annual organization meeting Jan. 12.

Danielle Green replaced Carol McIntosh as the school board’s president. Joyce Ellis-McNeal moved into the vice president position, replacing Green. Adrian Walker replaced Ellis-McNeal as the board’s new secretary. Chris Del Morone was chosen to fill the assistant secretary-treasurer position previously held by Walker.

Laura MacIntyre was the only board member returned to the position she held in 2021, as the board’s treasurer.

Additionally, Kevelin Jones – FCS superintendent for two months since his appointment Nov. 17 last year

– proposed a new-look structure for FCS central administration.

#### **Contested presidency and vice presidency**

Three persons were nominated for the board’s top position: Green; McIntosh; and Del Morone. Green claimed the president’s position on the first ballot with votes from Ellis-McNeal, MacIntyre, Walker, and Green. McIntosh received votes from Del Morone, Trustee Allen Gilbert, and McIntosh.

Ellis-McNeal captured the vice presidency by a similar 4-3 margin with support from MacIntyre, Walker, Del Morone, and Ellis-McNeal.

Walker (secretary), MacIntyre (treasurer), and Gilbert (assistant secre-

tary-treasurer) all received winning 7-0 vote margins.

#### **A “green” board**

Except for Green and McIntosh who are in their sixth years of FCS board service – both elected in 2016 – all other board members have served on the panel for one year or less.

After taking two of the top three spots in the November 2020 general election, Ellis-McNeal and MacIntyre took their seats in January, 2021. Walker was chosen the same month by the FCS board to fill the unoccupied seat of a third general election winner, Anita Moore, who did not fully meet board requirements.

In September 2021, Del Morone

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

## Schools ...

(Continued from Page 4.)

and Gilbert were picked to fill seats that had been suddenly vacated due to the resignations of board veterans Diana Wright and Vera Perry the month before.



**FCS past President  
Carol McIntosh**

Photo source: FCS website

### Graceful transition

McIntosh had served as the board's president for one year during calendar year 2021. It was an uncertain year marked by a pandemic, infrastructure challenges, financial uncertainties, unexpected board resignations, changes in administration, declining student enrollment, low standardized test scores, staff departures, board-administration tensions, and a controversial parting of ways with the district's long-serving legal counsel.

Board meetings in 2021 were often lengthy, generally running three to five hours, and frequently marked by obvious tensions between and among its members.

Nonetheless, McIntosh was gracious in defeat.

"It was an honor to serve you [the public]," McIntosh said. "I'm sure Ms. Green will do an amazing job. And I'm in full support of all our officers no matter where I sit. My fight will always be for our students, the people who work in our district and in our community. So, thank

you."

According to her LinkedIn page, Green "was born and raised in Flint, Michigan." She received a General Studies degree from Mott Community College, a Bachelor of Science degree from Central Michigan University with a concentration in Public Administration, and a Masters in Educational Leadership from Wayne State University.



**Newly elected FCS President  
Danielle Green**

Photo source: FCS website

### Proposed new look for central administration

Superintendent Jones proposed a new look for the central administration team:

- Keiona Murphy's duties as the district's assistant superintendent would include: "state and federal programs; technology; director of student and family services (enrollment); pupil accounting/programmer; athletics."

- The executive director of academics (vacant at present) would preside over: "(the) office of academics; building principals; PE (presumably professional education); MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports) and health services; student data."

- The executive director of HR (human resources) is a position currently occupied by Jorgina Rubin on an interim basis.

- The executive director of finance, a post currently occupied by Ayunna Dompheh, also includes a director of operations.

In 2021, Jones became Flint's eighth superintendent in 16 years following the contentious departure of Anita Steward. A lawsuit was filed by Steward's attorney, Tom Pabst, charging breach of contract and other violations.

In the past 18 months, FCS administrative changes began, but did not end with the superintendent's office. It included the office of assistant superintendent, director of operations, director of finance, and multiple changes at the building(s) level.

An acrimonious ending of the decades-long relationship with its former legal counsel, The Williams Firm, may yet end up in court.

Eileen Tomasi, FCS school health coordinator for 11 years, stepped down in Sept. 2021. That position is still vacant.

EVM education beat reporter can be reached at [hcford1185@gmail.com](mailto:hcford1185@gmail.com).

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# Despite public opposition, plans for Ajax Asphalt plant move forward

By Harold C. Ford

Public opposition and appeals to state and Federal regulatory agencies have thus far failed to derail plans for an asphalt plant in Genesee Township very near northeast Flint. An air permit was approved by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) in November allowing Ajax Materials Corporation to move forward.

The construction site is within an industrial park on Energy Drive adjacent to the St. Francis Prayer Center, 2381 Carpenter Rd, and only one-tenth mile from northeast Flint neighborhoods. They are “some of the lowest-income and predominantly black neighborhoods in Flint,” according to Mona Monroe-Younis, executive director of Environmental Transformation Movement of Flint (ETM).



Protest sign on the grounds of St. Francis Prayer Center on Carpenter Road  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Opposition to the plant is organizing around the issue of pollution in the context of environmental racism. Genesee Township is 80 percent white; few of its residents live in close proximity to the proposed plant.

About 86 percent of the people within one mile of the proposed facility are people of color, according to industrial hygienist and Flint resident Peterson Cullimore.

Flint’s population is 56 percent black; its poverty rate is 39 percent, more than twice that of Genesee Township.

Some available data support the protestors’ arguments. A Jan. 2, 2022

report by the Detroit Free Press “found a connection between where air pollution permits are approved and communities where long-standing racial and socioeconomic disparities persist. Poor and minority populations make up a larger share of the population in areas where an air pollution permit was recently approved than in areas without permit activity.”

The Free Press reported that only 11 permit requests submitted to EGLE have been rejected in the past seven years while 1,700 were approved.

## Opposition broad based

A broad coalition of groups and individuals have organized in opposition to the proposed plant, including Earthjustice, Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, the National Housing Law Project, ETM, Flint Rising, and the St. Francis Prayer Center.

In a Dec. 18 statement, coalition members charged, “If built, the asphalt plant would release hundreds of tons of air pollution every year in a community that already has one of the highest rates of residents being hospitalized because of asthma in Michigan.”

According to the Free Press, “Genesee County’s asthma hospitalization rate is nearly double the statewide average, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.”

“There’s a whole host of industrial facilities along Dort Highway within half a mile,” said Mona Monroe-Younis, ETM’s executive director, at a Nov. 15 community forum. “All of these facilities together are creating a high level of asthma.”

Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley issued a statement Nov. 15 following the permit approval by EGLE. It read, in part:

“The decision to approve the Ajax Materials Corporation’s permit is very disappointing ... This continues to happen in poor to moderate communities with black and brown residents ... without consideration of our families’ health

and safety first.”

“Adding one more plant is very concerning to us,” added Monroe-Younis. “We’re all saying with one united voice, ‘This plant should not be here. Putting it here is an act of environmental racism.’”

“We’re worried about the combined risk of these hazardous air pollutants and air toxics, namely the ones that are suspected or confirmed human carcinogens which have been confirmed



Peterson Cullimore, industrial hygienist, Windborne Group, partner  
Photo source: LinkedIn

in asphalt fumes,” Cullimore said.

“We’re also interested in odor,” added Cullimore, “not being able to open our windows ... Odor itself can be grounds for denying a permit like this.” Dust, noise pollution, light pollution, and the negative impact on real estate prices – thus widening the racial wealth gap – are other concerns.

“Here we go again,” said Quincy Murphy, city councilperson for Flint’s 3rd Ward, in referencing the city’s infamous water crisis, 2014 to the present.

At a “listening session” in Flint’s Riverpark neighborhood on Dec. 18, 2021, Murphy heard from local residents, or their representatives, who would be most directly affected by the proposed

(Continued on Page 8.)

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

For this issue, a selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of Feb. 4. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our March issue, email info about your event to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com) by Feb. 26.

## **Buckham Gallery**

Now-Feb. 12

### **Small Talk**

Michael Reedy, Bria Spolans

Feb. 12-Mar. 19

### **Dialects and the Decommodified:**

**The Specters of Capital:** Morgan

Craig

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For more info go to <https://z-upload.facebook.com/events/276017247848929/>

## **St. Cecilia Society**

Feb. 13, 2 p.m. Sunday

Featured performers will be soprano Kim Streby, baritone Robert Hoag, jazz singer Tracy McDonough, and pianist Pat Cronley at MacArthur Recital Hall

Feb. 27, 2 p.m.

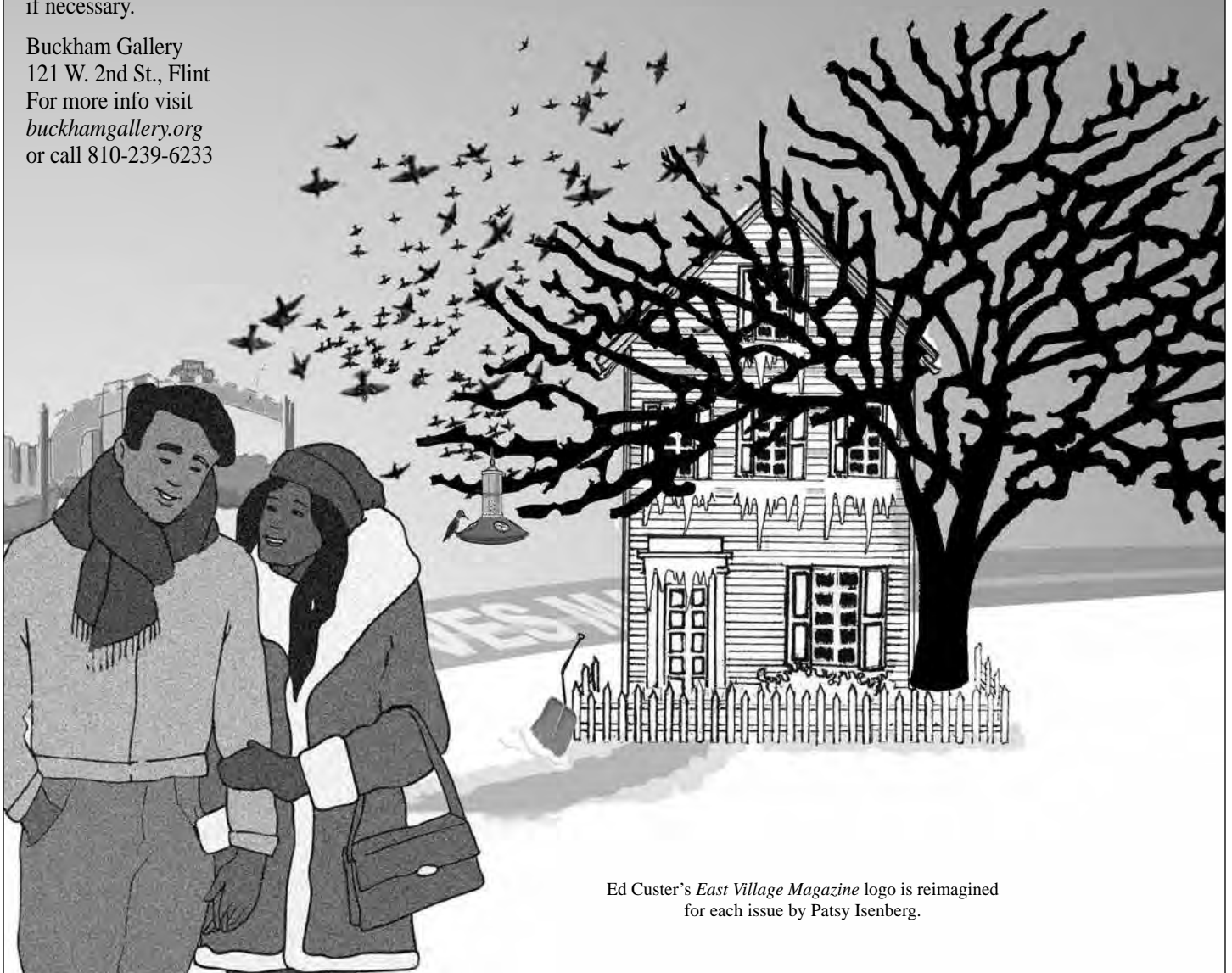
Winners of the Student Awards auditions will perform at MacArthur Recital Hall

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

# Ajax Asphalt ...

(Continued from Page 6.)

Ajax plant:

- Ted Zahrfeldt, director, St. Francis Prayer Center: “This is a fight. This is like Goliath ... coming in; we’re like David, but we don’t even have a good slingshot ...

Genesee Township seems to have no care or concern for the community, the community where this plant is going.”

- LaShaya Darisaw, political and organizational consultant: “This is a civil rights issue ... based on its pattern of discriminating against black and brown communities.”

- Unidentified resident: “This asphalt plant is greatly going to destroy the Flint River because of their (Ajax) water runoff.”

“This is an ideal situation for the state to stand up for environmental justice and demand a cumulative risk assessment prior to any permitting,” Cullimore said. “We will not trade our health for ... freshly paved roads.”

## EPA research confirms health consequences

As reported by *East Village Magazine (EVM)* on Aug. 13, 2021, a 2015 study by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) confirmed the deleterious impact of asphalt plants on the health of nearby residents:

“Asphalt plants mix gravel and sand with crude oil derivatives to make the asphalt used to pave roads, highways, and parking lots across the U.S. These plants release millions of pounds of chemicals into the air during production each year, including many cancer-causing toxic air pollutants such as arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, cadmium ... hexane, phenol, polycyclic organic matter, and toluene ...”

“Other toxic chemicals are released into the air as the asphalt is loaded into trucks and hauled from the plant site, including volatile organic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and very fine condensed particulates.

“Exposure to these air toxics may cause cancer, central nervous system

problems, liver damage, respiratory problems ... coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath, severe irritation of skin, headaches, dizziness, and nausea. Animal studies show PAHs affect reproduction, cause birth defects and are harmful to the immune system.”

## Appeals to state and federal agencies

In addition to several public information/protest meetings, anti-asphalt plant activists have formally raised their concerns about the asphalt plant in the following ways:

- Sept. 21, 2021: Official comments filed with EGLE regarding air quality;
- Oct. 27, 2021: Request for EPA’s External Civil Rights Compliance Office to review possible Title VI violation of the Civil Rights Act;
- Nov. 8, 2021: Administrative complaint filed with the EPA contending EGLE did not sufficiently study risks/impacts on Flint community;
- Dec. 15, 2021: Administrative complaint filed with Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) alleging various civil rights violations.

None of the above actions have been successful so far in halting construction of the plant.

Ajax received its air permit approval on Nov. 15, 2021. The next day Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer sent an email contending EGLE “took every measure it could ... to protect residents in the plant’s vicinity.” Those permit protections included:

- Cannot burn waste oil;
- Limitations on sulfur content in fuels burned;
- More stringent smokestack tests for pollutants;
- Development of a fugitive dust plan.

## EVM seeking response from Ajax, state and federal governments

EVM is seeking responses to the proposed asphalt plant in Genesee Township from Ajax itself, and from officials

and agencies at the state and federal levels. Those include: U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters; U.S. Congressman Dan Kildee (5th District); the EPA; HUD; Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer; State Senator Jim Ananich (27th District); Michigan Representative David Martin (48th District); EGLE, Michigan Department of Environment; Genesee County Commissioner Gary Peppin (9th District); and Genesee Township Supervisor Daniel Eashoo.

EVM will report on their responses in its print and online editions.



**Theresa Landrum, Evergreen Advisory Board member**

Photo source: Evergreen Action

## Lessons from 48217

Theresa Landrum, a lifelong resident of southeast Detroit, said at the Nov. 15 forum she was introduced to the possibility of environmental injustice when the local Sierra Club’s Rhonda Anderson asked, “Did you ever think that the illnesses in your community were being caused ... where you live at and what is surrounding you as far as industry?”

Her neighborhood, known by its 48217-zip code, was found to be one of the most polluted communities in the nation. Landrum survived a bout with cancer; her parents did not. Nor did a disproportionately high number of neighbors in the predominantly African American community.

More than 40 pollution-spewing enterprises were/are located inside 48217, Landrum said. An asphalt company, Marathon Petroleum Company Asphalt

(Continued on Page 9.)



## Ajax Asphalt ...

(Continued from Page 8.)

Terminal, was but one of those enterprises.

Landrum and her environmental justice compatriots have lobbied four Michigan governors and three directors of the Michigan Department of Environmental Equality (MDEQ) to address the “cumulative impact” on the residents of her community by some four dozen polluters.

Landrum told Nov. 15 forum participants that, “Hundreds, and maybe thousands, of chemicals (were) being allowed to emit into the air ... we began to understand that these different kinds of cancers, these different kinds of breathing health issues could possibly be connected to our environment.”

The local Beaumont health facility reported a disproportionately high number of childhood asthma cases in 48217.

“That was unprecedented,” said Landrum. When stonewalled by MDEQ for the given reason of “no data”, Landrum and other activists created a “health survey” that was distributed by local churches.

“They found that 48217 was the most polluted zip code ... in the state of Michigan,” recalled Landrum. “We had some of the highest cancer rates across the nation.” EGLE refuted the information. It took two more years for the Center for Disease Control to confirm the results of the health survey generated by Landrum and her colleagues.

Landrum said Standard & Poor’s, an American credit rating agency, reported an across-the-nation rise of 20 percent in property values while, at the same time, it reported a 56 percent drop in 48217 property values.

“That shows you,” Landrum asserted, “the data is there, but the regulatory agencies and the local governments and even our state legislatures do not act on behalf of our residents.”

“I feel that the inaction of the regulatory agency of EGLE is not the inability to do it, it’s the unwillingness to do it,” charged Landrum. “They know that these industries are impacting the health of the residents.”

“Over the years, we have not had a very favorable relationship with EGLE because the culture, the mentality is siloed,” alleged Landrum. “One department does not talk to the other department ... That is not for the benefit of the residents.”

“Who has done a long-term study of the health of the residents to show that the standards set by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) ... is adequate for human life to exist?” asked Landrum rhetorically. “‘Nobody.’ So, we have to do our own work and our own studies.”

Landrum declared that state and federal governments have statutory provisions to investigate the “cumulative impact” of pollution(s). “But they don’t,” said Landrum. “Why? Because big money has the money and the ability to lobby against that and it’s not favorable to their company.”

Landrum and her environmental justice colleagues are asking for a “health impact assessment” and “cumulative impact assessment” for every permit that is considered.

“Michigan has industrialized the lives of people,” said Landrum. “Industry is more important than people’s lives. We’re casualties of industrial greed.”

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

## Flint Registry ...

(Continued from Page 15.)

by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) National Center for Environmental Health to Michigan State University College of Human Medicine’s Division of Public Health.

### To “find help for my son” - Flint Registry participant

“We signed up for the Flint Registry to access resources and find some help. My son was diagnosed autistic and referred to Neurodevelopmental Center of Excellence — that’s really helped us getting him services in school and autism behavioral therapy,” Maxine Onstott, a Flint Registry participant, stated.

### Community engagement

According to the report, components of the Flint Registry’s community-engaged effort included, but were not limited to, establishing a community advisory board, conducting focus groups, creating a parent partners group, integrating a youth advisory council (Flint Youth Justice League), hiring and training community members physically located in Flint, hosting community events, developing a community ambassador program, collecting pre-enrollment feedback, obtaining Community Ethics Review Board (CERB) approval, recruiting and hiring a Director of Community Implementation and Engagement, conducting robust grassroots community outreach, and more.

The Flint Registry Community Advisory Board promotes communication between residents, parents, public agencies, and schools to facilitate input, increase community awareness, and coordinate activities to benefit those served by the Flint Registry.

The advisory board is co-chaired by Dr. Lawrence Reynolds and

(Continued on Page 17.)

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# Writer Gary Gildner looks back on a Flint that “gave joy to my youth”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

To understand how writer Gary Gildner feels about his Flint childhood in the 1950s, some Latin is in order.

Flint -- specifically Flint's legendary Holy Redeemer Catholic Church and school and its devoted diaspora -- is at the heart of the second essay and central to many of the others in Gildner's new collection, *How I Married Michele and Other Journeys*, just out from BkMk Press in Kansas City. The Flint essay is titled “Juventutem Meam.”

For 21st century Catholics, accustomed now to the decades of the English mass, the words might as well be Greek.

But if you were an altar boy in the Fifties, as Gildner was, in the era before Pope John 23rd yanked Latin from the sacristy, you would know in your bones, from endless repetition, that “Juventutem Meam” are the words that start the Latin mass.

They mean, “To God who gives joy to my youth,” Gildner confirms.

Though the stories are not simple and their plot lines not always happy, joy permeates his memories.

“In the boom years following WWII, Flint was amazing,” he recalls in a phone interview. “I couldn't have been happier.”

Always prolific and still vigorously productive at 83, Gildner has published more than 20 books, including eight poetry collections, four short story collections, a novel, one collection of essays, and two memoirs. His 2008 book *The Warsaw Sparks* documented his adventure coaching a baseball team in Poland when Gildner was on a Fulbright professorship in 1987-88. He had

a second Fulbright in the former Czechoslovakia in 1992-93.

The Flint of Gildner's memories is largely gone -- the school closed in 2009, the buildings demolished in 2019. He has not been back since 2014, a period of eight years that has torpedoed the city into a world unimagined in so many ways, But he retains an ongoing, intense writer's love for what the city was, and its effect on him endures.



Writer Gary Gildner  
(Photo by Daniel Lacroix)

Born in West Branch in an apartment over his Gildner grandfather's lumber yard, Gildner was the oldest of three kids. When he was six, his parents moved the family to Flint, where his father, an auto mechanic, carpenter and gardener, sought opportunities from the post-war boom.

Housing was hard to come by following World War II, but Gildner's father found a converted garage across the street from Bendle High School. After a few months, the family moved to a house at 2014 Buder St., Gildner still remembers.

“My dad promised my mother it was temporary,” and eventually

he built her a house off Maple Road where she lived the rest of her life.

“A lot of my poems come from that house [on Buder Street],” Gildner says. “It had a lush back yard with a magnificent cherry tree, two long rows of Concord grapes which my mother made jelly from every year. The house behind us was owned by the Hill family -- their son Eddie was my best ‘non-Catholic’ buddy.”

He says he loved the nuns at Holy Redeemer -- Sisters of the Holy Cross from Notre Dame -- and Holy Redeemer added one year at a time from eighth grade on just in time for him to graduate from high school there.

Gildner says he used the Latin phrase for his Flint essay as a tribute, because “I did appreciate very much what those nuns gave me and also other things that the Catholic Church gave me -- they gave me drama.”

Two examples make his point.

One time playing softball, his favorite teacher, Sister Lenore, was pitching.

“I caught one of her easy pitches, and I drove it straight back at her. She had a gorgeous Italian nose and the ball landed smack on her nose and made it bloody. I thought, oh my god, I've broken that poor woman's nose,” he recalled, and in fact, “In subsequent days, it looked a little off center.”

But during the game, “She pulled a hanky out of her clothes and said, the blood has stopped, let's play ball. How could you not love a woman like that?”

The other involved a surre-

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## Gildner ...

(Continued from Page 10.)

al moment with one of the parish priests. The pastor of the parish at the time, Father Louis P. Gauthier, would give a home to a lot of priests who were troubled, Gildner recalls.

“One was a chaplain from WWII who suffered from PTSD. He was a big guy, carried himself like an athlete. I was serving mass with him one morning -- how we always began our day. The entire student body’s waiting for us to come out, but before we walk out of the sacristy to start mass, he spots my duffel bag with a football in it. He picks it up and he starts to hold it.

“You’re the quarterback, right? Show me how you grip the ball,” the priest demanded. “Now we’re talking about football -- the mass has completely flown out of his head, and he was retreating to a happy time -- because he was burdened. I didn’t know what the hell was going on, but I was on the priest’s side -- he had been so sad and that moment he was suddenly accessible.”

After Holy Redeemer, Gildner went on to Michigan State and eventually became a professor, retiring from Drake University in Des Moines to write full-time.

Like many Michiganders, Gildner inherited deep and braided Polish connections. His grandfather, Steve Szostak, immigrated to Michigan at 16 in the early 20th century. He worked in the factories in Detroit but saved up enough eventually to buy a “pretty little farm” up north, 187 acres where Gildner as a child spent blissful summer visits.

That grandfather, who spoke only Polish as a matter of principle, Gildner suspects, loved the Polish writer Joseph Conrad -- known

only to him as Józef Korzeniowski -- and kept a Conrad book in his pocket all his life. When he died, his wife buried the book under his arm. Gildner was 11 at the time and didn’t know anything about it. But later, Conrad became important to Gildner himself. Trying to track down more about his grandfather for a memoir, he found the unearthed connection with the Polish writer stunning.

The Flint essay is one of 15 in the collection, put together from more than 20 years of Gildner’s writing covering a lifetime of experiences -- not just in Flint, but at his Polish grandfather’s farm, in Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, in Iowa, Idaho and his current home in Tucson, Arizona.

His father and both siblings -- Gloria and Greg, both of whom stayed in the Grand Blanc/Flint area while Gildner journeyed the world -- have died, as well as his mother, who passed at 97 in 2014 in the house off Maple Road. The occasion of her death was his last visit to Flint. He has two children and three grandchildren from two previous marriages. He married Michele, a retired civil rights lawyer, in 2009.

Explaining the book’s title, Gildner says the many journeys of his life are what made it possible for him to marry again -- that each adventure of his life prepared him for the next. He says the book is a love letter to Michele, a way of explaining who he was and is.

He was aiming to understand, he says, “How you’re able to be a full human being with another person because of all your experiences. We are the sum of our scattered details, which aren’t so scattered after all,” he said.

“Our lives are messy, many great things are messy, democracy is messy -- something we have to put

up with.”

He eventually dropped away from Catholicism, partly because of a pressing need to find the truth.

“I’m ‘fallen away,’ but I don’t feel that I have fallen away from everything. I just separated myself from a certain amount of ritual and sloganeering. For people who have been raised as I was, there’s a certain complexity to it that ironically fits in beautifully to my need to try to discover ‘where the dog is buried.’”

It’s one of his favorite phrases, translated from Polish, a stand-in for finding out where the truth begins.

But Gildner understands that nailing down “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” remains as elusive as the mysteries his Holy Redeemer priests proffered.

Sometimes, he asserts, in the conclusion to the title essay, “Just plain old remembering ... is sometimes rich enough.”

“My history with Flint is ongoing,” Gildner summarized when asked about the hold the city has had on him. “I have never really left Flint. The reason why I was interested in fleeing Flint after high school was that I wanted to see more -- the world was much bigger than Flint, but I have come to learn that you can find the world in a molecule. Both approaches aim at finding the truth.

“Flint has given me a great deal and I am grateful for it,” he says. “I can’t imagine ever completely divorcing myself from Flint.”

More about Gary Gildner and his books available at [https://www.pw.org/directory/writers/gary\\_gildner](https://www.pw.org/directory/writers/gary_gildner)

*How I Married Michele* can be purchased through BkMk-Press.com or through your local bookstore.

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# “Sons: Seeing the Modern African American Male” exhibition at the FIA explores perceptions of Black men

By Tom Travis

Aiming to go beyond a photographic study, photographer Jerry Taliaferro hopes his exhibit will help the community explore “perceptions and biases” towards Black men.

“Recent events point to the urgent need for conversations about the contemporary Black American male,” Taliaferro said in a press release accompanying the show.

“Any effort, however humble, to foster an understanding of this largely misunderstood and often marginalized segment of the American population is of utmost importance,” Taliaferro added.

Taliaferro, 68, photographed men nominated by the community in early 2021. The 49 men photographed are divided into two sections: first a black and white photograph of just their face, and then later in the exhibition a larger photograph in color, where the subjects were instructed to “be themselves,” according to the press release.



**The exhibit is divided into two parts: first the small black and white photograph and second the brighter gallery with color photographs of the men.**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

The exhibit opened Jan. 22 and runs to April 16 in the Hodge and Henry Gallery.

The gallery is open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Entry to the exhibit is free for Genesee County residents. More details about the location and COVID protocols can be found at <https://flintarts.org/visit/>

admission.

On the eve of the opening of the exhibition at a private showing for the men photographed, their families and the media, *East Village Magazine (EVM)* spoke with four men and their family members.

**“Just because our skin is different doesn’t mean we can’t make an impact in the world.”**

**- Dennis Mitchell**



**Portrait of Dennis Mitchell**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

*“Just because our skin is different doesn’t mean we can’t make an impact in the world. We’re all, at the end of the day, human beings. We all breathe the same way, we eat the same way. We should always be united and not in conflict with each other.”*

“I would want other races and all people to see this as a representation of Black kings making a difference in the world.”

Asked what he hopes visitors will take away from the exhibit Mitchell said, “I would want other races and all people to see this as a representation of Black kings making a difference in the world.”

*Mitchell added that it was “beyond words” to be a part of the*

*exhibit.*

**Dennis Mitchell**, 23, born and raised in Flint, said, “it’s an honor to be a part of the exhibit.” Mitchell is Director of Youth Services at the Flint and Genesee Group.

“I’m just the type that likes to ‘do the work’ and I don’t do things to get notoriety, I don’t do things to be recognized but the more work that I do the more recognized I am. So it is an honor to be recognized among these great Black men.”

**“I think that people should take away from this that we have made significant achievements and contributions to the society and to the world.”**

**- Leon Adams**



**Leon Adams with his wife Patricia Adams in front of his portrait by Taliaferro**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

**Leon Adams**, 72, of Flint, a retired engineer, attended the event with his wife Patricia Adams, 71.

**“This is a historical moment and I’m among great men here. All these guys have made significant achievements and I’m just happy to be a part of them.”**

*“I think that people should take away from this that we have made significant achievements and contributions to the society and to the world. And I think this shows only a*

*(Continued on Page 13.)*

## “Sons” exhibit ...

(Continued from Page 12.)

little tidbit of that here in reading the stories of all these men.”

Patricia Adams, Leon’s wife, accompanied her husband with her arm wrapped around his. She commented, “I’ve been smiling ever since his picture was taken. I’m excited about it. It’s a wonderful display and I hope people will come to the FIA to see this exhibit.

### Heartwarming message



**Deondre Chilton’s portrait in the exhibit.**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

**Deondre Chilton, Jr.**, 18, a Flint resident and Grand Blanc High School student is the youngest man photographed in the exhibit. “Being the youngest of the men in this exhibit, it’s really important to me because it lets me know that people are looking towards me as the future of this community.

“It’s ... really heartwarming to know that just a simple picture can capture so much about the person. And what they mean to our community,” Chilton said. “It’s very heartwarming to know that the community sees me as an important asset.”

He added, “I hope that those visiting the exhibit will realize the times are really in need of a change and the biases from before like the

Jim Crow era were just not necessary and they were too much to be going on in the first place.” Chilton added hopes that people walk away from this exhibit knowing that us as Black people are not a threat to them.

Chilton reflected on his experience of seeing the photographer’s previous Flint exhibit, Women of a New Tribe. He said, “The exhibit really opened up to me that Black people could be anything that they wanted to be and as big as they wanted to be.”

Chilton is in his 13th year at UM-Flint. He said he hopes to go on to study software engineering at UM-Flint, Kettering, Howard University, UM-Ann Arbor, or the Rochester Institute of Technology.

### Liveliness of a Black man



**Trevor Norman and his mother in front of his portrait**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

**Trevor Norman**, 28, described the exhibit as “positivity for Black men. One thing I really liked as I walked through the exhibit is that it shows everyone smiling rather than opposed to a straight face or a mean face. It helps to bring the vibrancy out, you can see everyone’s personality in these photos.”

Norman said he hopes when people leave after visiting this exhibit that they’ll realize things like, “they don’t have to lock their doors when I walk by.”

“Honestly just to show a different side than what the media shows. We all know that the media portray Black men in a negative way whether they’re doing crimes or they’re show-

ing the death of a Black man.

“But rather to show the liveliness of and the pureness of a Black man in this gallery -- you can’t put a price on that. It’s great to see,” Norman added.

Keisha Norman, 49, Trevor’s mother, said, “It means the world to me to see my son in this exhibit. It’s an opportunity for the rest of the world to see what I get to see every day -- which is a young man aspiring to do great things.”

“He’s a photographer, he’s a barber, he loves longboarding - he’s more than just face that some people see as a negativity towards Black people. There are so many positive things that are happening in the Black community and we need to highlight more of that instead of highlighting negative things.

“There are so many things that we can highlight ... those men need to be celebrated more for their achievements and the things they’re doing in education, helping the community and trying to bring families together and keeping families united.

“All of this is important ...we are doing this in our community. This exhibit helps to highlight those great things that our Black men are doing in our community.”

Pictured holding his camera in the photograph, Norman says he hopes to open his own gallery or partner with someone to open one where he can display his photographs.

“I think there are a lot of revelations to be had. We’re very proud of it,” said John Henry, FIA executive director.

“This is a tremendous survey of a very important community here in Flint. They have engaged in this project which exposes a lot of realities of what it means to be Black in America and Black in Flint. I’m hoping a lot of Flint turns out for this because I think there are a lot of revelations to be had. We’re very proud of it,” Henry commented.

(Continued on Page 14.)

## “Sons” exhibit ... (Continued from Page 13.)

The selection process for the exhibition was based on the model used in the 2017 “Women of a New Tribe” exhibit, which was Taliaferro’s first exhibition at the FIA. In 2021 community members nominated “African American men in the Flint community who have had a positive impact on individuals, have helped those around them in the neighborhood and created positive change or furthered important issues in the community,” the press release explained.

“Visitors will have the opportunity to reflect and reconcile their initial reactions to the portraits, after getting to the men and their stories through text labels and QR codes that lead to interviews conducted by the artist with each man,” according to the press release.

The exhibition marks both the return of Taliaferro art work to Flint and the fifth anniversary of his previous exhibition “Women of a New Tribe, which proved to be a popular exhibition.

While not present in-person Taliaferro did appear on a zoom call in the FIA theater where patrons could engage and ask questions.

### Stories from Sons: Seeing the Modern African American Male

*East Village Magazine reporter Harold Ford gathered five of the 49 stories from the “sons” photographed in the exhibit. Here is a sample provided by the FIA. Each “son” selected three words or phrases to describe themselves.*

**Bob Campbell** – Husband, Father, Writer: Campbell is a Flint native and author of *Motown Man*, a novel published in Nov. 2020, reviewed by *East Village Magazine*. The setting of *Motown Man* is the “vehicle city,” Flint, Michigan in the 1990s. The book explores themes of racial identity and relationships in an industrial town. No less than striking,

his portrait at the FIA exhibit shows Campbell dressed smartly in black and white formalwear holding a copy of his book.

**Anthony Artis** – Art Collector, Teacher, Bible-based pastor: Artis is co-pastor of Dedicated Believers Ministries. He holds a B.A. in Business Administration and a Master’s of Divinity degree. He and his wife have created The Anthony and Davida Artis Collection of African-American Art.

**DeAndre Chilton, Jr.** – King, Son, Loyal: Chilton is the youngest of the 49 men featured in the FIA’s “Sons” exhibition. He is a student at Grand Blanc High School. At GBHS he is a member of the National Honor Society, the cross-country team, a jazz band member, and captain of the bowling team. He is president of the Alpha Esquires, a mentoring program; he represents the Alpha Esquires at oratorical events.

**Stephen Mayfield** – Educator, Police Officer, Entrepreneur: Mayfield has been a law enforcer for more than 30 years. He is currently employed by the Department of Public Safety at the University of Michigan-Flint. He teaches public safety at the local Career Institute. He is co-founder of the Block Club, a UM-F student organization that promotes community service, social events, and safety.

**Rico Phillips** – Ice Hockey Ambassador, Retired Professional Firefighter, Community Representative: Phillips retired from the City of Flint Fire Department after 27 years of service. His passion since high school has been ice hockey; he played on the team at Flint Southwestern High School. He began officiating matches in the 1980s. In 2010, he founded the Flint Inner-City Youth Hockey Program that intro-

duces hockey to 8- to 11-year-olds. In 2019, he was recipient of the National Hockey League’s Willie O’Ree Community Hero Award. He assists the Ontario Hockey League “to help ensure that the game is inclusive for all players, staff, and fans.” His portrait at the FIA shows him clutching a hockey stick, of course.

### A life of photography - Taliaferro

Taliaferro was born in the small southern town of Brownsville, Tennessee, according to his personal website: [www.blackartphotoart.com](http://www.blackartphotoart.com).



**Photographer Jerry Taliaferro (left, on screen) appeared by Zoom to engage with the patrons as they wondered through his exhibit.**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

He is a 1977 graduate of West Point Military Academy. While serving at Fort Bragg his interest in photography began. While he was serving in the U.S. military in Germany his first published photograph appeared in a Munich magazine in 1985. He spent many years in commercial and advertisement photography.

In the ensuing years his focus has turned towards fine art photography. Other exhibits of Taliaferro include: *The Tuskegee Airman Project* and *Black Women as Muse*.

More information can be found at in a link on FIA’s website about the exhibition.

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*EVM reporter Harold Ford contributed to this article. Harold can be reached at [hcford1185@gmail.com](mailto:hcford1185@gmail.com).*

# Flint Registry reports 16,000 people enrolled in first four years

By Tom Travis

As of July 31, 2021, just over 16,000 people have enrolled in the Flint Registry. Nearly 70 percent of those are adults, according numbers just released in a report documenting The Registry's first four years of service. The oldest participant is 104 years old and the youngest is two years old.

The inaugural report details how participants are doing in areas of health, nutrition, development, and lead elimination as the Registry enters its fifth year. Among those findings:

Both adults and children report they have difficulty affording healthy food, and 43 per cent of adults say they are worried about food running out before they could buy more.

The most common reported diagnosis for adults during or after the Flint water crisis was high blood pressure (47 per cent of adults).

Nonetheless, 90 per cent of parents/caregivers describe their child's physical health as excellent, very good, or good and 84 per cent describe their child's mental health as excellent, very good, or good.

The Flint Registry made over 91,000 phone calls, 272,000 mailings, and hosted 441 community events in its first four years of programming, according to a press release. As of Jan. 1, 2022, enrollment has increased to over 18,000 participants and referrals exceed 25,000.

The full report can also be found at their website at: [www.FlintRegistry.org](http://www.FlintRegistry.org).

## Selected report findings include:

- 90 per cent of parents/caregivers describe their child's physical health as excellent, very good, or good and 84 per cent describe their child's mental health as excellent, very good, or good.
- 25 per cent of parents are

concerned about their child's development.

- 63 per cent of adults describe their physical health as excellent, very good, or good. 66 per cent of adults describe their mental health excellent, very good, or good for mental health.

- The most common reported diagnosis for adults during or after the Flint water crisis was high blood pressure (47 per cent of adults).

- Both adults and children have difficulty affording healthy food to eat (43 per cent of adults were worried about food running out before they could buy more).



**Director of the Flint Registry Nicole Jones, PhD, MS.**

Photo source: [www.publichealth.msu.edu](http://www.publichealth.msu.edu)

"We are inspired by the resiliency of Flint, and we are driven to be an asset to our community. Many on our team call Flint and Genesee County home, and we are so grateful to build something amazing in Flint, by Flint, and for Flint to better support our community," the Director of the Flint Registry, Dr. Nicole Jones said.

## 22,317 referrals in four years

The Flint Registry was designed to improve the health and development

of participants by connecting Flint residents to supporting services. The Flint Registry's first referral was sent in January 2019.

By the end of the four-year grant period (July 2021), the number of referrals quickly climbed to 22,317. The most common referrals for adults were FAST Start (the City of Flint's lead service line replacement program) and for children, the Neurodevelopmental Center of Excellence (NCE).

In December 2016, President Obama signed the sweeping Water Infrastructure and Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN) into law. This provided funding for numerous water infrastructure projects across the country including \$170 million specifically for Flint to deal with the water crisis emergency that lurked its head in April 2014.

The Flint Registry is for any-



**Former U.S. President Barack Obama drinks a glass of filtered water from Flint during a meeting with local and federal authorities in Michigan, May 4, 2016.**

Photo source: REUTERS/Carlos Barria

one who was exposed to Flint water because they lived, worked, attended school, or regularly visited the City of Flint during April 2014-October 2015, including children who were born before August 1, 2016, that may have been exposed prenatally.

The Flint Registry is supported

(Continued on Page 9.)

## **Commentary ...**

*(Continued from Page 3.)*

What seemed like an impulsive and out of control mob soon began to look more ominous as details emerged. Though much is likely to be revealed with the Jan. 6 Commission in months to come, it's already apparent that there was much planning and coordination for the events of that day, and the goal was to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Exactly who said what to who, and who emailed who, remains to be seen, but clearly this was a concerted effort to undo a democratic election at the highest levels of government in the most brutal manner, including death threats against the vice-president.

All of that was fueled by a defeated president who claims that the election was stolen, even after more than a year of recounts, audits, and more than 60 court challenges to the contrary.

What is most worrisome is not that Donald Trump believes that, but that as many as 75 percent of all Republicans, and 40 percent all Americans, buy into it as well. Those beliefs are not simply a disagreement over policy, they strike at the heart of the trust that any democratic system needs.

### **Restrictions on voting**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many election officials responded by allowing mail-in voting, early voting, same day registration, and no-excuse absentee voting. Considering how quickly some of the adjustments had to be made, the system worked remarkably well. Voter turnout was at a record level, and by most estimates the election was probably the fairest and most honest in our history.

But in response to the large turnout, and the new methods of voting, more than 19 states have passed laws aimed at restricting the right to vote, limiting times and places for casting ballots, making registration more

difficult, and placing other barriers to prospective voters.

The full impact of those measures remains to be seen, but the motives are clear. They aim to suppress the vote that elected Joe Biden but, more importantly, they strike at the trust in the system, and the trust in the voters.

### **Partisan attacks on local election officials**

Those who have sought to undermine democracy have taken a new tack and begun targeting local offices that rarely make partisan headlines. While much of the nation focuses on the presidential contest or the governor's race, it is the state secretaries of state and local city, county, and township election clerks, who will manage the elections, and count the ballots in 2022 and 2024. It was these individuals, many of whom were Republican, who oversaw the counts and recounts in 2020, and found there was little cheating of any consequence.

Those who support the 'big lie' that the election was stolen in 2020 are now targeting these often invisible offices, with the hope that, in 2024, they will be able to rely on their partisan state and local officials to do their bidding when votes are counted. This year, Michigan may see a ballot proposal that would limit the power of the secretary of state to conduct audits. Some local officials have received death threats for doing their jobs.

As Josef Stalin said "The people who cast the votes decide nothing. Those who count the votes decide everything."

### **Fake Electoral College votes**

Finally, in one of the most blatant and bizarre attempts to undo the election, Michigan Republican electors tried to submit a fake electoral ballot, giving Michigan's 16 electoral votes to Donald Trump, in spite of the fact that he lost the state by over 150,000 votes. They showed up at the Michigan State Capitol as the electoral votes were being

recorded, and were turned away by Michigan State Police.

It appears that this attempt was a coordinated plan to reverse the electoral vote in a number of other states as well. According the Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, both federal and state criminal charges are a possibility for those involved.

This attempt goes far beyond an individual voter trying to stuff an extra ballot in the box for their candidate, or voting for a dead relative. This organized attempt is an attack on the very idea that in a democracy the voters should decide elections.

### **What to do?**

We need to recognize the full nature of the threat from the events of Jan. 6, the attempts to limit the vote, and the ways in which even the most local officials are critical to democracy. These aren't simply disagreements over public policy, right vs. left, or even Republicans vs. Democrats. They strike at the heart of democracy, and the trust that supports it.

Democracy requires participation; those who work against it count on the apathy of others. Take the time to learn about the candidates and issues and vote. Pay attention to those offices that are often at the bottom of the ballot. They may be more important than you realize. Don't accept everything you read on Facebook or Twitter. Check things out. Use fact checkers regularly when you see a new 'fact' on social media.

Democracy can be fragile. Other nations have lost it when faced with challenges. We need to face the current challenge to assure that we remain a democratic nation for the next 200 years. Perhaps the best quote is attributed to Ben Franklin, when, after the Constitutional Convention, he was asked "What do we have, a republic, or a monarchy?" His response was, "A republic, if you can keep it."

Let's hope we can keep it.

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





**Flint residents can receive bottled water, filters, replacement cartridges and at-home water testing kits at the following locations:**

- Ward 1** – Genesee County Land Bank, Ross Plaza, 2320 Pierson Rd.
- Ward 3** – Antioch Missionary Baptist Church-Owned Property, 1401 E. Stewart Ave.
- Ward 6** – West Court Street Church of God, 2920 W. Court St.
- Ward 7** – Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center, 3501 Lapeer Rd.
- Ward 9** – Genesee County Land Bank, Eastown Bowl Bowling Alley, 3001 S. Dort Hwy.

The hours of operations for these community sites are:  
 Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday: Noon to 6 p.m.  
 Tuesday and Friday: Noon to 8 p.m.

Additional information is available at  
[www.michigan.gov/flintwater](http://www.michigan.gov/flintwater)

## **Flint Registry ...**

*(Continued from Page 9.)*

Kenyetta Dotson.

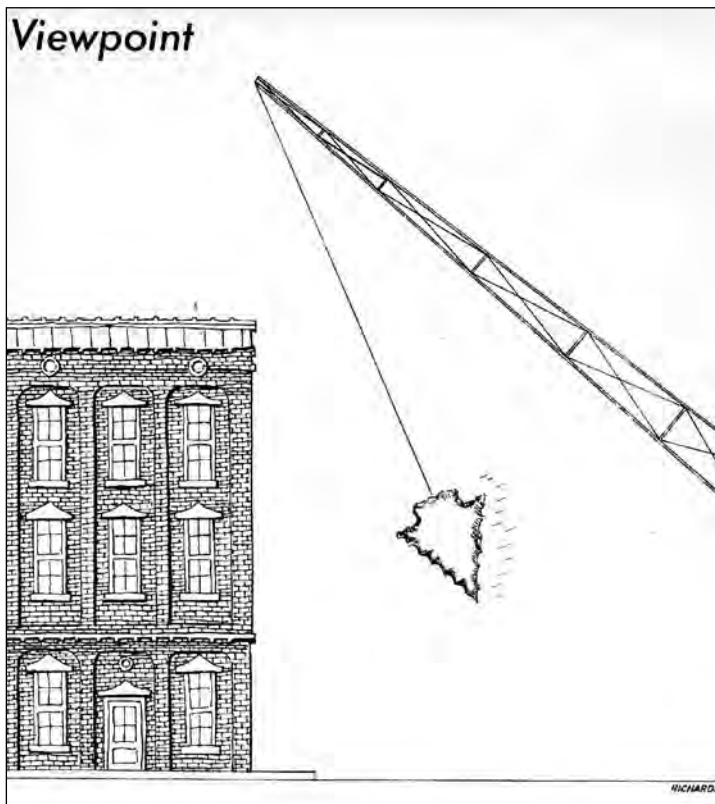
The board members represent 15 sectors of the Flint Community: faith, workforce development, seniors, education, academia, organized labor, nonprofit, government, philanthropy, media, health care, behavioral health, parents, youth, and law enforcement.

**Flint Registry logo represents moving forward**

The Flint Registry logo, the San-



## *From the archives*



This ink drawing was created by late Flint resident Don Richards, one of several he contributed to *East Village Magazine* in the 1980s. Richards was a land surveyor, a trade he learned in the Army.

He loved local history, finding ways to tell his stories through surveying.

This cartoon, much loved by two generations of EVM staff, has been on the wall of the EVM office for many years.

kofa bird, is a mythical African bird from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The bird is flying forward, yet looking back, and carrying an egg in its mouth. It is symbolic of always needing to move forward, but never forgetting what happened in the past, and prioritizing the young.

To sign up or find more information, visit [www.FlintRegistry.org](http://www.FlintRegistry.org) or call 1-833-GO-FLINT. Eligible participants receive a \$50 thank you check after enrollment.

EVM Managing Editor Tom Travis can be reached at [tomntravis@gmail.com](mailto:tomntravis@gmail.com)



# Village Life ...

(Continued from Page 20.)

spirit and dogged determination to make Flint a better place.

## Reminiscences of Tony

### Joelena Freeman

"If you take a minute just to imagine, a dauntingly large sea of chanting warriors armed with empty water bottles inside the rotunda at the Capital in Lansing, belting out the phrase "Do your jobs! Open the pods!"

Tony could be seen and heard loud and clear. He was a rock within our community and a strong voice for the people! He never seemed to miss a beat to be able to stand up against those who harmed us Flint residents.

He spoke loud for others who could not. He was big guy with a huge heart and wasn't afraid to shed his tears of passion whenever we won or whether we lost a battle against the perpetrators of our beloved Flint community of citizens.

I watched Tony express himself ways no others could. We all watched. I was proud to walk the line with him. He was a fighter for justice and for the people, always. It won't be the same without you my friend and fellow water warrior...I miss you already..."

### Rhonda Kelso

"Tony stood up for all of us!!"

### Carma Lewis

"This is the day I realized that Tony could do no wrong in my eyes." Full video of Tony Palladeno can be viewed on a YouTube search.

### Gina Luster

"Those late night City Council Meetings.... EPIC! He would try to get through to Eric through Me! Lol... What a task! We've definitely lost a Warrior!"

### Vicki Marx

"Tony was a warrior and fought ferociously for his city whether it was water or the privatization. Those of us

who were lucky enough to call him friend all knew that he was a grizzly bear with a heart bigger than the city he fought so hard for. I'll miss being your driver and bodyguard my Friend."

### Melissa Mays

"Tony has been a solid and constant rock for Flint starting long before the Water Crisis. In the past 7 years I've known Tony, I was honored to see and work alongside such an incredible advocate, friend, family man and the dedicated rabble rouser for justice he truly was. Tony's positive impact on Flint is permanent and he will be missed."

### Colette Metcalf

"Side by side we fought The Water Snakes. Tony fought fiercely for his family and community, long before the Flint Water Disaster. Beautifying and cleaning Flint especially his beloved Kearsley Park.

Thank you to his family for sharing Tony and Leah with us as we hunted those water snakes. Tony showed the world how strong Flintstones are. Till my last breath I too will fight for Justice for Flint.

Tony they can't silence you even in death, Water Warriors will continue to fight, we will say your name and remind them We WON'T Back Down. A compromised immune system is one of the many health effects of lead poisoning. Yes Covid-19 will be written as your cause of death.

We know the truth of how bad you were poisoned by Flint Water and I for one will remind those responsible if not here on earth their judgement awaits. Rest easy my brother."

### Trina Redner

"Flint lost a warrior, his absence will be felt & loss a deep blow to those he stood with."

### Christina Sayyae

"Tony would always put his community in his heart. He carried the weight of what happened personally. More people need to stand and never back down like Tony. I remember so

many times when I was well enough to fight still he would always show up.

If he saw you needed a hug or "we can do this." He was there. People need to be brave like Tony. People need to care about their neighbors and community like Tony.

We can build a beautiful future without the lies of the "gov" being like Tony."

"My kids and I will miss him deeply. He was a role model. My heart is broken. We will never forget him."

### Dan Scheid

"I remember Tony at the Whiting for the info session prior to the cultural center millage vote, reminding the panel of arts directors of their responsibility of seeing that the seats in that auditorium were filled with Flint's poor, should the millage pass." An account of that 2018 meeting, including Palladeno's comments, can be read at <https://www.eastvillagemagazine.org> and search: "arts millage town hall."

### Bruce Stiers

"[Tony] was a stand up guy with a beautiful heart and a rock solid family. I've asked if possible that the flag at City Hall be lowered to half staff, and a moment of silence at the next council meeting for our Fallen Warrior."

### Andrea Watson

"Tony was true through and through, wanted us to fight if not for ourselves our children, grandchildren and others! I was always afraid, no longer!"

### Tonya Williams

"We deff lost a Flint hero. Tony will always hold a special place with many. He is a true Flint hero."

### Maegan Wilson

"Tony was a lead Flint water warrior who made his voice heard. He organized, trained and equipped others to fight for clean water. He was truly dedicated to exposing the Flint water crisis and will be greatly missed."

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## Village Life ...

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### Deb Conrad

“Tony was larger than life. I know we probably disagreed on a whole lot of stuff—except that people should have clean, safe, affordable water. It was a pleasure to be in the street with him. Even when the “street” was indoors at a church.”

### He spoke up for “forgotten rotten neighborhoods”

In a July 2018 *East Village Magazine* article covering a town hall meeting about the arts millage Palladeno offered some iconic and poignant quotes.

Several speakers voiced concerns that the city’s cultural institutions have not always reached out adequately to underserved communities, and will need to aggressively do so if they are receiving millions of dollars of public funds.

Palladeno, a highly recognizable figure during the water crisis, spoke up for access to the arts from what he called “the forgotten rotten neighborhood of Flint” which literally begins just across Robert T. Longway from the Cultural Center.

“I was that second grader in the third row that never knew what an oboe was,” he said, recalling being exposed to the arts in elementary school. “I heard a kettle drum pounding for the first year in

my heart — it still does it.”

But the public school arts programming when he was growing



In 2018 Tony raised his voice of concern at a town hall concerning the arts millage. At the time the photo was taken Tony is saying the following, “I lived in a decent neighborhood with elders that looked out for everyone. Didn’t know we were poor until they told us. I loved my neighborhood, like you should. Doubt has set in now. The times have changed, but my love has not.”

(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

up—and in fact, the physical schools themselves, several speakers noted—have disappeared.

“Walker, Homedale, Whittier, Central — GONE,” Palladeno said. “You understand what I’m saying to you? But I was that kid in the second grade that got a piece of this—and this should be available to everybody.”

Still, Palladeno said he has concerns that as a group of private, non-profit institutions a push for ade-

quate access for the public might not yet be second nature.

“You are looking at the city of Flint here,” he said. “I/we are Flint. I/we expect something for our children and our elderly. I get to look from a burned out neighborhood for not one year, not two years — twenty years ago we got abandoned. Not once has anybody from this building [The Whiting] come into that neighborhood.

“I am for this, just for the simple fact that you might bring the elderly in with the kids for somebody who never heard an oboe before,” Palladeno said.

EVM guest writer Ben Pauli is the author of *Flint Fights Back: Environmental Justice and Democracy in the Flint Water Crisis* and is a professor of Social Science at Kettering University.

**COLLEGE CULTURAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**  
Sign up to get notices of meetings at  
**[cnaflint@gmail.com](mailto:cnaflint@gmail.com)**



(Photo by Mike Naddeo)

Visit the Genesee County Health Department website at: [www.gchd.us/coronavirus](http://www.gchd.us/coronavirus) for information on COVID testing, COVID vaccination and COVID information and statistics.

# Village Life

## Flint Water Warriors remember Tony Palladeno, silenced by COVID

By Ben Pauli

Contributing Flint Water Warriors include Joelena Freeman, Rhonda Kelso, Gina Luster, Vicki Marx, Melissa Mays, Colette Metcalf, Trina Redner, Christina Sayyae, Dan Scheid, Bruce Stiers, Andrea Watson, Tonya Williams, Deb Conrad and Maegan Wilson.

On January 10, 2022, Flint lost one of its preeminent native sons, Tony Palladeno, to complications from COVID-19. As Tony lay in the ICU at Hurley Hospital on a ventilator in the weeks prior to his passing, prayers and well-wishes from far and wide flooded social media.

One could almost feel the collective will of a city straining to pull him through to safety, to help him muster what strength he had left for one last fight. I was not in the room, of course, but there's one thing I'm sure of: Tony fought until the end.

He wouldn't be Tony otherwise.

Tony will no doubt go down in the annals of Flint history as one of the city's great personalities, a character among characters. He as much as anyone embodied the city's pathos—its pain, its disappointment, its sense of abandonment and neglect—but also its resilience, its determination, its fire.

And for as much as he suffered and strove, he could be incredibly lighthearted and playful, quick with a joke and one of his inimitable Tonyisms. In his wryest, crudest, most jovial moments, Tony was probably the closest thing Flint had to a Falstaff, leavening the atmosphere with witty and winking commentary and bringing the roil of the streets into every room he entered.

Among other things, I am grateful to Tony for teaching me about listening. Everyone who knew Tony heard him say, at one time or another, that he

wasn't being listened to, that his concerns weren't being heard. His response was generally to talk more, and talk louder: not uncommonly, right up to the point where he was forcefully escorted out of the room.



**Tony Palladeno**  
(Photo by Dan White)

His emotional way of speaking and occasional outbursts of anger could belie the fact that he was a deep and nuanced thinker. (For every "I'm done" and "they're killin' us" there was an "I'm not saying it's all bad...") Just when you started getting the feeling of déjà vu—of watching the same old Tony Show—he would hit you with something that made you stop, and think, and reconsider.

In the course of one soliloquy he could provoke everything from eye-rolls, to laughter, to insight and empathy—sometimes all at once. Those who

didn't listen to Tony, and listen carefully, missed out on a lot.

They missed out not only because Tony could help you see things in a new light but because his knowledge of the community was virtually unrivaled. I thought that one day I might pitch him a book idea: *The History of Flint—As Told by Tony Palladeno*.

What an informative tale that would have been—not to mention an amusingly skewed and humorous one. When Tony came to speak to my students at Kettering, his gloss on the city's pre-industrial era was: "tiny beavers and big trees...no offense." *Tiny Beavers and Big Trees*. That should have been the title of Chapter one.

Most of all, Tony was someone with heart. There was no secret about that: it was right there on his sleeve for all to see, pretty much all of the time. His love for his family, his friends, and his city was palpable. No one

was prouder of being from Flint than Tony, and no one prouder of the East Side, in particular.

Who will give the tours of the neighborhood now? Who will tell his story the way he told the stories of so many bygone people and places? If the outpouring of memories from Tony's loved ones and comrades over the past few days is any indication, his legacy is in good hands.

Because as much love as Tony gave others, he got it back from the very many people who admired his unique

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