

# East Village Magazine

March 2022



Photograph By  
*Ethan D. Carter*


# The Tom Sumner Program

Produced live weekdays from 9 to noon

## Ways to listen...

- ★ **STREAM IT ON-LINE:**  
[www.tomsumnerprogram.com](http://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



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](http://markfishersells.com)

4265 E. Court Street, Burton MI 48509





**FREE Home  
Warranty**

*Flint's Resident Realtor*  
*The Name Trusted in  
More Neighborhoods*

**(810) 234-1234**  
[www.RyanEashoo.com](http://www.RyanEashoo.com)



Produced by  
**CHILDREN'S MUSEUM INDIANAPOLIS**



Supported by




Speed, power, performance ...  
 be part of a dynamic race team  
 working with the most famous  
 toy vehicles on the planet—  
**Hot Wheels®!**

Buy tickets at [SloanLongway.org/HotWheels](http://SloanLongway.org/HotWheels)



**February 5 through May 15, 2022**

4190 E. Court St., Burton, MI 48509 | 810-237-3450



107 W. Kearsley St.  
 Downtown Flint  
 Open Monday-Saturday  
[Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop](https://Facebook.com/consolidatedbarbershop)



# East Village Magazine

Vol. LIX No. 2 March, 2022

**Founder** Gary P. Custer

**Managing Editor** Tom Travis

**Consulting Editor** Jan Worth-Nelson

**Consulting Editor** Ted Nelson

**Reporters** Harold C. Ford

Madeleine Graham

Patsy Isenberg

Coner Segren

**Columnist** Paul Rozycki

**Photographer** Edwin D. Custer

## Distribution Staff

**Director:** Edwin D. Custer. **Staff:** Kim Bargy, Jacob Blumner, Connor Coyne & Ruby Coyne, Casey Custer, Caroline Fechik, 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, Julian Rodriguez, Paul Rozycki, Mike Spleet, Kim & Ronan & Jude Streby, Holly West, and Karen Wilkinson.

## Board of Trustees

- FaLessia Booker • Edwin D. Custer
- Paul Rozycki
- Jan Worth-Nelson

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

**Website:**

[eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org)

**E-mail:**

[eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com](mailto:eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com)

Layout by Patsy Isenberg. Printing by PrintComm Inc., 3040 S. Dye Rd., Flint, MI 48507.

*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.

© 2022 East Village Magazine

## Commentary

# How COVID has changed us, and what it means for East Village Magazine

By Paul Rozycki

**I**t's been two years. March 10, 2020. That was the day when Michigan saw its first two COVID cases.

Ironically, it was also an election day, and the beginning of the widespread shutdown of much public activity in the state.

Within days, colleges and K-12 schools were closed to in-person learning. Bars, restaurants, gyms, and factories shut down, and emergency restrictions were imposed on many public gatherings in the following weeks. By early April, there were over 20,000 COVID cases in Michigan, and nearly 1000 deaths.

At first, we thought it would be over in a month or so. Then we expected things would return to normal after a year. Now, two years later, we are again hopefully looking to the end of the COVID pandemic, yet nothing seems to be back to normal.

Will there be another variant? Will there be another spike in infections? Will we need a fourth booster shot?

### How have we been changed?

After two years, how have we all been changed by COVID? The list is long, and it will take years to sort it all out, but at every level, it's a different world today than it was two years ago, in both big and small ways.

### The medical system's response

On the national level we've seen the American medical system respond quickly with vaccines that limit the spread of COVID, and prevent infection. Yet, we've also seen

bitter battles and partisan conflicts over actually getting the shots, leaving many vulnerable.

We've also seen American hospitals and medical personnel, often touted as the best in the world, overwhelmed by the numbers of those infected by the COVID virus. Yet, in spite of it all, they rose to meet the challenge.

### Zoom meetings

We've learned of the virtues and vices of working at home, and Zoom meetings. Many workers now expect to spend at least a good part of their working time at home, rather than commuting to an office.

Yet, for all its convenience, a Zoom meeting isn't quite the same as meeting someone in person. Will the home office be standard in the future? Almost certainly, the workplace will be quite different in the years to come.

### Who are the essential workers?

We've also discovered those who are the most essential workers. Obviously they are the doctors, nurses, county public health workers, and other medical professionals who face COVID every day. But so are the store clerks, waitresses, janitors, teachers, bus drivers, postal workers, journalists, police officers, and fire fighters, who deal with the public every day. Hedge fund managers probably didn't make the list.

The shutdowns and upheaval caused by COVID has also led many workers to leave their current jobs, and pursue new work opportunities.

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

Cover: Enjoying late winter fun until spring shows up

# Education Beat

## *Flint School Board acts on new hires, infrastructure repair, temporary deficit relief, strategic plan*

*By Harold C. Ford*

In a five-and-a-half hour meeting ending at midnight Feb. 9, the Flint Board of Education (FBOE) worked its way through a packed agenda and acted on a half-dozen key matters.

The board's actions covered new hires and compensation packages; critical and ongoing infrastructure needs; the intricacies and interplay of the district's Emergency Deficit Elimination Program (EDEP) and the temporary infusion of federal dollars via Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) legislation; and a long-awaited strategic plan.



**Keiona Murphy,**  
**Flint Community School's new**  
**assistant superintendent**

Photo source: Linked In

### **New hires and compensation**

The new hires that garnered the most attention from board members were the appointments of three new central administrators as proposed by Kevelin Jones, Flint superintendent:

- Keiona Murphy, elevated from her interim status as assistant superintendent to assistant superintendent with a salary of \$114,954 and an additional \$4,200 stipend.

- Diona Clingman, appointed to executive director of academics, a new position, at a salary of \$111,034 for 245 days.

- Sharita Galloway, moved into the executive director of human resources (HR) position with a salary package identical to that of Clingman. Jorgina Rubin had been filling the HR position on a temporary basis.

Several board members criticized the pay gap between newly-hired classroom teachers and central administrators. As examples, Hannah Freeman and Monica Hicks-Jackson were elevated from "guest teacher" status to being fully employed at salary levels of \$35,869 and \$39,545 respectively.

"Shameful," decried Laura MacIntyre, FBOE treasurer. "There's such a huge discrepancy between the executive salaries and the teacher salaries."

"Top heavy," continued MacIntyre. "Why do we need an executive director of academics? ... We need teachers, we need counselors, we need nurses..."

"I struggle with that (salary levels)," Joyce Ellis-McNeal, FBOE vice president, agreed.

"I share Trustee MacIntyre's sentiments, especially as it relates to the need for teachers to be compensated," said Adrian Walker, FBOE secretary. "We have to make sure we're competitive with other school districts..."

"Our teachers aren't making enough," Carol McIntosh, the FBOE's immediate past president, asserted.

Jones came to the defense of central administrators' work assignments and compensation packages. "It was a lot of work," he said, to determine appropriate workloads and levels of compensation. "We (central administrators) are currently carrying as much as we can carry."

"Teachers deserve so much more," declared Danielle Green, FBOE president, "(but) I choose to support Mr. Jones and his team."

"Our backs are to the wall," Chris Del Morone, FBOE assistant secretary-treasurer, stated.

After prolonged discussion, the FBOE voted 7-0 to approve compensation packages as recommended by Jones and his team.



**Dan Mack, Johnson Controls**  
**account executive**

Photo source: Linked In

### **Significant state of disrepair**

Nearly every FBOE meeting in recent years includes one agenda item, or more, that address infrastructure challenges in the buildings of Flint Community Schools (FCS). The Feb. 9 meeting was no exception.

Dan Mack, account executive at Johnson Controls, reported on his company's efforts to address FCS infrastructure challenges in the past two years. "The state of disrepair was significant at most of the buildings," Mack reported.

Mack said Johnson Controls launched a two-phase effort to address some FCS infrastructure needs:

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

## Education ...

(Continued from Page 5.)

- Phase 1 targeted lighting, water conservation, air handlers, boilers, and the building envelope.

- Phase 2 primarily addressed HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) systems.

“Air conditioning is the number one priority with the balanced calendar,” Mack said. The FCS school year starts in August and ends in June the following year.

“There are other systems in these mechanical rooms that still need to be addressed,” stated Mack as he showed photos of the bowels of FCS buildings that constitute the headquarters for each building’s HVAC systems.

The Johnson Controls team was forced to prioritize the district’s most important infrastructure needs as there wasn’t sufficient funding for all the needed upgrades. Mack reported that he had to reduce his company’s services by \$4 million in order to provide the district’s most pressing needs.

On Dec. 15, 2021, the Plante Moran Cresa (PMC) auditing firm that specializes in real estate reported that FCS is facing a 10-year capital need of \$174 million to properly maintain the 11 school buildings that currently house its students. PMC told the FBOE it only needed four elementary schools; FCS currently has eight.

Collectively, Flint’s buildings have 792 years of wear and tear; their average age is now 71 years. The average age of about 84,000 school buildings in the U.S., according to a Nov. 2017 Education Week report, is 49 years at present.

The Flint-based Mott Foundation’s proposal to renovate or rebuild FCS school buildings at a cost of several hundred million dollars – first revealed by *East Village Magazine* nearly a year ago in April and May of 2021 – has yet to appear on an FBOE agenda.

(Continued on Page 6.)

## Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3.)

Most business now post help wanted signs on their front door, promising higher wages and benefits.

### Supply chain shortages

We’ve become accustomed to shortages of toilet paper, hand soap, meats, pet food, new and used cars, and computer chips, among many other products. We often go to the grocery store with the hope that we will find what we need.

We’ve learned how critical the supply chain is to keeping the store shelves full of the goods we have always expected to find there.

### COVID’s partisan divisions

We’ve also seen how COVID, which is a threat to everyone, and should have united us, has become another point of partisan conflict. Wearing a mask has become a way to tell one’s partisan leanings.

The vaccination rates between Republicans and Democrats are dramatically different. Even what were once routine local school board meetings have become shouting matches over mask mandates and virtual learning. In Michigan, some of those opposed to Gov. Whitmer’s strong response to COVID threatened to kidnap her, and hold her for trial. Yet, for the Flint City Council, both COVID and a recent election seem to have had little effect.

Whether they were held virtually or in person, the meetings still seem to go on endlessly, fueled by personal attacks, racial division, and bickering.

### What it means for *East Village Magazine*

Yet for those of us who are part of *East Village Magazine*, COVID has given us some serious challenges as well. At a time when newspapers and magazines are disappearing around the

country, community journalism is more critical than ever, and *EVM* is working hard to fill that role.

At a time when democracy is under pressure, it’s more important than ever to have coverage of local government and community events, to keep the First Amendment and democracy alive and well.

Our December/January issue was delayed by paper shortages caused by supply chain problems. We have now learned that Riegler Press, who has been our printer for more than 20 years, is ceasing production, and we have the challenge of finding a new printer who can deliver the quality that Riegler did, at a similar price, and a similar time frame.

So far, from all estimates, the cost of printing will be higher, and that may result in either fewer copies of *EVM* to distribute, fewer pages in each issue, or something other than a monthly publication schedule.

Our second challenge is people. If most other business are posting help wanted signs, we are no different. As a semi-volunteer organization, with modest pay for staff, we need reporters, writers, distributors, advertising people, and business help. If you have skills in any of those areas, and an interest in keeping local journalism alive and well in Flint, let us know.

And, of course, funding is critical to all that we do. Currently *EVM* is funded by a grant from the Mott Foundation, advertising revenue, and supporters from the community who are committed to keeping the *East Village Magazine* alive and well.

Even as COVID has placed new demands on funding from all sources, *East Village Magazine* appreciates all the help and support we have received from the Flint community.

Even with all these challenges, we expect to continue to tell Flint’s story, as we have since 1976, long before anyone heard of COVID.

*EVM political commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at Paul.Rozycki@mcc.edu.*

## Education ...

(Continued from Page 5.)

### “It’s urgent.”

“It’s urgent,” Pete Medor, FCS interim director of operations, declared, of infrastructure needs at the Southwestern and Northwestern buildings. “The system has seen its best day; it needs immediate attention.”

Medor was referencing three FBOE agenda items: steam heat exchangers and base mount pumps at Southwestern, and a gas valve at Northwestern.

Medor noted that global supply chain issues would mean delayed delivery of materials needed to make the urgent repairs at Southwestern and Northwestern. “We’re 14 to 16 weeks out to get these materials,” he said.

At first, the FBOE rejected all three funding proposals by unanimous 0-7 votes. Then it reconsidered.

“I’m very concerned about human beings more than money,” Ellis-McNeal implored.

After more discussion, the board reversed itself and unanimously voted 7-0 to approve all three funding requests at a cost of about \$600,000. And the costs are not reimbursable with federal pandemic relief funds as infrastructure repairs require a bidding or request for proposal (RFP) process.

Board members acknowledged that HVAC needs at Southwestern and Northwestern had been brought to the board’s attention in January. “I brought it to you a month ago,” said Medor.

### Short-term stability, long-term challenges

Ayunna Dompreeh, FCS director of finances, provided the FBOE a financial report that had the appearance of stability due to the infusion of about \$32 million in ESSER (COVID relief) funding from the federal government.

“This gives us the appearance that we are not operating in a deficit,” cautioned Dompreeh. “I want to stress ... we are still in a deficit.”

About \$20 million of the aforementioned \$32 million total would normally be covered by the district’s general fund. ESSER funds will soon go away and, without adjustments to FCS finances, the district will return to its condition of annual deficits and long-term debt obligations.

Without Federal ESSER funds, Dompreeh warned, FCS would currently be operating at a \$21.5 million annual deficit.



**Flint Community School  
Board member Laura MacIntyre**  
(Photo Source: Laura MacIntyre)

### Emergency Deficit Elimination Program (EDEP)

“So, what changes do you want to make going forward that will help us to show when we will come out of deficit?” Dompreeh asked.

Dompreeh’s question alluded to the Emergency Deficit Elimination Program status with the State of Michigan that looms in the background and haunts nearly all decisions made about the district’s finances.

“You’re on track,” Jones said. He said he would be meeting with the Michigan Association of School Boards scheduled the next day, Feb. 10. “Don’t lose heart,” he counseled.

“We just have to keep moving,” Jones said. “But we have to determine what we’re going to do with the buildings.”

## Strategic plan

At its Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting on Feb. 9, a long-awaited strategic plan was given tacit approval by the FBOE on a 6-1 vote and sent to the board’s regular meeting on Feb. 16. Then on Feb. 16, adoption of the strategic plan was tabled to allow the board further time for study. The plan has not yet been released to the public.

The district’s current strategic plan was adopted in 2017 and will expire this year.

### Feb 16 Revelations

At the conclusion of the five-hour regular board meeting on Feb. 16, during a time set aside for board members’ remarks, Trustee Carol McIntosh celebrated an unspecified legal victory by FCS while FBOE Treasurer Adrian Walker announced his resignation.

McIntosh gleefully proclaimed, “This district had a major victory ... With our new counsel (Charis Lee), our one-woman band ... she was able to pull a victory out the bag for this district and this board.”

When asked by *EVM* if the “victory” was in the lawsuit filed by former FCS Superintendent Derrick Lopez, McIntosh replied, “No.” When asked if the “victory” was in the lawsuit brought by former Superintendent Anita Steward, McIntosh looked away and did not answer.

Steward filed a lawsuit against the district and four FBOE members on Sept. 8, 2021 alleging breach of contract and other violations. She resigned as FCS superintendent Nov. 12, 2021.

Just-elected board treasurer Adrian Walker announced his resignation from the school board, effective immediately, in order to take an unspecified position in Michigan’s state government. Walker was chosen to fill a board vacancy in Jan. 2021.

The next regular meeting of the FBOE will be Wednesday evening March 16 — starting at 6:30 p.m. Regular meetings are preceded by Commit-

(Continued on Page 7.)

## Education ...

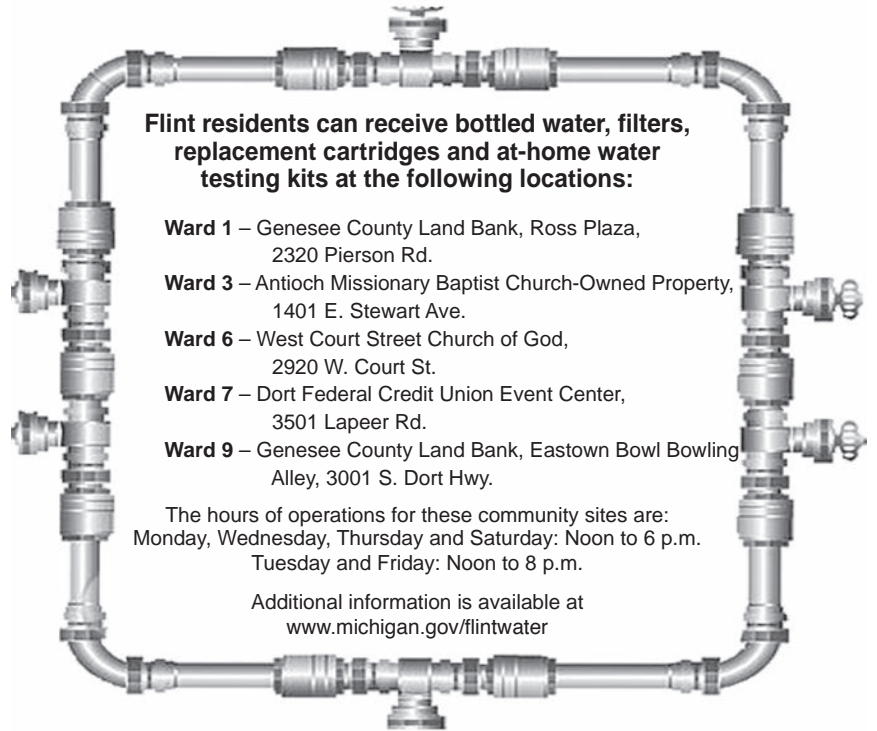
(Continued from Page 6.)

tee of the Whole (COW) meetings one week prior with the next COW scheduled for a 6:30 p.m. start March 9.

Meetings are held at Accelerated Learning Academy (ALA), 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint. Information about FBOE meetings can be accessed at the district's website: [flintschools.org](http://flintschools.org).

At present, meetings can be attended in person or remotely. Recordings of FBOE meetings can be accessed at YouTube.

EVM Education Beat reporter Harold Ford can be reached at [hcford1185@gmail.com](mailto:hcford1185@gmail.com).



**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, Easttown 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)

## Unclassified Ad

### Apartment for Lease

Two-bedroom second story apartment for lease on Avon near Kearsley St. Available in April. Can be partially furnished. Has a large upper deck, off-street parking, washer, dryer, storage. Walk three blocks or less to U of M-Flint, MCC, Cultural Center, library, downtown, Farmers' Market, three parks, and bike paths. Easy freeway access. References and credit check requested. \$650 per month plus utilities.

E-mail [ecuster@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ecuster@sbcglobal.net) or write:

Apartment  
Box.11  
720 E. Second St.  
Flint MI 48503.

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

PLEASE JOIN US

# Artwalk

**March 12, 6-8:30p**  
**ALVIN BROWN**  
Photographer  
Music:  
Steven Prevett - guitar  
Quincy Dobbs - accordion

**April 9, 6-8:30p**  
**JUNKO MILLER**  
Artist - Mixed Media  
Mott Community College  
Music Students  
w/ Dr. Townes Miller

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
711 S. Saginaw Street • Flint, MI 48502  
(810) 234-8627



## MUSIC IN THE HEART OF THE CITY 2022 CONCERT SERIES

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church**  
**MARCH CONCERT**  
**Sunday, March 27**  
4:00 Voice, Flute, & Piano  
Townes Osborn Miller - Flute  
Brittney Siemon - Voice  
Carl Angelo - Piano

**APRIL CONCERT**  
**Sunday, April 24**  
4:00 Organ Master's Recital  
Matthew Benkert

**Admission:**  
**\$10 Adults, \$5 Students**  
**Free to MCC or UM**  
**students with ID**

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church**  
711 South Saginaw Street  
Flint, Michigan 48502  
810-234-8637  
*Artistic Director: Holly Richardson*

Woodside Church of Flint seeks

## PART-TIME ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

TO DO ALL THE REGULAR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT THINGS

If this might be you, find the job description with application instructions on our website:

[www.woodsidechurch.net/employment-at-woodside](http://www.woodsidechurch.net/employment-at-woodside)

- This is not a remote position
- COVID vaccination and booster are required
- starting pay at least \$15/hour

## Book Review:

# Flint, perplexing attractions loom large in Kelsey Ronan's "thoughtful, fascinating" debut novel "Chevy in the Hole"

By Bob Campbell

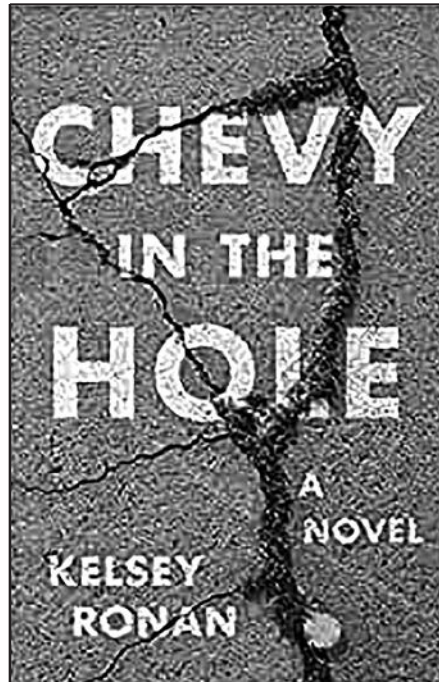
Reading *Chevy in the Hole*, the debut novel by Flint-native Kelsey Ronan, a question continued to nag me: What did Monae see in August that would allow such a relationship to take root?

He's a nerdy, recovering drug addict who nearly died after overdosing in the bathroom of a Detroit farm-to-table restaurant and returned to his hometown of Flint to restart his life. She's a senior "at the university" (UM-Flint, presumably) majoring in environmental science, volunteering at an urban farm in one of Flint's many depleted neighborhoods and employed at Sloan Museum (The museum isn't identified by name).

He's also a habitual cigarette-smoker who crashes on his sister's couch, doesn't give a damn about much of anything, and is "pretty sure" Flint owes him something. Meanwhile, she's motivated "to know why kids get fat on the free lunch program and the junk food their mothers buy at gas stations because they've got to take two buses to get to a supermarket."

Oh, and then there's this: In one of the nation's most segregated communities and one with a checkered past and present on matters of race, he's a 26-year-old white man and she's a 22-year-old Black woman.

Their bond is central to August's salvation, Monae's quest to rescue her father's memory, and is something of an allegory for Flint's gradual transformation in this thoughtful and fascinating place-based novel. Flint looms large in the story to the point that it almost feels like a main character with a distinct personality instead of serving as the primary setting



Cover of Ronan's debut novel

However, as author Morgan Thomas states in the recent essay "Place is Not a Character—It is Its Own Story," "Rendering these aspects of place successfully on the page requires recognizing place not as backdrop or character, but as ecosystem—a system of interactions between living organisms and their environment, which leaves physical traces ... This is place — sentient, determining, the ecology with which other beings in our stories co-create their lives."

August and Monae begin to co-create their lives together in 2014 after "the emergency financial manager (EFM), installed by the governor to pull the city out of debt and dysfunction, decided to pull drinking water from the Flint River instead of piping it in from Lake Huron." By the time the novel concludes eight years later in 2022, August and Monae will have been swept along – Flint and its resi-

dents, too – by the full-blown public health crisis and its aftermath related to the city's tainted drinking water.

Over the course of 285 pages, Ronan beautifully captures the mood and spirit of the period. Her descriptions of the desolation mixed with the rebirth of certain areas, along with the sounds and smells of life in Flint, are spot on. Also noteworthy is the way she depicts the mixed emotions some residents feel about the way the city's automotive heritage is remembered.

"While he talked, Monae glazed a semi-smile on her face and stared out at Saginaw Street. Across from the wine bar were statues of David Dunbar Buick and Louis Chevrolet and Billy Durant, fathers of Flint's auto industry; the city had recently erected them in baffling nostalgia. In the waning day, still threatening rain, they looked like loiterers on the sidewalk, no place to go."

*Chevy in the Hole* also traverses 85 years of Flint history where members of the respective families of August and Monae are participants in pivotal and notable events, a treatment reminiscent of the movie "Forrest Gump." The episodes include the 1936-37 Sit-Down Strike, the horrific 1953 Beecher tornado, the Flint City Hall sleep-in to protest racial discrimination in housing, and the AutoWorld debacle.

Historical figures who appear include an elderly and broke Billy Durant, who was by then running a bowling alley in town; Flint's first Black mayor Floyd McCree; and Keith Moon, The Who drummer who infamously decided to park a Cadillac

(Continued on Page 9.)



## Book Review ...

(Continued from Page 8.)

in a swimming pool at the Holiday Inn on Bristol Road across from GM's Flint Metal Fab after a concert earlier that evening. The number of historical interludes interspersed throughout the narrative felt, at times, like some heavy-duty name-dropping, at least for this Flint native. However, the story doesn't bog down and keeps flowing. Moreover, a non-native reader might be rather surprised to learn about some of Flint's sociocultural impact and stature pre-"Roger & Me."

A few minor quibbles: In a chapter set in 1945, August's then-young grandfather is described as having "pedaled past the smokestacked acres of Buick City." This has become a common error, even among some Flint residents. The name "Buick City" wasn't coined until the mid-1980s following a major GM reorganization. Prior to that, the massive industrial complex was the Buick Motor Division, headquartered in Flint.

Also, given the novel's long sweep of time, a family-tree diagram at the beginning the book – like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's classic *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – would have been a helpful reference guide to keep track of August and Monae's family ties going back generations.

So, what about Monae's attraction to that burnout, August? That's what I found most intriguing about the novel. While she is dismissive, even resentful of the nostalgic fervor for the city's automotive heritage, this "young Black girl ... with high cheekbones and braids" seems largely disconnected from contemporary Black Flint.

That seems a bit odd for this child of the city's Northside, given her family history, passion for improving healthy food options for the city's children (who are predominately Black) and the close relationship with her

Uncle Harold, a Third Ward (Third World?) councilperson and twice-defeated mayoral candidate.

But the same might be said of August's disaffection and tenuous connection to white Flint.

Perhaps what August and Monae saw in each other might best be found at *Chevy in the Hole* – "A clear lunar landscape, empty, stretching all the way downtown." As a speaker at a meeting of Narcotics

Anonymous explained:

"I mean, they've planted a thousand trees in Chevy in the Hole. Ain't even *Chevy in the Hole* anymore. Chevy Commons, they're calling it. We're living in a whole other city. A whole new place."

*Bob Campbell is a local writer. His debut novel Motown Man was published by Urban Farmhouse Press in November 2020.*

Presented by  
  
FOUNDERS SOCIETY

# First Bloom!

Artful Bling & Pleasing Things

**SATURDAY  
APRIL 2  
10a–5p**

**SUNDAY  
APRIL 3  
11a–4p**

*First Bloom! Artful Bling & Pleasing Things* features over 40 artisans' jewelry, attire, and accessories. Mark your calendar for this two-day event located at the Flint Cultural Center Academy!

**\$5 admission**  
(*First Bloom! 2020–22 free pass accepted*)



**Flint Cultural Center Academy**  
1200 Robert T. Longway Blvd.  
Flint, MI 48503

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of March 4. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our April issue, email info about your event to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com) by March 26.

## Flint United Basketball Club

Sunday, March 6 at 3 p.m.  
The game will be against Toledo Glass City.  
Dort Financial Center  
3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint  
810-744-0580  
Tickets: \$16 to \$40  
For more info visit  
[exploreflintandgenesee.org](http://exploreflintandgenesee.org)  
or [facebook.com/flintunitedbasketball](https://facebook.com/flintunitedbasketball).

## Bette Davis, Ain't for Sissies

Thursday, March 10 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.  
Jessica Sherr channels Bette Davis on the night of the 1939 Oscars after she learns she's going to lose to Vivien Leigh and talks about the male-dominated studio system in conversations with others  
The Capitol Theatre  
140 E. 2nd St., Flint  
810-237-7333  
Tickets: \$30  
For more info visit [capitoltheatreflint.com](http://capitoltheatreflint.com).

## Knee High Naturalist: Treats from Trees

Wednesday, March 9, 10 to 11:30 a.m. or 1 to 2:30 p.m.  
Kids age 3-6 will learn about foods that come from trees including tasting and making maple syrup. Dress for outdoor activities. Pre-registration needed by March 8. Kids must be accompanied by an adult.  
For-Mar Nature Preserve,  
5360 Potter Rd, Burton  
Cost: \$5  
For more info call 810-736-7100 x892.

## Trivia Night at Longway Planetarium

Saturday, Mar. 12 at 6-7 p.m.  
Challenge others in six common categories. Recommended for ages 13 and older. The 7 p.m. planetarium show is included with the Trivia Night tickets.  
Longway Planetarium  
1310 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
810-237-3400  
Tickets: Adult \$7, senior \$5, child \$5, under age 2 free, residents of Genesee County receive a 50% discount.  
For more info visit  
[sloanlongway.org/trivianight](http://sloanlongway.org/trivianight).

## St. Patrick's Day Boxed Lunch Sale

Thursday, Mar. 17 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Boxed lunches include corned beef sandwiches, chips, coleslaw, a pickle and treats.  
Pick up at 901 Chippewa St., Flint.  
One lunch: \$10 with proceeds benefitting Catholic Charities Meal Programs. For more info visit [catholiccharitiesflint.net](http://catholiccharitiesflint.net).

## Pride & Prejudice Theatre Production

2 p.m. or 7:30 p.m., Fridays-Sundays  
The Dept. of Fine and Performing Arts of UM-Flint will have tickets available at [tickets.thewhiting.com/events](http://tickets.thewhiting.com/events).  
UM-Flint Theatre  
327 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
For more info call 810-766-6723

## Flint Institute of Arts

"Sons: Seeing the Modern African American Male," through April 16. This is an exhibit of both black-and-white and color photographs of 49 men from Flint at the Henry and Hodge Galleries.

"Drawing from Life: Ed Watkins," through Apr. 10. In the Graphics Gallery are drawings and mixed media works by this Flint native fine artist.

Flint Institute of Arts  
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
For more info visit [flintarts.org](http://flintarts.org).



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



**I GOT THE SHOT  
SO I CAN SEE MY GRANDMOTHER**

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [GCHD.US](http://GCHD.US)

(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 ...

(Continued from Page 12.)

it as a child with her father, when the old Chevy plant was still there, in ruins. She found it scary and the hill up to Kettering University hard to ride. Like many Flintoids, she groans and rolls her eyes at the change in its name to “Chevy Commons” in recent years -- as if fancying it up shortchanges its native, industrial and post-industrial legacy.

As Ronan recounts this chain of events and memories, we sit comfortably six feet apart in the almost deserted bookstore: our masks in place except when I pull up my phone to take her photo. It is her first “formal” interview for the book, and I give her my Flint knitted cap as a souvenir; she immediately puts it on.

Full disclosure is needed here: We are old friends. As my student at the UM - Flint, she was quiet but a startlingly gifted “mature beyond her years” writer as they say ... a Flint Public librarian called her a “prodigy” -- the kind of kid who makes teachers’ lives in literary backwaters suddenly worthwhile. She touched my heart, a miraculous talent emerging from Flint’s tedious mediocrity and bad luck.

She intersected with my own exasperation and impatience with a city I was not born in -- unlike many Flint natives, I don’t have primal loyalty to it. I got to know Ronan just as I was recreating my own life following a divorce from a Flint poet whose working class roots were rife with alcoholism, discord and what I had come to recognize as an intense blue-collar yearning for grace. That old story.

On her request, I read her eulogy for Bryan at his funeral, and in the dark days following, she took refuge at my house while my second husband and I were in what was then our other home in LA. She had a peach-faced love bird in a cage named Daassa whom she let out once in a while. He ate one of the buttons off our TV remote; he also left little plops of bird poop around the house, only to be discovered later, like little shards of disorder and depression. There was a door at the top of the stairs onto a flat

roof; Ronan says she’d go out there with Bryan’s brother to sit and mourn and drink and Bryan’s brother, a violist, would play.

[All this is why *East Village Magazine* asked Bob Campbell to review *Chevy in the Hole* -- I am capable of asking many questions of my former student, but not of writing objectively about it.]

She asserts with undramatic ambivalence: Flint betrayed her. Yet she says she also aches for the city and the family histories she brings to her work.

Her father was a roofer and her mother drove a school bus for the Grand Blanc school district. She was born at McLaren Hospital, walked from her westside home to Eisenhower Elementary and graduated from Flint Southwestern. Her father abandoned the family when she was a teenager. Born Kelsey McLees, in her 20s she changed her name to Ronan -- in repudiation of her father and in honor of a beloved grandfather.

Her father, who still had “existed but didn’t exist” in Flint, died last July. She and her sister only found out about it two months later when her mother tracked down evidence he had not paid his water bill.

“I don’t want to dismiss the reality of crushing poverty and systemic injustices and being chronically under-resourced, about having limited options in your life -- it’s very real,” Ronan says. “This town wasn’t good to me, and I don’t want to be the white lady that glosses over the reality. But I think there is a lot of normalcy here.

“I didn’t want to write the naive, rah-rah story,” Ronan says, “This is a flawed place: Gus is a damaged, fractured person. But there’s still recovery of the land, the person.”

“If you’re ingenious, if you’re someone who knows how to work the land,” (here she mentions urban farmer and Local Grocer co-owner, with Franklin Pleasant, Erin Caudell), people need to be fed, if you know how to do this.

“That persistent idea of ‘ruin porn’ -- that’s tricky. It’s not a lie ... there are these giant, crumbling factories ... yeah, you have the rotting house, but if you widen the lens you have the regular house next door, people living in it like my mom

feeding the birds and returning books to the library.”

“My therapist (who I’ve seen for years and who I owe a great deal to) sometimes speaks of intergenerational ‘curses’ and of breaking cycles/ family burdens that aren’t yours to carry,” Ronan wrote in an email followup to our interview.

“My interrogation of that very much runs through the book, though I’m not sure I’ve come to any revelations about it or feel profoundly healed. For instance, addiction runs through both lines of my family. Though I don’t want to diminish Bryan as simply an addict, he was, and I always knew that, and I loved him very much.

“There’s a lot of grief and homesickness in my family, too. Like a lot of Flint folks, my great-grandparents came up from Missouri and Tennessee, and those stories of ‘back home’ were present when I was little. Maybe it sounds ridiculous, given that I’ve only moved an hour down 75, but that homesickness, that ache, follows me.

“I don’t mean to sound all toxic positivity here (‘choose joy!!’) but I do think about the choices I can make, what I can do with what I’ve been given. In the book, Gus is aware that he comes from a family line troubled with addiction and miserable relationships and secrecy, but through the arc of the book he learns how to recognize it and what he can do to stop perpetuating it.”

Ronan’s life has moved on. She lives with her fiancé Dylan Doherty, a middle school teacher. She is a visiting writer at Gardner Elementary School via the InsideOut literary arts project -- a job she says is “absurdly fun.” She’s a part-time InsideOut publications coordinator and operations director of Room Project, a Detroit collective of women and nonbinary writers and artists. As “childless millennials” she and Doherty have three cats and are planning a move from Hamtramck to Grosse Pointe Park -- she says they are ready for a bit more comfort.

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

## Village Life

“What if he had opened his eyes?” Kelsey Ronan on grief, healing, breaking a curse in “Chevy in the Hole”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

**T**welve years ago, Kelsey Ronan found her longtime partner Bryan dead of a heroin overdose in their Flint apartment. Out of what she describes as an onslaught of grief, anger, loss, and finally, a hard-won, unsentimental hope, the novel *Chevy in the Hole* was born.

For Ronan, the book emerged from one poignant question: “What would have happened if Bryan had opened his eyes” instead of dying? She has imagined what could have been, out of trauma and her writer’s deeply implicated witness.

The book begins with a scene in which her stand-in for Bryan, Gus Molloy, is brought back to life after OD’ing in a bathroom stall in a Detroit dive. In the shock of not dying, he gathers himself together and comes back to Flint, where he arduously begins to salvage a life.

He finds his way to his mother and sister, to Narcotics Anonymous, and through that to a community garden project, where he meets Monae Livingston, a Black young woman who brings him into an urban farm project, they slowly and warily connect. On the day they meet, in a scene remarkable in its matter-of-fact and unromantic detail, she is wrenching a chicken from the jaws of a stray dog -- by pummeling it with a shovel -- and then she teaches Gus how to butcher and cook the fowl. It’s a bloody, practical sequence she executes with startling no-nonsense skill.

As Ronan tries to tease out the many dimensions of Gus and Monae’s relationship, she braids in four generations of two families -- one white and one Black. Gus and Monae’s love, and their lives, somehow survive: it is a narrative, Ronan says, of “damage and reclamation.”

In the process, Ronan shaped what she says is a love letter of sorts to Flint

in which the city is not just backdrop but a potent, persistent character: bitterly implicated in her characters’ hurts and struggles, a city that’s racially divided, poor, infuriating, haunting, complex, ugly, beautiful -- and addicting.

The city is also, she brazenly contends, “a place to be happy, a place of healing, and a place of fulfillment for some people.”



Author Kelsey Ronan at Totem Books  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

In a two-hour interview at Totem Books in late January, Ronan, 36, a Flint native who now lives in Detroit, says she plunged into a personal “wilderness” following Bryan’s death. She had graduated from UM - Flint with top grades, a prestigious writing honor and an English degree; after his death, she put out about 100 job applications, with no success. She volunteered at a women’s shelter and lived on leftover scholarship money.

Finally she decided, “I’m never

going to live in Michigan again, f--k this place.” She fled to Purdue for an MFA in fiction writing. Two years after that -- during the Flint water crisis -- she worked for a St. Louis nonprofit. That’s where she met her fiance Dylan Doherty, a philosophy PhD grad student.

They came back to Michigan together: to Detroit, to face more trauma. Ronan’s younger sister got diagnosed with a brain tumor and that took priority as Ronan stayed at her side through years of treatment and fear -- and they lived together during the pandemic. Her sister’s tumor was removed, she is alive and in remission after radiation and chemotherapy.

Ronan says that phase in her life also was when, with the help of a therapist, she began to unbury Bryan and her grief. For years she had excised almost everything about him and about her family, and hadn’t had time to process what had happened. She started to write about it.

“It was just like thinking on the page and felt like a spiritually healing thing -- reckoning with my family and with grief,” she says.

Ronan steadily published short stories and essays in increasingly top-ranked magazines -- *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *McSweeney’s*, *Belt*, *Midwestern Gothic*. A collection of those stories got her an agent, and then, after many rejections and when the collection morphed into a novel, she won a five-figure advance in a book deal with Henry Holt and Company. The book’s official release is March 15.

She says she called the novel *Chevy in the Hole* because that historically-fraught 60 acres along the Flint River in downtown Flint was near where she grew up, and has been the site of many of Flint’s -- and her characters’ -- transformations. She remembers biking through

(Continued on Page 11.)

LIX: 2 (706 issues, 7,388 pages)