

East Village Magazine

September 2022



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Commentary

The Tom Sumner Program leaves a history of civil conversation in an uncivil time

By Paul Rozycki

After a decade and a half of giving Flint area listeners hours of civil and wide-ranging conversations in politics, music, science, writing, and the arts, Tom Sumner has decided to end his radio program. It has run on WFOV 92.1 FM in Flint.

In his recent post, Sumner said



Local radio personality Tom Sumner at the microphone (Photo by Paul Rozycki)

'I'm suspending production of The Tom Sumner Program indefinitely effective Friday September 2, 2022. There are several reasons, but if I were to pick three, they would be dwindling audience, increasing difficulty raising money and for 15 years I have been trying to set an example of how information should be explored, respected and shared in a civilized way - and yet - public conversation throughout the country is becoming meaner and less informed.'

Democrats, Republicans, and 'off the beaten path'

Over the last 15 years, Sumner has interviewed a score of presidential candidates, most Michigan candidates for governor, the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House, many local

candidates for the state Senate and House, and almost every Flint mayoral candidate. He has also interviewed nearly every candidate for the Flint City Council or County Commission. He has held forums for many candidates, including one 'off the beaten path to the White House,' where minor parties, who rarely have a forum, had the chance to air their views.

Expert insights

The program has introduced listeners to a variety of experts in many areas. Richard Walker, formerly of the Longway Planetarium, offered his insights on astronomy and geology, UM-Flint economist Chris Douglas gave regular updates on the status of the economy, and legal expert Brendan Beery explained the latest Supreme Court decisions and their implications for the average citizen.



Tom Sumner interviewing former Flint mayor and local and state politician, the late Woodrow Stanley (Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Musical artists

Sumner has hosted musical artists who played everything from Bach to Grand Funk. Sumner fondly recalls the conversations he's had with Flint Symphony Orchestra Conduc-

(Continued on Page 8)



Photo of the Month: FIA Glass Hot Shop (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat ***Tumult continues on Flint ed board as president, treasurer tossed***

By Harold C. Ford

“Here we go again.” — Joyce Ellis-McNeal after being removed as Flint Board of Education president, Aug. 17

The tumultuous nature of the Flint Board of Education (FBOE) was, once again, on full display at the panel’s 3.5-hour Aug. 17 meeting as Joyce Ellis-McNeal, president, and Laura MacIntyre, treasurer, were suddenly tossed from their positions.

Voting to unseat both McNeal and MacIntyre were: Carol McIntosh, vice president; Chris Del Morone, assistant secretary/treasurer; Allen Gilbert, trustee; and Danielle Green, trustee.

Linda Boose joined with Ellis-McNeal and MacIntyre to oppose both motions for removal.

The motion to remove Ellis-McNeal was made by Gilbert; the motion to remove MacIntyre was made by

McIntosh. Seconding motions were made by McIntosh and Green, respectively.

Green was attending her first meeting after a five-month hiatus. During discussion, Green told Ellis-McNeal she (Ellis-McNeal) was “intellectually, morally, ethically not qualified” to hold the board’s president position. “I’m not the only one thinking it.”

“We’re just acting out in a way that’s unprofessional,” Ellis-McNeal responded. She characterized both ousters as “retaliation.”

McIntosh ascended to the presidency upon removal of Ellis-McNeal. The president’s gavel was immediately passed from Ellis-McNeal to McIntosh who presided over the short remainder

of the meeting.

Del Morone was chosen to fill the vice president’s position, vacated by the ascension of McIntosh to the presidency, with votes from Gilbert, Green, McIntosh, Del Morone, and Boose.

Green received votes from Gilbert, McIntosh, Del Morone, and Green to become treasurer, replacing MacIntyre.

“Here we going again,” McNeal said in response to the sudden change of FBOE leadership. In the past 21 months, since Dec. 2020, the gavel of the Flint board’s presidency has been passed four times from McIntosh, to Green, to Ellis-McNeal, and McIntosh once more.

(Continued on Page 5)

Education ...

(Continued from Page 4)

Difficult tenures of Ellis-McNeal and MacIntyre

Ellis-McNeal had been elevated to the FBOE's top position upon Green's ouster following Green's alleged assault on MacIntyre in March. Ellis-McNeal's perceived bumbling leadership style – frequently requiring redirection by other members of the board and central administration staff present at public meetings – featured rambling soliloquies that seemed to stray. Under Ellis-McNeal, FBOE meetings routinely lasted three to five hours and longer.

[Readers, listeners, viewers can witness for themselves the parliamentary untidiness of FBOE meetings for the past five months by watching videos of those meetings made available on YouTube. Print accounts have also been provided in recent print issues and online posts of *East Village Magazine* (EVM).]

MacIntyre's 20-month tenure on the Flint panel has featured multiple incidents of conflict with other members of the administrative and elected leadership teams:

- FBOE veterans Vera Perry and Diana Wright – who had collectively served on the board for more than 24 years – suddenly resigned from the FBOE on Sept. 7, 2021. Neither provided a full-blown explanation for suddenly stepping down. Wright had been repeatedly rebuffed

in her attempts to get the C.S. Mott Foundation's proposal to rebuild or renovate all of Flint's school buildings on the board's agenda; the most vocal and strident opposition came from MacIntyre. In a statement to EVM, Perry said only that her services were "no longer used." Both Wright and Perry had had very public spats with MacIntyre during the latter's first six months on the panel. During one heated exchange, Perry hurled the epithet "heifer" in the direction of MacIntyre.

- MacIntyre also verbally sparred with Ellis-McNeal in her first months on the FBOE. During one disagreement, then-board President McIntosh banged her gavel repeatedly and shouted "Order, order, order, order! Hey, hey, hey, hey!" in an attempt to end the verbal melee between the two.

- In Aug. 2021, then-Superintendent Anita Steward and Ayunna Dompree, then-executive director of human resources, filed "hostile work environment" charges against MacIntyre. Subsequently, MacIntyre's interactions with the two central administrators were restricted, according to a declaration by then-board president McIntosh. Soon thereafter, both Steward and Dompree exited the district.

- A March 24 confrontation between MacIntyre and then-FBOE President Green during a committee meeting culminated in an alleged assault by Green upon MacIntyre. Green was quickly removed from her position as president by a 5-0 vote of board members. Subsequently, lawsuits by both persons were filed.

Presumably, a personal protection order (PPO) requested by MacIntyre had barred Green from attending board meetings the past five months.

- More recently, McIntosh was escorted from the board's July 20 meeting by a security officer following an intense exchange of angry words with MacIntyre.

Perry, Wright, Ellis-McNeal, Steward, Dompree, Green, and McIntosh are all African American women. That may help explain why veiled and explicit charges of racism have increasingly been launched in the direction of MacIntyre by members of the public and other board members.

"Four votes"

"As you can see, you've got your four votes," Ellis-McNeal concluded in response to an apparent new majority bloc of four votes on the seven-person panel. Relative newcomers Del Morone and Gilbert joined with the most senior of the board's members, Green and McIntosh, to remove Ellis-McNeal and MacIntyre from their positions and pass other measures.

Green had returned to her first meeting after a five-month absence following her confrontation with MacIntyre that led to her removal as president. It was believed that a successful PPO request by MacIntyre was the reason for Green's absence.

After the Aug. 17 meeting, Green told EVM that Herman Marable, 67th District Court judge, had

(Continued on Page 6)



Former president Joyce Ellis-McNeal
(Photo by Tom Travis)



Former treasurer Laura MacIntyre
(Photo source: *New York Times*, March 24 article)



Former president Danielle Green
(Photo source: FCS website)

Education ...

(Continued from Page 5)

sent a memo to Ellis-McNeal explaining that it was not his intent to bar Green from her duties as a public official. Green claimed that McNeal had not disclosed Marable's memo. Earlier in the meeting, Green referenced "documents the president has been trying to hide from us."

McIntosh reappeared at July's FBOE meeting after a self-imposed hiatus of several months. During heated exchanges with MacIntyre, McIntosh declared, "I haven't been coming to meetings because I don't wanna' get set up like Ms. Green got set up!"

In a further show of strength, the new four-vote majority approved, by another 4-3 margin, to pay Green's legal fees stemming from the March assault incident. The board had voted to pay MacIntyre's fees at an earlier meeting.

The emerging four-vote bloc actually coalesced earlier during the Aug. 17 meeting during a tempestuous and prolonged debate over whether or not to immediately pay fees to the district's attorney, Charis Lee.

"I could've already taken this to court."

After a cacophonous end to the Flint district's long relationship with The Williams Firm in the fall of 2021, a promising new relationship with the law firm of Charis Lee also has become tempestuous. Lee had been recommended to the board by El-

lis-McNeal. But Ellis-McNeal had led a months-long effort to block payment of Lee for her firm's legal services for allegedly not following proper procedures.

MacIntyre joined Ellis-McNeal in vehemently opposing payment to Lee:

- Ellis-McNeal: "The (district's auditing firm) has advised ... that we refrain from paying until we hear from them. ... This board has an obligation to the auditor. ... We didn't authorize [to] let her (Lee) ... bill, and bill, and bill without documentation. ... Excessive invoices kept coming in, \$7,000, \$8,000, \$9,000. ... I have requested that the attorney meet with myself and the superintendent."

- MacIntyre: "This matter is getting very sloppy and unprofessional. ... This vendor (Lee) has refused to follow the procedure. ... You cannot vote to pay a vendor carte blanche; that's not how fiscal responsibility works. We did vote to pay initial invoices which were paid; at this point there are many other ones that are very problematic. ... The procedures have to be followed."

McIntosh, Gilbert, Green, and Del Morone vigorously argued for prompt payment of Lee's services:

- McIntosh: "This is sabotage ... If this board voted to pay her (Lee) no outside auditor overrides this board. ,, We have her (Lee's) bill and it's not excessive. ... This is slanderous (in reference to the comments about Lee by Ellis-McNeal

and MacIntyre). ..."

- Gilbert: "The previous board, before I got here, approved of this attorney (Lee) to be the board's attorney. ... If that attorney was in contract with this board and this district, we're responsible. ... I don't think this attorney has been treated fairly."

"I think she has the right to come before us and defend herself," Gilbert said after introducing a motion to have Lee, who was present in the audience, come forward and speak to the board. "I see no problem with that," Del Morone said in support. "It's better to deal with it in-house than in the courthouse."

In a rare moment of unanimity, the board voted 7-0 to have Lee come forward. Lee gave a spirited defense of her work for the district.

"I decided not to play politics," Lee said. "That you would withhold money from me, I really do not appreciate that, especially when you know I don't overbill this district; I underbill you. And I made sure to only bill you for things I could prove. ... Everything that I have billed, I have worked for."

"I live in this community," said an impassioned Lee. "I have no desire to steal from you. ... The allegations, because I won't play these games, is appalling. ... My name, my firm has been slandered and I do not appreciate it. ... I've still been willing and asking you and begging you to work with me and talk with me about these allega-

(Continued on Page 7)



Board member Allen Gilbert
(Photo by Tom Travis)



Board member Chris Del Morone
(Photo by Tom Travis)



Attorney Charis Lee
(Photo source: LinkedIn)

Education ...

(Continued from Page 6)

tions, because allegations don't mean they are true."

Lee said her firm has not been paid for its work for the district since February. "I could've already taken this to court," she said. "I've never had an issue with getting paid until President Ellis-McNeal became president. ... You have not cooperated with me as (the) board attorney since April."

"I'm not interested in meeting with you (Ellis-McNeal) and the superintendent," Lee said, "because I'm not interested in getting set up."

The discussion lasted for 79 minutes and became so rancorous that the security officer assigned to FBOE meetings, once again, appeared from the hallway and took a seat near board members.

MacIntyre accused other FBOE members of "grandstanding (and) performative circus." Green accused Ellis-McNeal of "lying like you do about everything else."

In the end, the Flint board's emerging four-vote bloc – McIntosh, Green, Gilbert, and Del Morone – joined by Boose, voted to pay Lee for services rendered. Then they immediately removed Ellis-McNeal and MacIntyre as board officers.

* * * * *

The remaining meetings of the Flint Board of Education in 2022 are scheduled for: Sept. 14 & 21; Oct. 12 & 19; Nov. 9 & 16; Dec. 14 & 21. They can be viewed remotely or in person. Meetings are held at the ALA building, 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint, MI 48503. Further details are available at the district's website. (www.flintschools.org)

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

Bricks ...

(Continued from Page 20)

car show a wife, son and daughter-in-law pushed an elderly man, the wife's husband, in a wheelchair up to his car. The old man was slouched and non-engaging until he saw the car, according to Bogart. The man's relatives asked, "Dad, you remember your car like this?" He sat up, talked to everybody about the car and his memories. As they wheeled him away from the car he slouched back down into his wheelchair. Bogart claimed, "This car actually brought him back for that moment."

Bogart said he's spent about \$5,000 and more than 100 hours in repairs and upgrades to the car, including fixing an over heating problem by replacing hoses and belts. He replaced the carpet because



Lawana Cardwell, of Flint Township, standing beside her 1965 Cutlass.

(Photo by Tom Travis)

the original carpeting had horse hair insulation under the carpeting, and the horse hair, when damp, has a rotting smell.

The 1960's Pontiac Bonneville is unique, explained Bogart, because it was the first one to have a complete grill across the front. Before 1960 the Bonneville had two-separate grills. James added the '60 Pontiac is one of the longest cars made, -- seven inches longer than a Catalina."

For everyday driving, James said he has a 2012 GMC Chevy but has owned other classic cars including Chevelles, Malibus and Mustangs.

"I was walking down the street and I said, 'I gotta have that car:'"

- Lawanna Cardwell

Lawana Cardwell parked her 1965 Oldsmobile Cutlass in front of the

McCree Building, on Saginaw Street. She sat in a lawn chair on the sidewalk watching car lovers admire her car. A Flint Township resident, Cardwell said she bought her car seven years ago, to the day, at Back to the Bricks. The owner of the car had put a "for sale" sign in it. "I was walking down the street and I said, 'I gotta have that car,'" Cardwell said.

She said she's never had a classic car but said she had always thought she would like to have one. "My brothers never believed I'd own one. But I always told them that when I see the car, I'll know it's mine," she added.

Cardwell said nothing in particular drew her to the '65 Cutlass being "the car," except maybe the color. Cardwell said she always liked the color red. She said she just knew it was the car for her.

When Cardwell called the owner the next morning he asked her, "Who is this?" "This is the lady that was interested in your car," she replied. "You were serious?" the owner replied.

Cardwell enjoys the car only during the summer and keeps it in storage during the fall and winter. "I watch the weather to determine when to put it away, usually sometime in October," she said. The only major work she's done on the car is replacing the back seat because of cracked upholstery, and new tires.

Her husband and brother are the only other people she allows to drive the classic car, insisted Cardwell.

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

Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3)

tor Enrique Diemecke on the fine points of Mahler or Bach. But he also recounts the times he's hosted Flint's Mark Farner of Grand Funk Railroad



Sumner with Grand Funk Railroad's Mark Farner

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

and Eddie Money on the show. Even after recalling the famous names in music that he interviewed, he takes greatest pride in the "local musical talent in the Flint area" who often performed on the show.

Writers and authors

He has hosted interviews with authors of mystery novels, cookbooks, travel guides, history books, political books, photography books, and art books. Best-selling authors David Baldacci, Mary Higgins Clark, and Debbie Macomber, have all been regular guests on the show. He recalls one story when President Obama met Baldacci at a book signing, when Obama smiled and said "You're a celebrity," to the writer. One of his interviews involved writers who were given the chance to complete the writing of the Mark Twain children's book.

Entertainers, actors, and witches

He said one of his most memorable interviews was with Carl Reiner who spoke of his days working with Sid Caesar and how his interest in acting was sparked by the WPA arts programs developed by FDR in the 1930s. A

last-minute connection gave him a chance to interview actor Tony Shalhoub, of Monk fame, when he was in the area.

He has also interviewed the sons or daughters of a number of celebrities including Vincent Price, Rod Sterling, and Charles Schultz.

On Friday the 13th or Halloween he would often have a Wiccan priestess take calls and do Tarot card readings on the air.

"He's been everywhere, man!"



Armchair Politics panel at Hell Saloon in Hell, Michigan. From left to right: Paul Rozycki, Tom Sumner, Jan Worth-Nelson and Henry Hatter

(Photo submitted by Paul Rozycki)

He has even taken the show to Hell, (MI) every Halloween, and has done the show on a train to Lansing. He's done the show on the road from St. Ignace, Cadillac, Mt. Pleasant, and the Birch Run Speedway as part of the Back to the Bricks Promo Tour.

He has done shows from the White Horse Tavern, Kettering University, Baker College, Mott Community College, Good Beans Café, WFNT 1470, a studio in the Flint School Bus depot, the Burton City Hall, a basement on Flint's east side, the Lansing Lugnuts ballpark, a new supermarket on the north end of Flint, The Bavarian Inn, and Slo' Bones Bar, in Frankenmuth, Calvelli's in Lapeer, Bluebell Beach, the Flint Flat Lot during Back to the Bricks, Flint's New McCree Theater, and in the last two years his



Sumner with long-time co-host and assistant Andrea Sutton

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

home studio in the Davison area.

And while Sumner gives great credit the critical role played by those who helped as co-hosts and technology experts over the years, he did a great deal on his own, broadcasting five shows a week, for three hours a day, 52 weeks a year, with much preparation for each show, delivering the quality one would expect from a major broadcast outlet.

Civil discourse and an informed democracy

But the significance of the Tom Sumner Program isn't the number of places he's been, or the number of people he's interviewed over the years, as large as those numbers might be. It is the nature of those interviews that matters. In his political interviews he has had Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, Libertarians, and Green Party candidates on the program and has treated them all with respect and dignity.

Unlike many interviews where candidates are allotted two minutes to present their ideas, the Sumner Program typically gave candidates 45 minutes or an hour to speak to the voters and respond to Tom's questions. The questions he asked were a serious attempt to learn more about the candidates and their views. He didn't fall back on "softball" questions, or try to embarrass a candidate with "gotcha" questions.

In a time when so much political discourse is a 30 second commercial, a tweet, or a snarky one-line Facebook

(Continued on Page 9)

Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 8)

post, Sumner's interviews were an example of what informed democracy is all about. He said his goal was to "get to know the people behind the news, and get people to listen more." Nearly every interview ended with information on how to learn more about the candidate on their website or other source.

More importantly, his interviews and discussions were an example of what a civil discussion is all about. He often contrasted his program to what he called "rant radio" where the loudest and noisiest voices got the most attention.

Unfortunately in the last few decades it has been the "rant radio" of Rush Limbaugh, Alex Jones, and their imitators who have defined much of our politics. There are many causes for the divisions we see in our politics today, but much of the tone has been set by those kind of programs. Social media made it even easier for anyone to join the rant.

With Sumner's civil discussion, even among those who come from different parties and hold opposing opinions, one could find common ground. His program was a sharp contrast to much of the divisive rhetoric that we see in much of the media today.

Armchair Politics

My own involvement with the Sumner Program came over a decade ago with his weekly "Armchair Politics" segment, where every Wednesday morning, Henry Hatter and I, along with a rotating third chair, would discuss the politics of the week. Though Henry and I came from differing viewpoints and party loyalties, the discussion was always informative and civil.

One of the greatest rewards I have from the Sumner Program is the friendship with Henry and the chance to meet the many guest chairs who have been part of Armchair Politics.

One of the regular third chairs on Armchair Politics is *East Village*



Tom Sumner with Jan Worth-Nelson at a fundraiser at White Horse Tavern in Flint.

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Magazine Consulting Editor Jan Worth-Nelson. Her views on the Sumner Program and Armchair Politics speak for all who have been part of the program for the last decade or more.

She said "He was one of the best propagators of good citizenship I know. In this time of fakery, mediocre thinking and massive bullshit, Sumner always maintained his grace, immense curiosity, and humor. He tolerated emotional outbursts but always brought things back to respectful consideration. He is world-weary but still loves the old values of fair play and -- yes, democracy. I learned so much from him and his guests. It was so much fun -- and an honor -- to be on the show with him, Paul Rozycki and Henry Hatter. I love his voice, literally and figuratively, and I can't bring myself to refer to this in the past tense:

I'm sad it's ending."

Part of Flint's history

Not only has the show been a forum for civil discussion in these divisive times, but it's also been a valuable historical record of much of the politics of Flint and the surrounding area. With the changing nature of the local print media much of that history could be lost. Thankfully, Tom has recorded his program and it has been available at www.tomsumnerprogram.com and as part of that history he is making arrangements to donate the recordings of the program to the University of Michigan-Flint Genesee County History Archives in the near future.

A thank you to all

In the end Sumner offered a gracious thank you to all who have been part of the program.

He said, "Any disappointment and/or burn-out I might be feeling can't diminish the pride I have in the caliber of guests the show has attracted. Political candidates, best-selling authors, live music and a variety of studios and locations have earned the show a reputation I never could have imagined when I began 15 years ago. The list of people for whom I am incredibly grateful includes guests, listeners, and contributors of money and other resources. To all of YOU, I say THANK YOU!"

EVM political columnist Paul Rozycki



Tom Sumner, signing off...

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

City's financial peril thwarted with \$220 million boost from State coffers

By Tom Travis

An infusion of \$220 million into the city's coffers from the State Treasury will give enduring relief to the city's finances. On July 6, Mayor Sheldon Neeley announced the City of Flint will receive \$220 million from State budget allocations to fund the city's pension costs. That allocation is part of the State's \$76 billion budget Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed July 1.

In recent budget hearings the City's CFO Robert Widigan has detailed a desperate picture of the city's underfunded pension fund. Widigan has told the City Council an annual pension payment of \$32 million was projected to expand to \$40 million in FY2024. With the lump-sum \$220 million infusion from the State the city's annual payment will be reduced to between \$18-19 million, according to Widigan.

With the additional \$220 million from the State Treasury, the city will be able to allow critical city services to continue, Neeley explained. Without the infusion of State funds many critical services would be affected because the city would be required to pour funds into the mandated pension payment. CFO Widigan explained that the city has "a moral" and "a constitutional mandate to fulfill our promise to retirees."

"Today is a historic day in the city of Flint. As a result of the hard work and dedication of many, the City of Flint will receive more allocated dollars from the state budget than ever before in its history," Neeley stated, when the payment was announced in July. "We will also see several community-based organizations

in Flint receive funding including Berston Field House, St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church, and the Boys and Girls Club.



Mayor Neeley speaks at a recent press conference
(Photo by Tom Travis)

priorities set at the start of my tenure and we will continue to set an agenda for the future for the betterment of the great city of Flint" Neeley said. "I want to thank our governor, Gretchen Whitmer, for her continued support of Flint.

I would also like to thank the Flint delegation - Senator Jim Ananich, Rep. John Cherry, Rep. Cynthia Neeley. Without support of these and other partners, the City of Flint would have likely been solvent, " said Neeley. "Their commitment to Flint is a true reflection of the power of partnership in our community. I am proud of the partnerships we've built to move our community forward," wrote Mayor Sheldon Neeley in a press release.

"In the coming days, weeks, and months, Flint will begin to address our pension fund deficit as well as utilize dollars in other principal areas of our city budget for the benefit of our community. "This administration continues to meet and exceed



Chief Financial Officer Robert Widigan speaking at a City Council meeting
(Photo by Tom Travis)

The city needs a "boost" - CFO Widigan

The City of Flint has been plagued by a \$400 million deficit in its pension fund. CFO Widigan has been saying over the last few months in budget hearings with city council the city needs a "boost" and the city of Flint is headed towards "insolvency." In a June budget hearing Widigan warned, "However, if pension costs continue to rise as forecasted in FY2024, the city is projected to see a deficit of \$15 million."

Currently the city has 1,700 pensioners and beneficiaries. Widigan said the city knows of current year pensioner deaths but does not keep a tracking sheet of the number of deaths over the years. The pension contribution cost has appeared to increase each year but Widigan explained that is due to multiple factors including funding ratio, market returns,

along with changes in assumptions and demographics of the retirees change. In 2012 the city stopped offering pensions for new city hires.

There are still city employees that are working who remain on the old pension system. Hurley Hospital employees, the city's hospital, are on their own pension

system, according to CFO Widigan. Retiree health care is not factored into the pension. According to the city the pension and health care are separate. There are no annual actuarial valuation reports completed each year on the pension fund attrition.

Over the last 10 years the city has contributed the bare minimum payment

(Continued on Page 11)

\$220 million ...

(Continued from Page 10)

to the pension fund, an amount determined by MERS (Municipal Employees' Retirement System of Michigan). An independent, professional retirement services company, MERS of Michigan was created to administer the retirement plans for over 100,000 participants throughout Michigan's local units of government on a not-for-profit basis, according to the MERS website.

"This drastic increase [of pension payments] makes pension contributions our most significant expense in the city budget. The outcome of these challenges is that the City of Flint faces an ongoing structural General Fund budget deficit of a \$14 million reduction to fund balance in FY2023. "This continues to grow to a \$20 million reduction to fund balance in FY2024. In FY2023, we address this structural deficit with the use of some onetime fixes available to use due to poor accounting practices from the past.

However, this does not fix the overall problem, and in FY2024, we are still projecting a significant deficit in the General Fund," Widigan said in an email response to *EVM*.

Reps. Cherry and Neeley, State Sen. Ananich help Flint to be included

"There have been long term negotiations on reaching a deal to help municipalities, including the city of Flint, manage the unfunded liability pension funds, Cherry told *EVM* at a July press conference. Cherry explained earlier legislation that began in the State House of Representatives "helped everyone else [in Michigan] except the City of Flint. And that's not fair."

"So the work that I did was to really try to make sure that the House version did not pass and become law. Because it would have been very difficult to sell to the City of Flint because it solved everyone else's problem but not the City of Flint's problem." Cherry explained that he worked to stop the initial House bill that did not help Flint and "I worked to create opposition to it."

Both Rep. Cherry and Sen. Ananich complimented the other for their "crucial" work on getting this legislation passed. *EVM* spoke to Rep. Cherry in-person at a press conference and to Sen. Ananich in a phone interview.

According to AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) President of Local 1600, Sam Muma, The union's involvement has been to "work with the Lansing people to understand our concerns." To continue to make a payment of \$40 million a year towards the pensions is a big deal when it comes to day to day operations. The reduction of \$20 million annual payment into pensions will allow the City of Flint to use those

funds for essential city services.

"The EM [Emergency Managers] kicked the bucket down the road." Muma suggested that the Council and the City bring MERS back into negotiations to be able to rework the amortization numbers in light of the payment.

Widigan, "We are constantly working with MERS to find ways to make the city's annual payments more realistic. We will both come back to the negotiating table to see what can be done after the \$220 million is made available from the Michigan Treasury."

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



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“What’s next? What do we do with all this?” Tracee Glab, new FIA executive director, welcomes new era

By Tom Travis

“The arts have meant a lot in terms of transforming my life. I grew up in the southwest Detroit immigrant neighborhood mostly – Italians, in the shadow of the Ford Rouge Plant. A lot of people that lived in my neighborhood worked at Ford or for Marathon Oil or one of the other industries in the area. So it was a very hard working, working-class, blue collar neighborhood.”

That significant background is part of what motivates and has prepared Tracee Glab for her job as the newly-selected executive director of the Flint Institute of Arts (FIA).

“The arts weren’t really a part of our everyday life. Survival was, to be honest,” she recalls. “But as a kid I had my first visit to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and when I was exposed to it through high school and college it opened up a whole new world for me,”

Glab spoke with *EVM* in the stately, wood paneled LaFleur library of the FIA. She replaces previous FIA Executive Director John Henry who had served as FIA’s executive director for 24 years.

“What’s next? What do we do with all this?”

“We have this amazing jewel in the community and we’re build-



New director of The Flint Institute of Arts Tracee Glaab

(Photo source: FIA)

there really isn’t anything like that in Michigan,” she notes.

“The second thing is I want more ownership,” she says. “I want our visitors that are already coming as well as people who haven’t been here to really feel like this is their museum, that it’s not someone else’s, that they have some ownership in it.”

“That takes building trust, building bridges with community members. We have been doing that: that’s not something brand new I’m bringing, but I want to further it. I want to explore ways to discover, ways we haven’t tried or maybe things we tried five or ten years ago that didn’t work then but maybe it would now because things are different.”

Reflecting on the recent updates in the Cultural Center, Glab says, “It’s growing and changing...I think it’s an exciting time to be the director of the FIA because with newly renovated Flint Public Library (FPL) and Sloan Museum of Discovery. I think the Cultural Center is

(Continued on Page 13)

ing on a very firm foundation with the fabulous collection and wonderful building, an art school that is top-notch with wonderful instructors so my thought is, ‘What’s next? What do we do with all this?’” she says.

Glab says the answer is two-fold: one, getting the word out to people in the community, including the Genesee County area and all of southeast Michigan because the FIA and its adjacent neighbors in the Flint Cultural Center are a close driving distance for most communities.

“To have this resource where you can go to an art museum and a science history museum in one visit and including the planetarium,



Flint Institute of Arts south entrance

(Photo by Tom Travis)



LeFleur Library at the FIA

(Photo by Tom Travis)

FIA ...

(Continued from Page 12)

going to get a lot more visitors than we normally do.”

second largest art museum in the State of Michigan and one of the largest art museum schools in the nation. Over the years the gallery has amassed an art collection with

art objects at FIA are European and American paintings, according to FIA’s website.

The FIA houses 25 galleries, a sculpture courtyard and 15 art studio spaces in its 175,000 square feet. The FIA boasts 160,000 annual visitors and about 2,200 students from preschool to adult who take classes each year, according to the FIA website.

“I can’t do this alone”

Glab says she realizes she’s the leader, but “I can’t do this alone. I’m counting on my team, I have a great staff here. And I’m counting on community members and people who have supported the museum and maybe people who haven’t yet supported the museum but want to. This is the only way we can take on this huge task, that word of mouth.

“We can invest lots of money in marketing, but it doesn’t replace

(Continued on Page 14)



Kearsley Street entrance to FIA

(Photo source: FIA)

Glab said she has seen the number of visitors rise already, especially on Saturdays, as people visit the Cultural Center’s newest update, The Sloan Museum of Discovery.

Public invited to an Open House Saturday, Sept. 10

Glab says she is looking forward to meeting the community and listening to their questions and comments at an open house scheduled for 12 noon to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10. Glab will meet visitors in the Bray Gallery where they will have a chance to chat with her and learn about her vision for the FIA.

FIA, one of the largest art museum schools in the U.S.

Glab steps into the top spot at an institution with a long history. For more than 90 years the FIA has been a fixture in the Flint community. Established in 1928 before moving to the present location in Flint’s Cultural Center on Kearsley Street the FIA now hails as the

over 8,500 objects with some spanning back 5,000 years. Most of the



Art workshops and courses are offered year-round to the community

(Photo source: FIA)

FIA ...

(Continued from Page 13)

the power of the word-of-mouth advertising,” she asserts. The FIA employs about 98 and is governed by a 29-member board, according to FIA’s guidestar.com report. The FIA has more than 90 employees and 7 senior staff with a racial make-up of 77 per cent white and 31 per cent Black/African-American, according to the guidestar.com report, along with a nearly 50 per cent ratio for male and female.

FIA Board chose Glab from a list of 144 candidates

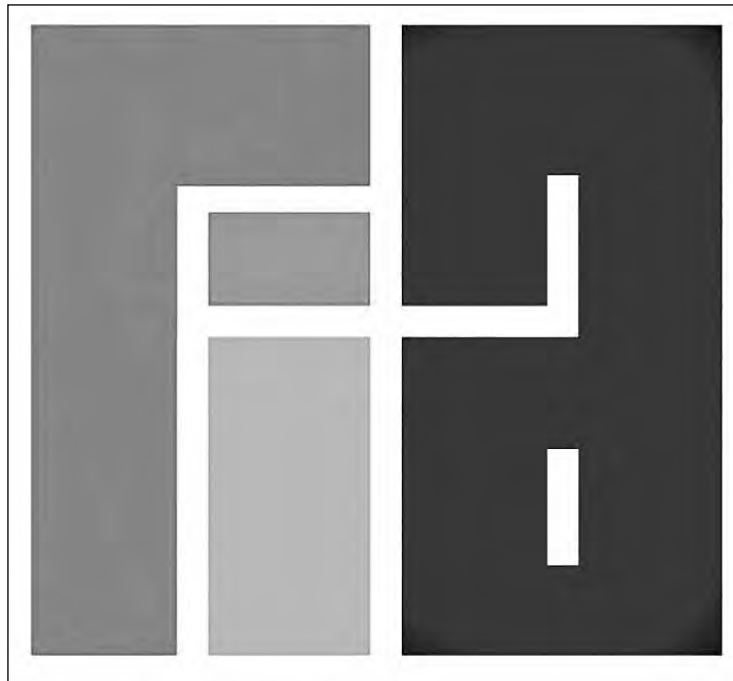
FIA Board President Tom Lillie said the Mark Oppenheimer firm was hired to initiate the nation-wide search for a new executive director. Oppenheimer returned a list with 144 names to the FIA board. An executive committee of nine FIA board members met to go over the 144 names. With the help of Oppenheimer and the FIA executive committee they chose 12 candidates. The whole FIA board examined the names and applications of the 12-candidates and narrowed the list to three.

Of the three, Glab, the FIA’s curator, was the only local candidate. One candidate was from Kansas City and the other was from Massachusetts. Most of the executive committee meetings were held over Zoom. The interviews of the final three candidates were held in-person in the homes of various FIA board members.

Lillie explained that for each of the three candidates an extensive tour was given of the Cultural Center’s buildings and institutions, housing options in Flint and Genesee County and local points of interest

in the area. Lillie commented that each of the candidates were “blown away” by the extent and beauty of the Cultural Center.

Glab came to the FIA fourteen years ago, 2009, starting as an asso-



FIA logo
(Source: FIA website)

ciate curator, then moved on to being the curator of collections and exhibitions. Her first project at the FIA was working on a Bray Gallery project. Glab has a B.A. from the University of Michigan-Dearborn and an M.A. in Art History with a study focus in museum studies from Wayne State University.

“We’re trying to reach people at multiple levels.”

“There’s a lot of work to be done and I’m the first to admit that,” Glab says. “And I realize that really good ideas can often come from outside the museum. As a leader, the director, my mission is to listen to people and there are already ideas out there that important to listen to. Sometimes we can’t execute them all for a variety of reasons, financial, staffing etc.

“It’s also important for me to be in tune with what’s going on in the museum world and other chang-

es that are happening across the country to better understand where the future of museums are. We are definitely in period of change; we can’t stay the same the way we always have because everyone else has,” Glab says.

The FIA offers specially designed tours of the galleries for those who suffer from memory loss. Those who use wheelchairs or walkers are invited to tour the galleries, according to their website. Tours and programs are offered for Homeschool programs. The Fall 2022 catalogue of classes can be viewed at this link (flintarts.org/uploads/images/AS-Fall2022.pdf).

“If COVID taught us anything, it taught us that our outreach isn’t just in-person -- it’s also digital and using tools like video and the internet to make our

presence known in our community and around the world,” Glab says.

A link for registration in FIA classes and workshops can be found on their website.

“...More accessibility and more ways to connect to our community...”

Glab envisions for the future of FIA a hope to continue “the same standards, excellence in programs and offerings of exhibitions.” She says she hopes to see “more accessibility” for Flint residents and, “more ways that we can connect to our community and have the community connect to us, so it’s a two-way street.

“We’re a passive place, meaning, we’re here and we’re open,” she says,” But I want to explore ways that we can reach out. I understand we are doing that but I feel like there are more ways, more

(Continued on Page 15)

FIA ...

(Continued from Page 14)

creative ways but I am going to explore this with our team more. I would like to see how we can be in the neighborhoods more.”

Memberships for area teachers available

Recently a sponsor come forward and offered to pay for a free membership for any teacher in Genesee County who wants to have a FIA membership. Glab explains. “It helps the teachers to know what we have in our collection and what we offer here. Hopefully they will be inspired to bring their students to the FIA or at least talk to their students about what is offered.”

“The millage has affected us very positively”

Thanks to a 2018 millage approval, everyday Genesee County residents can come to the FIA for free. In 2018, voters passed an Arts Education and Cultural Enrichment millage by 47 percent “yes” to 43 percent “no.”

“The millage has affected us very positively,” Glab says. “It has enabled us to offer the educational programs, exhibitions and collections, in addition to staying open and being available our residents now get in free. The millage fund-

ing has helped us to be able to cover the key areas of staying open and available for our community,” said Glab.

The passage of the arts millage, one of three approved, will bring in about \$8.7 million/year for ten years into the county’s arts and cultural institutions. The millage of .96 will cost about \$48/year for the average homeowner, making it the third highest millage in the county. Taxpayers’ money will go first to the Genesee County Board of Commissioners, which will then pass it on to the Flint Cultural Center Corporation for distribution, *East Village Magazine* reported in 2018.

“The millage passage made us aware of the community’s desire to support the arts and art culture, it’s not just the FIA but a whole range of institutions including the Greater Flint Arts Council, Berston Field House, Flint Institute of Music and the Sloan Museum of Discovery,” she explains.

“How I see it is that the people who are supporting the millage are investing in the community for the future.”

One of the number one things that makes a place desirable to live in, along with good schools and safety, is arts and culture, she adds.

“Having the arts in peoples’ lives makes them better people, makes them better humans, makes them more sensitive, more empa-

thetic. Even if they don’t choose arts as their career, the arts make people more tender. For example, there are art museums using art programs to reach out to people who haven’t had those kinds of experience before and looking at ways the arts can impact their lives. My focus is how can the FIA have an impact here and see how we answer that.

“I’d love to see the gallery filled with people. COVID had a devastating effect on our attendance but we’re coming back from that. I keep repeating this but I’m really passionate about wanting the people of the community to feel like it’s their gallery,” Glab says.

“I felt like this is where I would do the most good. I really loved my job as curator and I was reluctant to leave it because I love being a curator. But I felt like this was the natural step in my career and I really love Flint and I wanted to set down roots here.”

Glab isn’t sure how this new position is going to change her life but added, “it already has changed my life, in that people are talking to me in a different way. I’m getting an opportunity to talk to more peer-to-peer conversations that I didn’t have before as curator, and more discussions with the other directors in the Cultural Center.

“Ask me about it in another year,” she says. “This change has

(Continued on Page 16)



Flint Institute of Arts at night

(Photo source: FIA)

FIA ...

(Continued from Page 15)

been a whirlwind and I'm not exactly sure how everything is going to change."

Art galleries can have a perceived image of elitism

EVM suggested to Glab sometimes museums and art galleries can have a perceived image of being elitist or only for the rich.

Glab responded, "I've not heard that but I would love to have a conversation with anyone who thinks that. I can understand why historically museums have had that elitist vibe. Rich people gave objects of art and gave money so it became a rich person's

palace. But I think if people who said that met me and talked with me I could hopefully change their mind.

"While FIA still needs, very much, the wealthy to support us, from my experience, with our donors here they all agree and are passionate about making everything in our collection accessible to everyone. That says a lot to me, it says that our supporters and donors will step up and make sure we have greater accessibility for our community.

"We are going through a moment of deep reflection," she says. "We're starting to look at things that have a deep root in white supremacist ideas. The idea that one culture can appropriate another culture, put it on view and put it in a case -- all museums are grappling

with that and the only way we can really grapple with is to be honest about it.

"While we are being honest about it we also need to be good listeners and see how those practices have hurt people in the past. How have past practices made people feel excluded?" she explains.

"We're listening to the community to see what they want." Glab

"I wish we could just wave a magic wand and make all of it go away, but I know that's not possible. But I do think it's possible that we get there, eventually. I want to take steps to get there. So we're listening to the community to see what they want. Because I don't

(Continued on Page 17)

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Terae King Jr.

Major Corporation
Store Manager



Dylan Luna

Economic Development Manager and Former Educator

FIA ...

(Continued from Page 16)

want to assume that I know the way or I know how to make feel more comfortable. I want to hear from other people.

“I’m hopeful they can be honest with me and let me know, ‘this is why I felt excluded.’ And maybe it’s not just about admission -- it’s something else. Maybe when they walk through the door it’s not comfortable for them and I don’t know what that is until I hear from people. So I definitely want people to come up to me and tell me those things because maybe it’s something we can work on and address.

“Every community is different and what works in one community may not work here. So that’s where I’m really relying on people to work with me. And I really want to change that perception [that the gallery is for the rich] because I don’t like that perception,” she states.

Glab presently lives in Oak Park, near Detroit, with her husband and two dogs, Higgins, a lab; and Cody, a Pomeranian. But she added that she made an offer on a house in Flint the day of the interview with *EVM*.

Glab admits she is not an artist herself but is a student of art. Glab does hail as a writer and is currently focusing on writing about museum work. She has also written art historical essays for exhibition catalogues. She has written fiction and claims to love words and storytelling, “for me, art is just another form of storytelling.”

Glab says that early on in her career she was drawn to 19th-century British art. But because of the collection at The FIA, which is primarily American, European and contemporary, she’s changed her focus.

“I’m a generalist - one day I may be working on Chinese art and the next day on American 20th cen-

tery paintings. I love it because it makes things more interesting and I like to look at connections and themes between objects rather than just focus on one area. I have done the most research on paintings, but am drawn to all forms of art.”

Flint As Family exhibition coming to FIA this Fall

This Fall the FIA will offer an exhibit called Flint As Family

in three acts and about the Flint Water Crisis. The opening for the exhibition is planned to be a reception and panel discussion with the participants of the project as well as the artist who took the photos. These are ways to help us listen.

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



“KAREN ABOUT FLINT”

Underneath the leadership of Dr. Karen Weaver, Flint was taken off the most violent crime list. Dr. Karen Weaver has a real plan to combat crime by using the latest technology such as drones, live cameras, and fully utilizing the police intel center that was created under her leadership in 2017. In addition to ensuring that 911 calls are answered by increasing the police department to at least 150 officers or more. She has a proven track record for reducing violent crime. We deserve a safe city.

Under the leadership of Karen Weaver, Leer was the first manufacturing plant to be built in the city in over 30 years, employing hundreds of Flint residents. Karen Weaver spoke out against the unfair water settlement and used her national radio show to let people know Flint still hasn’t been fixed. Karen Weaver declared a state of emergency for the water crisis and initiated the fastest pipe replacement program in the nation.



THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of Sept. 2. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our Oct. issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by Sept. 26.

Labor Day Blues Fest

Sun. Sept. 4, 7:30 p.m.

This event, presented by FIM and 98.9, will feature performances by Calvin Richardson, Willie Clayton, Lenny Williams and Shirley Murdock.

Tickets: \$45 to \$65

For more info visit thewhiting.com or call 810-237-7333.

For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com/9757.

The Whiting

1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Goodstock

Sat. Sept. 10, 3 to 9 p.m.

This event will feature live music (Prof Joe Wright & Friends at 6:45) and others. There will also be food trucks, art vendors and "Olde Tyme, small batch Hires root beer. Goodstock will take place rain or shine but bring a chair.

Funding provided by Greater Flint Arts Council, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and The Good Beans Cafe.

This is a free event.

Good Beans Cafe

328 Grand Traverse, Flint

Coloring Parties at Tenacity Brewing

Tues. Sept. 13, 5 to 8 p.m.

Flint Handmade will sponsor a family-friendly evening of coloring. This month's theme is "Back to School Supplies." Attendees receive a free coloring kit and custom coloring page.

This is a free event but donations will be accepted to benefit programs for local youth.

Visit Flint Handmade's facebook page for info.

Tenacity Brewing

119 N. Grand Traverse St., Flint

Cars 2 at The Capitol Theatre

Fri. Sept. 16, 7 p.m.

Disney's Cars 2, featuring Owen Wilson and Larry the Cable Guy, Michael Caine, and Emily Mortimer will be shown.

Tickets: \$2-\$7 with 50% discount for Genesee County residents.

For more info visit capitoltheatreflint.com

or call 810-237-7333.

For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com/9773.

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

The Rocky Horror Show

Sept. 15 to 25, various days.

The Flint Community Players will present their production of this popular story. Some performances are interactive and for mature audiences.

Tickets: \$20 plus \$5 prop bag. For more info including dates and times visit app.arts-people.com or call 810-441-9302.

Flint Community Players

2462 S. Ballenger Hwy., Flint

Flint Repertory Theatre's

Death of a Salesman

Sept. 23 through Oct. 9

Evening performances (Fri and Sat.) are at 8 p.m., matinees (Sundays) are at 2 p.m.

The Rep opens for this season with "Death of a Salesman." This production features Tony Award nominee Lewis J. Stadlen.

Tickets: \$20 to \$25 with

30% discount for Genesee County residents.

Flint Repertory Theatre's Elgood Theatre
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit flintrep.org or call 810-237-1530.

For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com.

Gazillion Bubble Show

Sat. Sept. 24, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., 75-85 minutes

with no intermission. This is an interactive bubble extravaganza with lasers and other lighting effects for the whole family. Audience members seated near the front are advised to dress for "bubble mess."

Tickets: \$15-\$55 with a 30% discount for Genesee County residents.

The Whiting

1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info, visit thewhiting.com

or call 810-237-7333.

For tickets visit

tickets.thewhiting.com/9666.



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Village Life

“Why I buy cars like this – I was tired of seeing the same thing” Back to the Bricks 2022 is history

By Tom Travis

Five years ago James and Pam Bogart of Flushing were riding their Harleys near Kalamazoo when they saw a sky-blue 1960 Pontiac Bonneville sitting in a parking lot. The next day the Bogarts went back to look at the car. Remembering the same car his dad had when he was a kid, James Bogart was gazing at the Bonneville when his wife, Pam, yelled out of their car window, “Get it, I like it.” And in August they brought the classic to Flint’s 18th annual Back to the Bricks, a tribute and celebration of the city’s love of automobiles.

Back to the Bricks 2022

The roar of muscle car engines, shiny wing-tip fenders are the sights and sounds of every August in downtown Flint.

“In the fall of 2004, Al Hatch and other car enthusiasts began to discuss the possibility of a car show in downtown Flint that would complement and coincide with the ‘Woodward Dream Cruise’ in Detroit. Together, they began to take steps that would make Back to the Bricks a reality.

When the committee approached Jerry Preston of the Flint Convention and Visitors Bureau about sponsoring the event, he arranged a meeting with the Small Business Owners of Downtown Flint to enlist their support for a bold new venture that promised to revitalize the city and attract thousands to the area to celebrate the automotive industry and its role in the history of Flint,” according to the Back to the Bricks website.

Back to the Bricks is a week-long series of events that draws more than 500,000 visitors to the Flint/Genesee



Back to the Bricks graphic
(source www.backtothebricks.org)

County area. A car cruise that travels up and down Saginaw Street two evenings during the week, from downtown Flint to Grand Blanc, draws crowds to the curbs all along the route to watch the parade of



Rear view of James and Pam Bogart’s 1960 Pontiac Bonneville
(Photo by Tom Travis)

classic, quirky, elegant and muscle cars. The 2023 schedule already has been set for the week of Aug. 19.

During the day many car owners park downtown lining Saginaw Street and several side streets so that classic car lovers can “Ooo” and “Ahh.” At a stage set up in the flat lot, DJs and musical groups perform, the music broadcasting throughout the downtown via a complex speaker system.

1960 Pontiac Bonneville had two owners and all 10 grandkids fit inside

Pam Bogart sat in the front seat, passenger side, with a cooler of snacks at her feet in the sky-blue 1960 Pontiac Bonneville her husband James had brought to Back to the Bricks. Pam said all her 10 grandkids fit in the wide-interior, 60’s model Pontiac.

“This is a Michigan car. It’s been in Michigan its whole life.” Bogart

“I’ve had the car five years, James Bogart said. “I bought it from a man who had it for 25 years. He was 89 years old and he bought it from the grandson of the original owner.”

Bogart said it sat in a barn in Paw Paw, near Kalamazoo, for 10 years until the wife of the original owner died in 1993.

“After the grandparents, the original owners, died, the grandson didn’t want the car and sold it to the gentleman I got it from,” Bogart said. “This is a Michigan car. It’s been in Michigan its whole life,” he said. “It was repainted to the original color in the 1990’s after they pulled it out of the barn.”

A man came by and asked if he could look at the car. “I noticed he was having a moment.

He had tears coming down his cheek, he was emotional,” Bogart said. The man told James that his dad had this same kind of car, same color, same year. He worked at Superior Pontiac/Cadillac. James’ wife, Pam, called him on his cell phone to ask if he wanted her “to save him” and he said, “No, let this man have his moment.”

James has had other special moments with his car. He recalls at a recent

(Continued on Page 7)

LIX: 8 (711 issues, 8,088 pages)