



East Village Magazine

November 2022

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Commentary

Facing enrollment and financial challenges, UM-Flint asks, what's next?

By Paul Rozycki

"Academic politics makes me yearn for the simplicity of the Middle East."
— Henry Kissinger

Could the University of Michigan-Flint go the way of Auto World?

Probably not. But there are more than a few who are worried that the Flint branch of the Ann Arbor campus could face the same fate as the downtown auto-based amusement center that was closed in the 1980s and demolished in the 1990s after failing to live up to expectations.

Ironically, one of the UM-Flint's newer structures, the William S. White Building, which houses the School of Nursing and College of Health Sciences, sits on the site of the old Auto World.

Financial and enrollment challenges

Last month, in a community forum Sept. 23, UM-Flint Chancellor Debasish Dutta said that the college was facing major enrollment and financial challenges. "This is serious," he asserted. Mary Sue Coleman, the outgoing president of the Ann Arbor campus said, "The financial realities facing this campus are significant. I want to be direct: incremental progress is not enough, nor will it be sustainable going forward."

The Flint campus has faced declining student numbers and low graduation rates, according to Dutta. Enrollment has declined by 30 % since 2014-15 and its six-year graduation rate is the lowest among the 15 public state universities. The ratio of faculty to students is significantly lower than other public universities in the state. He said the current situation is "not financially viable" and that the

Flint campus would need to reevaluate its program and shift resources to those that are stronger financially. However, at an Oct. 20 Regents meeting in Flint, the university's admissions director highlighted an 8 percent increase in new degree-seeking students in the Fall 2022 semester.

Dutta said the college has hired the Huron Consulting Group to lead the process of carrying out the needed changes at the college, and that the planning stage would take place over the next month.

Several speakers at the October Regents meeting in Flint expressed concerns that the Huron group has a history of gutting the liberal arts and humanities. One of them urged the Regents to "fire Huron Consulting." Dutta promised there will be many opportunities for the community to learn of the planned changes for the Flint campus. In response to concerns that the community wasn't being heard, Dutta has said, "I want to emphasize that no decisions have been made. We are taking this process very seriously."

He indicated that the community interests would be heard but also said, "Ultimately this is the University of Michigan and we will make our own decisions."

At the Sept. 23 forum, faculty members, community members and students urged the Flint campus to become more involved with the downtown and the larger Flint community. Dutta and others expressed the desire to listen to the voice of the Flint community as they moved forward. Many expressed optimism

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Photo of the Month: Making strides against breast cancer (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Analysis

Two board meetings -- UM Regents, Flint Board of Education -- reveal stark contrasts of function, dysfunction

By Harold C. Ford

[Editor's note: Harold C. Ford, Education Beat writer for East Village Magazine (EVM) for nearly six years, attended two education board meetings within 24 hours. He was present at the University of Michigan (UM) Board of Regents meeting, held in Flint Oct. 20. He started to watch the YouTube recording of the Oct. 12 Flint Board of Education (FBOE) meeting Oct. 21 as he was out of the country and unable to attend the meeting in-person. He stopped watching the 5.5-hour FBOE meeting at the 3:45 mark when the Flint Board passed its first substantive motion; he went for a walk instead. He opted to write a piece that would reflect on the two meetings. Readers are invited to watch recordings of both meetings available on YouTube here for FBOE and here for UM.

Within nine days, two education board meetings were publicly held in Flint. On Oct. 12 and Oct. 21 the governing boards of Flint Community Schools (FCS) and the University of Michigan met, respectively. While both boards share many commonalities, the differences between the two were stark. This Education Beat piece will compare and contrast the two.

COMMONALITIES

Democratically chosen: FBOE members are chosen by City of Flint voters; board terms are six years unless a vacancy is filled. UM regents are chosen by voters in the state of Michigan; board terms are eight years unless a vacancy is filled.

Board size: The FBOE has seven

members; the Flint panel currently has six members as the position recently vacated by Danielle Green had not yet been filled. There are eight UM regents.

Board governance: Both boards are to democratically conduct meetings guided by Robert's Rules of Order and a lengthy list of bylaws.

Board responsibilities: Both boards oversee and evaluate the performances of its chief executives, set policies and procedures, and attempt to provide for the well-being of the educational institutions they govern. FCS has one superintendent and eleven buildings. UM has a president at its Ann Arbor campus and one chancellor at each of its campuses in Dearborn and Flint.

Public comments: Both boards allow for public comment during their

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Education ...

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meetings with a two-minute time limit for each speaker. Fifteen persons spoke at the beginning of the Oct. 12 FBOE meeting. Sixteen persons addressed the UM board near the end of its meeting on Oct 21.

Purpose: The primary responsibility of both governing boards should be to provide the best education possible for its students.

Critical issues: Both governing boards grapple with important issues that some would deem existential. The COVID-19 pandemic, declining student enrollment, and budgetary challenges

have recently plagued both K-12 and higher education institutions. Enrollment at the University of Michigan-Flint (UM-F) has fallen from 8,574 students in 2014 to 5,985 in 2022. Student enrollment in Flint’s public schools has fallen from nearly 47,000 in 1971 to slightly less than 3,000 at last report by the FCS superintendent. UM-F is now facing an uncertain Strategic Transformation plan advised by Huron Consulting Group that engineered severe austerity programs at the University of Wisconsin, the University of New Hampshire, and elsewhere. FCS faces several serious challenges: deteriorating infrastructure; staff shortages; poor standardized test scores; legal entanglements; and the looming return of indebtedness approaching \$20 million.

Administrative instability: Kevelin Jones became Flint’s eighth superintendent in 16 years when he filled the post in 2021; and numerous

changes in building and central administrative positions have accompanied the hiring of new superintendents. As reported by EVM’s Jan Worth-Nelson, Susan Gano-Phillips, a tenured faculty member and dean, told UM regents a “revolving door” in UM-Flint leadership, including six deans in two years, has caused “chaos.”

CONTRASTS

Size: The FBOE oversees a district of about 3,000 students in eleven buildings in one city, Flint. The UM Board of Regents oversees about 59,000 students on three sprawling urban

campuses in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint. With a student enrollment nearly 20 times that of FCS, one might logically conclude that the UM board would oversee a staff and budget at least 20 times that overseen by the FBOE.

ee retirements and resignations submitted by FCS administration. Prior to that vote, the FBOE voted on two procedural motions and received a single report on the district’s hydration stations. The following business was conducted at UM’s 103-minute meeting: the regents approved the appointment of Santa Ono as UM’s new president, four committee appointments, and 273 other personnel decisions; 18 reports were made; another 11 additional reports and/or action items were accepted.

Decorum: The UM board moved expeditiously through its agenda with minimal commentary and no parliamentary snafus. The Flint board was

plagued, as in past meetings, by plentiful parliamentary interjections (points of information, points of order), ongoing intra-board tensions, repetition, long orations, and multiple agenda redirects.

“Excuse me,” a frustrated audience member shouted at one point during the Oct. 12 Flint meeting. “You’ve just been repeating yourself over and over again ... Could we get to some point where we advance the meeting?”

FBOE members frequently play to the audience as in this call-and-response moment

between Trustee Joyce Ellis-McNeal and some of the Oct. 12 attendees that included paraprofessionals seeking a pay hike (starting at about the 1:20 mark of the YouTube recording).

- **McNeal:** “Who runs behind those kids?”
- **Audience members:** “Parapros.”
- **McNeal:** “Who wraps their arm around them?”
- **Audience members:** “Parapros.”
- **McNeal:** “Who sits with them?”



FBOE meeting from May 2022

(Photo by Tom Travis)



University of Michigan Board of Regents meeting at UM - Flint

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

campuses in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint. With a student enrollment nearly 20 times that of FCS, one might logically conclude that the UM board would oversee a staff and budget at least 20 times that overseen by the FBOE.

Meeting length: The October FBOE meeting ended 5.5 hours after its scheduled start, the UM meeting ended in one hour and 43 minutes.

Productivity: The FBOE passed its first substantive motion at the 3:45 mark of the Oct. 12 meeting as members voted 6-0 to approve the list of employ-

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<input type="radio"/> Michael Floyd Clack	 TERAE KING JR. Community Health Strategist
Board Member Flint Community Schools Partial Term Ending 12/31/2026	
<input type="radio"/> Terae King Jr.	

Education ...

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- **Audience members:** “Parapros.”
- **McNeal:** “Who cleans up behind them?”
- **Audience members:** “Parapros.”
- **McNeal:** “Who sneaks out of the building and goes get them something to eat?”
- **Audience members:** “Parapros.”

Flint’s intra-board tensions were on full display once again as in a lengthy give-and-take between FBOE President Carol McIntosh and Trustee Laura MacIntyre about the demolition of Flint Central (starting at about the 1:02 mark of the YouTube recording). Some

excerpts of that exchange:

- **MacIntyre:** “We, as a board, have not gotten any communications from our board president (McIntosh).”
- **McIntosh:** “Not true.”
- **MacIntyre:** “There have been no sub-committee meetings. The bylaws have not been followed.”
- **McIntosh:** “Point of information ... This is not personal attacks.”
- **MacIntyre:** “Point of information. This is germane to the topic.”
- **McIntosh:** “No, it is not.”
- **MacIntyre:** “It is.”
- **McIntosh:** “Point of order: You are off the topic.”
- **MacIntyre:** “As far as I’m concerned, this is an illegitimate agenda item.”

Fifteen candidates are vying for five spots on the Flint Board of Education in the upcoming Nov. 8 election. Profiles of eight of the candidates can be found at the *EVM* website.

The remaining announced meetings of the Flint Board of Education in 2022 are Oct. 26 (moved from Oct. 19), Nov. 9 & 16, Dec. 14 & 21. Meetings can be viewed remotely or in person. Meetings start at 6:30 and are held at the ALA building, 1602 S. Averill, Flint, MI 48503. Additional details are available at the district’s website: www.flintschools.org.

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



FBOE member Joyce Ellis-McNeal
(Photo by Tom Travis)



FBOE member Laura MacIntyre
(Photo by Tom Travis)



FBOE member Carol McIntosh
(Photo by Tom Travis)

UM-Flint administration lambasted for “bullying,” “chaos,” at UM Regents meeting as heated public comments critique “Strategic Transformation” and call for firing consultant

By Jan Worth-Nelson

The University of Michigan Regents got an earful in public comments Oct. 20 from faculty and students concerned about the actions of UM-Flint Chancellor Debasish Dutta, controversial steps underway to respond to challenges on the Flint campus, and the use of a consulting firm the group said advocates austerity and is wreaking havoc on higher education nationally in exchange for the bottom line.

The Regents, the UM’s eight-member elected governing body, hold their regular meeting annually in October on the UM - Flint campus, this time meeting in the Riverfront Center where media and the public were cycled through backpack checks and a metal detector. It was new UM president Santa J. Ono’s first Regents meeting since taking over as the university’s 15th president Oct. 14.

During public comments, Susan Gano-Phillips, a tenured psychology professor for decades and for seven years dean of the UM-Flint’s College of Arts and Sciences, said numerous complaints have emerged -- and been filed through official channels -- about Dutta’s administration, alleging “discrimination, retaliation, dishonesty, coercion, bullying, and failure to engage in shared governance.”

“Dissenting voices not tolerated”

She added, “However, because of a pervasive culture of fear and intimidation. promulgated by campus leadership, where dissenting voices are not tolerated, the wellbeing of faculty, staff and students is threatened.” Yet, she said, nothing has been done.

She said a “revolving door” in



Participants in the One University rally in McKinnon Plaza at UM-Flint

(Photo by Tom Travis)



UMF Political Science Professor Jason Kosnoski asking UM Regents to “Fire Huron Consultants”

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

offices of admissions and marketing, the turnover of six deans in two years, and at least four key positions held by interim leaders, has caused “chaos.”

Gano-Phillips said a group of former high level administrators, representing a collective 100 years of experience, are eager to speak with the Regents about their experiences, despite the risks to their professional reputations, “because we care deeply about UM - Flint.” She said so far there has been no re-

sponse to the group’s request.

Dutta’s response to EVM in answer to the speakers is at the end of the article.

A request to Regents Chair Paul Brown for comment has not been answered.

In part, Gano-Phillips’ critiques and those of many of the other commenters link to the controversial “Strategic Transformation” process under Dutta’s leadership.

Before Gano-Phillips and the

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that whatever transformation takes place will make the Flint campus stronger and better able to survive into the future, while others are not so sure.

The history of the UM and Flint

While Auto World had a brief connection with Flint, the University of Michigan has nearly a century of working with Flint and its educational institutions.

years before the new campus became a reality. The new campus was to be part of the newly created Cultural Center being created with major donations from many Flint leaders. While Mott and other Flint donors were strongly supportive of creating the new branch campus, Ann Arbor was less so, but in the end agreed to the creation of the UM-Flint. Many thought the UM-Flint branch would be created by expanding the Junior College, but conflicts between wills and trusts of two major benefactors—C.S. Mott and William Ballenger---caused the colleges to remain separate institutions.

to their current downtown location in the late 1970s. From that location, the University of Michigan – Flint grew to the major branch of the University of Michigan it is today.

The implications of the changes

At this point we don't know what will be the future path for the University of Michigan-Flint. There will be weeks and months of meetings and forums before that future is clear. But at this time it seems there are two major paths.

On one hand, if the University



The UM-Flint University Pavilion on Saginaw St. downtown Flint

(Photo by Tom Travis)

In the 1920s and early 1930s Flint Junior College (now Mott Community College) gave Flint residents an avenue to the Ann Arbor university by offering much of the work needed for the first two years of a UM degree. Many of the courses offered at the Junior College were parallel to those on the Ann Arbor campus and designed to allow students to transfer easily. In the Junior College's earliest days, most students did transfer to the Ann Arbor university.

It was C.S. Mott who initiated the idea of bringing a full UM campus to Flint. In a meeting with then UM President Ruthven in 1946, Mott suggested the idea. Mott pledged to give \$1 million to the project if the voters would pass a \$7 million bond issue, which they did.

However, it would take some



UM-Flint Recreation Center

(Photo by Tom Travis)

For a number of years, however, they shared the Court Street campus as the UM-Flint began in 1956 with 118 full-time and 49 part-time students. They remained on the campus, sharing a library and a student newspaper, as they pursued a 2+2 program with the Junior College, until they began moving

were to end its connection with UM-Flint, the impact would be enormous and devastating to the faculty and staff. It would be a huge blow to the development of the downtown -- and the whole City of Flint -- far surpassing the closing of Auto World. Given the commitment from the Mott Foundation and the whole Flint community, that seems unlikely, but not impossible. After all, Baker College, which began in Flint, chose to leave, in spite of having a large physical presence.

On the other hand, if UM-Flint were to shift away from the traditional liberal arts and humanities programs that have long been a part of the university experience – in particular, the University of Michigan – Flint

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experience -- and move to a technical STEM-based curriculum, it would also have a major impact. Obviously within the college it would mean a loss for those in the humanities and liberal arts programs and a gain for those in the occupational or STEM areas.

A number of students and faculty in the liberal arts spoke at the recent Regents meeting, urging the UM-Flint to keep to its tradition in the humanities and liberal arts. Beyond UM - Flint, a move to the STEM based curriculum would have a significant impact on both Kettering University and Mott Community College. Would all three schools be competing for the same students? And what would that mean for overall college enrollment in the city?

How to have your voice heard

At this point there is a lot we don't know. There have been several forums with the Regents of the UM, discussing some of the options. Chancellor Dutta said he has already held at least 21 meetings with interested community and college members. There have been a few news stories suggesting what path the University might take, from making a few modest changes to shutting down entirely and all points in between.

The scheduled public meetings of the Board of Regents and UM-Flint leaders will be announced in the future. Many of those will allow members of the public to express their views on the future of the UM-Flint. The University has a website, <https://www.umflint.edu/strategic-transformation/>, to keep the public informed of the decisions being considered.

East Village Magazine will stay with the story both in print and on-line to keep you updated on this important story.

EVM political writer and commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

Board of Regents ...

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others spoke, both new UM president Ono and Regents Chair Brown declared their support for the "Strategic Transformation" efforts.

Campus faces challenges

At a campus town hall Sept. 23, Dutta laid out a series of concerns and challenges facing UM-Flint, including a 30 percent drop in enrollment since 2014-15, the lowest six-year graduation rate among the state's 15 public universities, and a declining number of high school graduates statewide.

In a slide presentation, he detailed a process of what he called "market demand analysis, academic program analysis, and business case and implementation road map" which many interpreted as leading to program cuts based on economics over enrollment or efforts to support departments.

A UM - Flint website set up to describe the plan and implementation steps is available at <https://www.umflint.edu/strategic-transformation/>

Initial reshaping of the campus has centered partially on the new College of Innovation and Technology, which opened in 2021 to beef up the campus's technology and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) options. Formation of the CIT was funded in part by \$10 millions from the C.S. Mott Foundation, in addition to millions in state and federal CARES Act funding, and it is headquartered in the remodeled and expanded Murchie Science Building (MSB).

The first year, enrollment in the CIT was disappointing, some UM - Flint faculty reported, and in response, UMF administration added units from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), the UMF's largest, in what some observers suggested was an attempt to increase the new

unit's numbers. Others contend the moves were logical and intended to streamline and put like disciplines together.

Gano-Phillips said "the secretive transfer of three programs from CAS to CIT in June were designed to obfuscate the obvious failures of the Chancellor's signature strategic initiative, the creation of the CIT. CIT enrollment is just 26 percent of its year two goal, despite investments of hundreds of thousands of dollars in marketing and scholarships for many students."

Following Gano-Phillips' comments, students and UM-Flint alums, several identifying as working class, first generation in college from the Flint area, praised their UMF experiences but called out what they see as a de-prioritization of the humanities, and the prospect that as resources for the liberal arts are squeezed in exchange for the technical fields, UMF's overall prospects for survival as a vibrant four-year source of higher education -- and as an affordable option for students in the Flint community -- are threatened.

Sami Faye Kotob, a student in his 5th year of high school who is taking 12 hours of college classes at UM - Flint through the Early College program, lauded the opportunity to explore a variety of classes, and said UM - Flint is one of his top choices for college going forward.

"But I am concerned that while I may be able to finish my degree, the option I am given to do so will become increasingly limited. I implore the Board of Regents to increase funding and foster growth in all programs at UM - Flint, not just the ones currently deemed "in demand" by employers."

Preserve pathways for career success

Christopher Schwartz, a 2016 UM-Flint graduate in economics and

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political science who has clerked for the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals, said “Contrary to the wisdom of the moment, degrees in basic social sciences and humanities are vital pathways to career success. But I am worried others might not be able to follow this path if the social science and humanities at UM - Flint are not sufficiently funded -- and that would be a shame.”

“UM-Flint serves under-served rural and inner-city working-class communities in an important way, gives them a path to become lawyers, PhDs, and policy analysts. That path must be preserved.”

World languages “guttled”

Making a plea for better support for diverse languages, Emily Feurerherm, a professor of linguistics in what was formerly the English Department but has now been folded into a new Department of Language and Communication, said “Unfortunately, in the eight years I’ve worked here I’ve seen our humanities and world language programs gutted. We used to have multiple majors focused on Spanish, but now only a Spanish minor remains....there are almost no advanced world language classes left, in any language.

“This is not just a UM - Flint issue,” she said. It’s a community issue...lack of world languages risks our place in an increasingly diverse country and globalized economy.”

“Fire Huron Consulting”

A passionate Jason Kosnoski, associate professor of political science, described how the use of Huron Consulting affected his alma mater, the New School for Social Research in New York City, an institution that like UM - Flint, he



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asserted, was founded for “people that traditional academic deemed unworthy of inclusion.

“Sadly,” he said, the two institutions have another thing in common --they both hired Huron Consultants to “rethink” both of the institutions -- and at the New School in consequence hundreds of employees were laid off; same at the University of Wisconsin, he said, where severe program cuts, particularly in the humanities, followed Huron recommendations.

In a handout provided to the Regents, he detailed that Huron, formed in 2002 by 25 former employees of Arthur Anderson, an

accounting firm that “went under as part of the Enron scandal of 2001-2002,” repeatedly “shuttered thriving programs in the humanities and social sciences and drove mass faculty layoffs” -- at the University of Wisconsin’s Stevens Point campus.

“Huron does not share the values of either the New School or UM - Flint,” Kosnoski said, “So I ask one simple thing,” he said to loud applause, “Fire Huron Consulting!”

See Dutta’s answer to EVM’s request for comment about Huron Consultants at the end of this article.

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“We are very excited and energized”

Not all the commenters were unhappy with the changes at UM-Flint.

Mojtaba Vaziri, a physics faculty member of 32 years, spoke as one of the faculty who were moved into the College of Innovation and Technology this summer.

Thanking Dutta and the UM - Flint’s Provost and Vice-Chancellor Sonja Feist-Price, he said, “I want to tell you that the faculty who moved are all very excited and energized, and we appreciate the efforts made to make this move happen – I think it is important that you hear this.”

“Right now we are all fully engaged in a college-wide discussion on curriculum and how to enhance them to better serve our students and community,” Vaziri continued. We are fully invested in making UM-Flint a great destination for prospective students.

He thanked the Regents for investing in the strategic transformation initiative for the Flint campus.

“In my 32 years here, I have witnessed many changes and initiatives – but nothing at this level,” Vaziri concluded. “But I also recognize that additional change is needed to transform UM-Flint towards a healthy future.”

Promising a series of meetings to elicit community responses to UM - Flint’s challenges, Dutta said Thursday he has conducted 21 meetings so far with a range of constituents including in-house stakeholders and community leaders.

Dutta’s response:

Dutta provided the following response to EVM following the meeting . He was asked to specif-

ically address comments by Gano-Phillips and Kosnoski:

“I’d like to thank everyone - staff, faculty members and students - for bringing their passion for our university to Thursday’s meeting.

“Today, the state of Michigan finds itself in a situation where the number of high school students, and consequently, high school graduates is declining. Then, even fewer of those graduates are attending college. Something must change

and institutions like ours must find opportunities for growth if they are to survive. The strategic transformation initiative will see us examine student and employer needs as well as the needs of the community. From that, we will then thoughtfully and strategically reposition the university to meet the needs of the region. Huron Consulting is not making any recommendations; they are assisting us with market data and analysis.

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Book Review

Persona, place, and poetics in Sarah Carson's "How to Baptize a Child in Flint, Michigan"

By William Barillas

Born and bred, as the expression goes, in Flint, Michigan, poet Sarah Carson has previously published three chapbooks and two full-length books. The provocatively titled book *Poems in Which You Die* (2014) consists of surrealistic prose poems, narratives for the most part, that provoke speculation on what mundane yet consequential situations they might symbolize. Perhaps they represent the psychic backdrop to the realism and naturalism of *Buick City* (2015), with its vignettes and character portraits of postindustrial working-class life in contemporary Flint. The first sentence of "Perfectly Useful Front Lawns" suggests as much:

"We live now in a dream between who we are and what scares us."

That poem, like so many in Carson's second book, opens into an actual geography where roads not only take us through the present or toward the future but also into the past, as we

"follow Chevrolet Avenue across where the river used to be"

and

"tell passersby how there used to be hockey and how there used to be baseball, that our uncles had lived by radio."

A persona emerges, a version of the poet, and a distinctive milieu: trailer homes, jobs at Walgreens, Walmart, and Meijer, the demolition derby, laundromat, cigarettes, and Mountain Dew. That persona and milieu, as well as Carson's emerging poetic voice, are both moving and interesting.

Carson's third book, however, is something else, something more. She had me from the title, and not just because I'm a Flint expatriate and a scholar of Midwestern literature, especially writing from Michigan and, even more specifically, from the Saginaw Valley. It's the sense of purpose, or rather, method, expressed in the

ture life and honor the sacred, when one's place on earth has been disrespected, defiled even?

Baptism involves water as a symbol of purity and renewal, a bitter irony for a city whose water was poisoned, whether through sins or crimes of omission or commission by representatives of the state. As Michigan's greatest poet, Theodore Roethke of Saginaw, wrote in his notebooks, "[w]e have failed to live up to our geography." Sarah Carson addresses that failure with ritualistic tenderness and attention:

"First, hold the curve / of their head like // packed snow / a struck match, // a field mouse / you catch // with the cup / of your hand." Roethke would have loved that. I love the next step in the process: "Say they can be anything; / refill their root beer; // tell them, / Yes, // people like us / can be great, too."

The underlying impulse of these poems is praise—measured praise, clear-eyed and knowing. Not surprisingly, most or perhaps all of the poems in this book are odes, a sort of poem that speaks directly about a person, place, or thing, whether a physical object, living being, or concept, offering praise, however equivocal. A number of poems identify themselves as such in their titles, as with

"Ode to Brother's Best Friend in the Trailer Park," "Ode to the City That Is Not My City" (about Chicago, perhaps, where Carson lived for a time), and "Ode to Flint, Michigan on December 30, 2014, the 78th Anniversary of the Great Sit-down Strike." Like Keats, H.D., Neruda, and other past authors

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Sarah Carson's new book draws praise
(Photo courtesy of Persea Books website)

title that I find so apt and so evocative. How does one baptize a child in Flint, Michigan? The phrase suggests a process analysis essay written for a high school or college composition class. Remember those? They trace a sequence of steps, a series of actions toward a particular end, in this case, baptizing a child in Flint, Michigan. How is that done? How does one nur-

Book Review ...

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of odes, Carson knows through both instinct and instruction that, as Rilke says in *Sonnets to Orpheus*, “[o]nly in the realm of Praising should Lament / walk, the naiad of the wept-for fountain.” We’re talking Flint, after all, and the poet acknowledges violence (in “Don’t Touch,” we’re told how “one boy jumped another, / opened his temple onto concrete”), injustice, neglect, and danger (in “If the Pontiac Broke Down,” the speaker notes “no justice, / but a broken bottle, // a length of razor wire / beneath the slip & slide”).

Such honest witness contradicts the cant of pitchmen and politicians who would turn our ears and thereby our eyes from the reality of our lives, both the beautiful and the ugly. Good poetry does that for us, and the best urban poets of the last hundred years, among them William Carlos Williams, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sharon Olds, have known what Carson demonstrates in these poems: that one must look into the human heart and, say, a parking lot, with the same soulfulness and sense of framing.

In terms of framing or technique, one notes that most of the poems in this book employ short lines arranged into couplets (stanzas consisting of two lines). This artistic choice provides consistent pacing, rhythm, and a sense of Carson as speaker. Each couplet advances an image, action, or insight, usually as part of a sentence but always with its own unity within a larger flow of syntax and meaning. In poetry, every stanza and every line must work almost as a poem unto itself, and that is the case here. Two passages will illustrate what I mean, both from “Picking up a Prescription for My Daughter at the Rite Aid That Replaced the Rite Aid where My Mother Picked up Prescriptions for Me,” one of my favorite poems in the book, not least because it mentions a road that I know very well:

... it also took twenty years
to sell the house on Seymour,

pack the soup spoons,
the sandwich maker. . . .

Then later in the poem:

I am emerging

*through touchless
sliding doors,*

*plastic bags full of
half-off Halloween candy,*

*a humidifier
for the long night to follow.*

Taken out of context, these passages naturally lose some of their poignancy and physical immediacy. But their artfulness is still apparent, including the way that line and stanza breaks intensify and even embody meaning. The stanza break after “emerging” is particularly lovely, and the line break after “touchless” perhaps even more so.

This book represents a significant advance for the author both in terms of formal sophistication and engagement with the consensual world of places, people, and experience. *How to Baptize a Child in Flint, Michigan* represents Carson’s breakthrough, establishing with vivid specificity her personal mythos, her touchstone, her querencia, in the city of her birth. Like Whitman’s Brooklyn, Dickinson’s room and garden, or Roethke’s greenhouses, Flint is the site of her soul’s creation, breaking, and remaking. This is the book Carson will elaborate upon, diverge from, echo, and reinforce in her future writing. It should be recognized as a significant text in contemporary American poetry.

William Barillas is the author of *The Midwestern Pastoral: Place and Landscape in Literature of the American Heartland* and the editor of *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke*. He can be reached at williamdbarillas@gmail.com.

Board of Regents ...

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“Throughout this process, we are seeking input from our students and other stakeholders on the plan before anything is finalized. The end goal is to strengthen student outcomes at UM-Flint so that the university is academically strong, financially viable, and an institution that meets the needs of the workforce for our state, providing long-term success for all.

“The University of Michigan has many channels for filing complaints that Dr. Gano-Phillips raised.”



UM-Flint Chancellor Debasish Dutta

(Photo source: www.umflint.edu/chancellor)

The entire Regents’ meeting, including the public comments, can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za-nrcspBE&t=3275s>.

EVM is still awaiting a response from Regent Chair Paul Brown.

EVM Consulting Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com. Worth-Nelson worked for UM - Flint from 1987-2013, most of those years as writing faculty in the English Department, and retiring as director of the Thompson Center for Learning and Teaching.

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

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

Election Day

Nov. 8, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Those who haven't yet voted by absentee ballots can go to the polls in their precincts. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time.

You have the right to vote if you are in line by 8 p.m.

St. Cecilia Society of Flint Concert

Sun., Nov. 13, 2 p.m.

Musical Program featuring Terrence Stewart, baritone, new member Christy Fenlon, flute solos, and Larry MacDonald, piano, with music of Debussy and Chopin.

Free and open to the public, with reception to follow the performance.

MacArthur Recital Hall at the FIM

2025 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info contact Larry MacDonald, Director of Communication at 810-767-0418 or email larmacd@yahoo.com.

Pop, Funk, Motown, and All That Jazz

at The Capitol Theatre

Fri. Nov. 11, 7:30 p.m.

This show features Alexander Zonjic & Friends along with the Mott Community College Jazz Band.

This is a fundraiser for the Fellowship in Music Scholarship program.

Tickets: \$10-\$25

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

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

For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com/9825.

Flint Repertory Theatre's "Tommy"

Fri., Nov. 18 and Sat. Nov. 19, 8 p.m.

In partnership with The Capitol Theatre (held in a black box at The Capitol Theatre) The Rep presents a concert version of the 1993 Broadway musical featuring iconic songs "Pinball Wizard," "See Me, Feel Me," "Acid Queen," and others. This evening of rock and roll features Broadway performers and familiar Michigan actors. There will also be pre-concert parties each night at 6:30 p.m. Friday's party will be College Night and Saturday's will be Ladies Night.

Tickets for the concert: \$15 to \$71 with 30% discount for Genesee County residents.

Tickets for the pre-concert parties are \$15.

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

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

For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com/9583.

Why A Muslim Scholar Matters to the World

Fri., Nov. 18, 7 p.m.

Dr. Jon Pahl will present The life of Fethulla Gulen which is sponsored by Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint and affiliated with Atlantic Institute.

The UU Congregation

2474 S. Ballenger Hwy, Flint

For more info visit

[facebook.com/UUCongregationofFlint](https://www.facebook.com/UUCongregationofFlint)

Flint Institute of Arts

The FOMA film series continues with "My Donkey, My Lover & I," "Decision to Leave," and "Queen of Glory" in November.

Also featured at the FIA is "Enchanted: A History of Fantasy Illustration" on exhibit in the Hodge and Henry Galleries.

Free glass demonstrations take place on Saturdays and Sundays.

Flint Institute of Arts

1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit flintarts.org

or call 810-234-1695.

Black Friday: Owl Prowl

For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum

Fri., Nov. 25, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Learn about local owls and the unique sounds they make. Then hike through the park to practice your owl calling skills. Bring a flashlight and dress for some rough hiking. For all ages.

Pre-registration required by Nov. 24.

Cost \$5 per person.

For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum

2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton

For more info visit geneseecountyparks.org

or call 810-736-7100.



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

Village Life ...

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asked her why she chewed that tube of lotion. She just looked at me. She didn't try to lick me. She didn't try to move. She looked at me in a way as if to say, "let's do this all day, just stare at each other."

Tanja Mancinelli wrote in the Summer 2022 *Meditation Magazine* about animal communication, "Animals and animal communication can help us to restore a healthy relationship with creation by reminding us of the sacredness of all living forms, by showing us that everything is conscious - even if at different levels and thus worthy of our respect and loving care, and most of all by reminding us of the deep interconnectedness of all living forms, humans included, into a miraculous and mysterious web of existence."

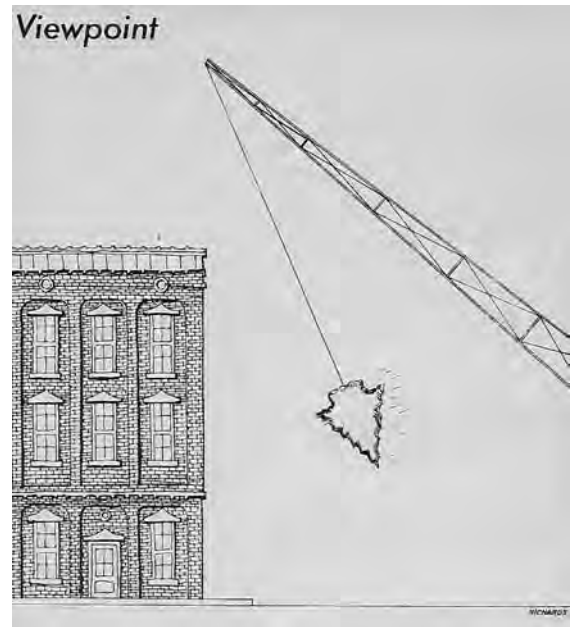
Each day when I came home Sadie had a bra from the laundry basket at the foot of my brother and sister-in-law's bed and a pair of my brother's shoes lying on her blanket in the living room. I would pick up the bra and shoes and put them back in the bedroom and the next time I came home there they were, again. I assumed it was a sign that Sadie missed her parents.

At the beginning of my dog-sitting assignment I would just leave the house, get in my car and leave. But then I found myself talking to Sadie and saying good-bye to her. I would look at her into her eyes and say, "I'm leaving now Sadie. I'm going bye-bye. I have to go to work." You've heard people say the phrase, "big puppy dog eyes." That's what Sadie gave me when I said good-bye...big, brown, sad, pouty puppy dog eyes.

Sadie taught me and reminded me of some important life lessons. We need each other. We joke about the crazy nature of dogs compared to cats. You know the typical scene? You walk in the door of your house and the dog is right there jumping in your face, licking, barking, running

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

Richards was a land surveyor, a trade he learned in the Army. He loved local history, finding ways to tell his stories through surveying. This cartoon, much loved by two generations of *EVM* staff, has been on the wall of the *EVM* office for many years.



between your legs (repeat).

Honestly, the craziness of a dog's welcome can warm your heart. Who doesn't love to be recognized and adored? It's like that classic Cheers scene where everyone calls out Norm's name: "Norm!!"

The welcome of a dog when you get home makes you feel loved and appreciated, even if the people in your life don't.

Nonetheless, I'm going to remain a single and petless guy. I love your pet - Flossie, Riffle, Sadie and Mitsy - as long as they're at your house.

EVM Managing Editor and animal lover but not an animal owner Tom Travis can be reached at tomtravis@gmail.com

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cnaflint@gmail.com

Village Life

Even Sadie's puppy love didn't convince me — I'm fine without a dog

By Tom Travis

I don't know what I was thinking when I agreed to take care of a dog and three cats. Not one of those little cute lap dogs but a really large, hyper black Lab named Sadie. Albeit Sadie is my brother and sister-in-law's dog, so kind of like a niece-dog.

I have to confess that the first two thoughts in my head were: my brother's house is way out in the country about 30-miles north of Flint and west of Birch Run. I was envisioning morning coffee on his patio in the bucolic peacefulness of country life watching the deer graze at the tree line along the Flint River. And also, shopping at the Birch Run outlets. When my brother asked me to dog-sit my first thought wasn't even about Sadie. I mean she's cute and a lovable dog for sure.

My life as a petless, single guy is filled with regimen and order, by design. I can pretty much tell you what I'm going to be doing most days and weeks except for the occasional and sudden press conference, visiting bigwigs or some other newsy event that dares to interrupt my balanced, intentional Zen-filled daily pace. I have neither a spouse nor partner nor pet to dictate to me a schedule other than my usual daily itinerary.

During the pandemic shut-down I pondered getting a dog or a cat, like

millions of others, as we all 'battened down the hatches' at home. I even looked up dog breeds and did some pet research. But then I snapped to it and realized the central tenet why I don't have a pet...I like being single



Sadie

(Photo by Tom Travis)

and pets are an extra and significant layer of responsibility.

I'm reminded of this significant layer of responsibility when I'm out with a pet-person having coffee or lunch and they'll jump out of their seat saying, "Oh, I gotta get home and let Fifi, Flossie or Bubba out to go potty ... bye." Cat owners don't have to do this.

I've even gone as far as to write down some reasons why I don't want a pet: I don't like to pet or touch animals. I don't like the oil from their fur on my hands. I don't

like their hair on my clothes. They puke and poop inside on the floor. They die and that makes me sad (I have enough to cry about.). They have to go to the doctor (money I don't want to spend). They bark annoyingly long and loud.

Reasons to have a pet: Companionship. Meeting cute humans while walking your dog at a dog park. The unconditional love from dogs when you get home — cats, of course, don't give a squirrel about you.

Here's another reason I'm not really interested in having a dog. When I walked into my brother's home each day after work I found something new, a gift, if you want to call it that. One day it was dried puke on the living room floor. My brother said it was likely from the cat.

I confronted Sadie about it and asked her if she did that. She just looked down the hallway where the clandestine felines dwelled so apparently it was, in fact, cat puke.

The next day it was a tube of my sister-in-law's hand lotion chewed apart lying on Sadie's blanket. As soon as I saw the chewed lotion tube, Sadie hung her head. Why do we try to reason and talk to animals? I tried to reason with Sadie. I sat on the floor with her and cupped her big black Lab face in my hands. I

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