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Magazine

May 2023

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Commentary

Is it time to unelect the electors?

By Paul Rozycki

In the United States we elect over 500,000 individuals to office. Every election year, the voters chose who will be their governors, senators, state representatives, mayors, city council members, judges, county commissioners, school board members, township clerks, drain commissioners, and perhaps an occasional dog-catcher here and there.

And all of those individuals are chosen based on one cardinal rule. Whoever gets the most votes wins.

With one exception. The President of the United States.

We elect the president by way of the Electoral College, a complex system that often confuses voters and has rarely worked as intended. Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Electoral College is that most of the time it has elected the individual who got the most votes.

But not always. On five separate occasions, in 1824, 1877, 1888, 2000, and 2016, the Electoral College chose the candidate who lost the public vote as president of the United States. In 2000 Al Gore had about 500,000 more votes than George W. Bush, but the Electoral College vote went to Bush. In 2016, Hillary Clinton had about 3 million more votes than Donald Trump but Trump carried the Electoral College.

History

The Electoral College has a curious history and has been modified several times from its original

intent. Originally electors were to be local leaders and were expected to exercise their own independent judgement on who they thought should be president. Voters were to choose the electors and let the electors pick the president. With the possible exception of the elections of George Washington, that fell by the wayside early in our history.

Winner take all

With the creation of political parties in the early 1800s, (which the founding fathers thought was a bad idea) the electors began to automatically cast their votes for their party. Gradually most states began to adopt the 'winner take all' policy, where whoever got the most votes from a state got all of the electoral votes. Today all states, except Maine and Nebraska, use the 'winner take all' approach. That 'winner take all' policy has been the main reason we have elected the second place candidate on five occasions. It's possible to build up a huge majority of votes in some large population states (like California or New York) and lose others by a narrow margin, giving the other candidate an electoral margin.

Reasons in favor

Those who favor the current system say that, while there are flaws with the current system, it does give a large voice to the smaller states who might otherwise be overlooked in

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Photo of the Month: Spring Daffodils (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Analysis

Turmoil at the top continues at Flint Community Schools

By Harold C. Ford

Editor's note - This article has been updated naming the former FCS employee who received the \$61,000 retirement payout.

The tumult that has plagued the leadership team(s) at Flint Community Schools (FCS) in recent years was fully on display in and around the April 12 Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of the Flint Board of Education (FBOE).

- Michael Clack, board president, announced an investigation by the Michigan State Police (MSP) into an alleged excessive retirement payout of \$61,000 to Monaca Elston, former executive assistant to Flint Community Schools.

- A revised partnership agreement with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) called for test score improvements in two subject areas and improved procedures within FCS administration and in board-administration relationships.

- By a 5-2 vote, the FBOE approved an out-of-state student trip that

went against the recommendation of FCS building and central administrators who said trip organizers were “not ready.”

- FCS central administration was rebuffed once again when its recommendation to fill a Human Relations Manager position was turned down by a 4-3 vote of the seven-member FBOE.

- Within a week, two central administrators resigned their positions; evidence indicates that discordant relationships with FBOE members triggered the resignations.

MSP investigation

Clack announced an MSP investigation at the end of the board's April 12 meeting that lasted nearly 6.5 hours.

The imbroglio over an alleged excessive payout to a former employee in 2022 surfaced at the March 15, 2023 meeting when Clack read from a report prepared by Stephenson and Company,

an auditing firm retained by FCS, that found “unused paid time off was paid out to a nonunion employee upon termination of employment at a rate significantly higher than past practice(s).”

The district's former executive assistant received a payout of \$61,000 upon her retirement in the summer of 2022, “approved by the board,” according to Clack.

At the March 15 meeting, all seven FBOE members agreed to launch an investigation into the payout that was about ten times greater than most such payouts which have generally followed guidelines for retiring members of the Congress of Flint Schools Administrators, an amount set at \$6,250.

Accusing fingers, implied and otherwise, have pointed in several directions:

- Clack to Joyce Ellis-McNeal, trustee: “You were president at that time. Can you explain it?”

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- McNeal: “That was an agreement between her [the employee] and Mr. Jones [Superintendent Kevelin Jones]... They agreed to the \$61,000 ... The board has absolutely nothing to do with it.”

- Jones: “This board voted. I knew nothing about it. I told her [the employee] ‘no.’ She usurped my authority and came to you [McNeal and the board] ... I wouldn’t have ever asked this board to pay out that kind of money.”

- McNeal to Jones: “If you knew that was a wrong check, why did you mail it?”

- Clack to Laura MacIntyre, trustee: “You were the treasurer. How did \$61,000 walk out the door?”

- MacIntyre: “We voted to have this employee compensated fairly according to the law ... I stand by that decision.”

- Charis Lee, an attorney who has worked with the district since July, 2022: “We [FCS] already have a policy about the payouts ... What happened here is that the board bypassed that.” Lee reported that Carol McIntosh, former board member who was absent from the payout meeting, said “there has been some type of criminal activity.” Former board member Allen Gilbert “felt he had been tricked,” added Lee.

At the April 12 meeting, Cynthia R. Scott, audit partner and certified fraud examiner for Stephenson and Company, reported on her firm’s recent audit of the district’s finances. She told the board of a “huge concern during the audit ... A large vacation payout (was) ... not in line with the employee agreement.”

Jorgina Rubin, since retired, was a 25-year FCS employee and held positions in the human resources (HR) department including that of HR manager. She made an unscheduled, nearly one-hour appearance before the FBOE on April 12.

Rubin explained that in 2022 she was asked by Jones to prepare a document for the pending retirement of the district’s executive assistant. Rubin produced a document that included three payout options that she then presented to

her supervisor, Sharita Galloway. One option included the \$61,000 payout option and two other lesser amounts.

Rubin told FBOE members she would not have recommended the \$61,000 payout option. Nonetheless, her comments provided no further clarity on who gave final approval of the payout.

Rubin did admit that she asked for similar payout consideration when she later retired from the district. “If this is what you all are considering for her ... I’m asking for the same courtesy,” she recollected.



FBOE President Michael Clack

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Clack concluded the April 12 meeting by advising FBOE members to prepare for the MSP investigation:

“It is extremely irresponsible and untrustworthy for one person to receive a payout that exceeds that of every teacher that has taught in the classroom ... It is unfair for one person to receive a payout ten times more than anyone would normally receive ... Treasurer MacIntyre sought the motion and President McNeal raised the motion ... The board has never been involved in the payout of a district



Dr. William Pearson, Michigan Dept of Education

(Photo source: Michigan.gov)

employee ... It is not district policy to show favoritism to certain retirees ... Beginning next week, a detective sergeant of the Michigan State Police will begin the interview process ... We will let the police do their job and we will move on with the business of the district.”

Partnership agreement

The goals of a new partnership agreement with the Michigan Department of Education were announced at the April 12 meeting.

“We have now had our partnership agreement approved by MDE,” announced Diona Clingman, FCS executive director of academics. Members of the team that crafted the partnership agreement included FCS administration and staff, MDE, the Genesee Intermediate School District, and the Crim Foundation which provides support services for FCS students.

Clingman said three goals were established in the agreement: modest improvements by students in literacy and math; and a systems goal:

- FCS students who score “proficient” in literacy will increase by three percent by June 30, 2025.

- FCS students who score “proficient” in math will increase by three percent by June 30, 2025.

- A “systems goal” included “the development and implementing of effective systems between the FCS Board of Education and district personnel that increase operational efficiency to improve the academic and social-emotional learning of FCS scholars by June 30, 2025.” Targets for this goal include: better FCS student attendance; diversity and inclusion training; and improvements in governance to include operations of the FCS business office and human resources department;

[As if on cue, FCS executives in both the business and human resources departments have submitted their resignations within a week of one another. See below.]

Dr. William Pearson, director of office of partnership districts and Paul

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Rozycki commentary ...

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a national election. There is some truth to that. For example, the smallest population state, Wyoming, has about 570,000 people, about half the population of Oakland County Michigan, which has more than 1,200,000 residents. Yet, Wyoming gets three electoral votes, equal to its representation in the U.S. Congress. Similar numbers are true for other small population states. That gives Wyoming a bit more clout that it might otherwise have. But it also means that in Wyoming there are about 144,000 voters per electoral vote, while in a state like Florida it takes 536,000 voters to equal one vote.

Others feel that the existence of the Electoral College makes a complex national recount less likely, as might have been the case in 1960 when Kennedy barely won Illinois to win the presidency. In many elections the electoral vote expands the margin for the winning candidate.

Problems with the Electoral College

While the Electoral College may give a little extra clout to small states, it also means that many states are ignored during a presidential campaign. Because of the ‘winner take all’ rule, whoever gets the most votes in a state gets all the electoral votes. So that forces candidates to focus heavily on the ‘tossup states’ that could go either way. Win Michigan by one vote and you get all 15 electoral votes. Win Pennsylvania or Georgia by one vote and you get all of their electoral votes. In 2020 the great majority of all campaign events were held in 6 states. Nearly 65 percent of voters live in states where the candidates rarely visit.

In addition, for states that strongly support one party there is no reason for either party to campaign there. Wyoming and West Virginia are strongly Republican states. Why should a Republican bother campaigning there? If they get 51 percent of the vote, or 99 percent they will get all the electoral votes. For Democrats the same is true. Why bother to campaign there? If they get 49 percent of the vote or 1 percent, they will get zero electoral votes. For states that typically vote Democratic like California or Massachusetts the pattern prevails in reverse.

That pattern also limits a voter’s impact on the national election. If you are a Democratic



Voters lined up outside City Hall during the November 2020 election

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

voter in Wyoming or West Virginia your vote won’t help your presidential candidate at all. If you are a Republican voter in California or Massachusetts the same is true. A popular vote election would mean that everyone’s vote would play an equal role in deciding the winner, whether they are in Wyoming, West Virginia, Massachusetts, California, or anywhere else.

Turnout

One other problem with the Electoral College is that the electoral votes are equal to the number of members of Congress a state has—two senators and the number of U.S. House members in a state. The smallest population states have

three electoral votes and the largest (California) has 54. Michigan currently has 15. The problem is that the voter turnout doesn’t change that number. If only 1 percent vote in California they decide all 54 electoral votes. If 5.5 million vote, more than 70 percent, in Michigan, as they did in 2020, they decide how our 15 electoral vote are cast.

“Faithless electors”

While the electors are pledged to support their party’s candidate if they win, they technically do have the right to vote any way they want. That was the original intent of the Electoral College. In recent elections there have

been “faithless electors” who voted for someone other than their party’s candidate. In 2016, John Kasich, Bernie Sanders, Colin Powell, Ron Paul, and Faith Spotted Eagle all received electoral votes for president.

There have been 165 “faithless electors” in over the years. So far, no election has been changed

because of a “faithless elector,” and 33 states have passed laws to prevent it from happening, but the possibility remains.

January 6 and the “fake electors”

The events around the January 6th insurrection and the attempts to overturn the 2020 election with “fake electors” and proposed actions by the vice president demonstrate one additional risk of the current electoral system. As part of the plot to overturn the 2020 election “fake electors” were put forward in seven key states, including Michigan. The hope was that they would somehow replace the genuine electors and

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Rozycki commentary ...

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give Trump the victory.

How to fix the system

Over the years a number of plans have been put forward to address the problems with the Electoral College. A September 2020 Gallup poll showed that 61 percent of Americans were in favor of abolishing the Electoral College, an increase of 12 points from 2016.

Constitutional Amendment

The most straight forward way to fix the problem would be simply to amend the Constitution, abolish the Electoral College, and have the president elected by a popular vote. But the amendment process is long and difficult, normally requiring support of two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-fourths (38) of the states. It's not easy, and most observers feel that an amendment would have little chance of success at this time.

The Proportional Plan

Some argue that the states should divide their votes in proportion to the popular vote in that state. For example, if a candidate got 60 percent of the vote, they would get 60 percent of the electoral votes, not 100 percent as is the case in most states today. The losing candidate would get 40 percent of the electoral votes. Though this plan would eliminate the 'winner take all' aspect of the Electoral College, it might end up throwing elections into the House if no one got the required 270 votes, especially if third parties picked up some electoral votes.

The District Plan

Since the number of electoral votes that each state gets is equal to the number of representatives in Congress, some have supported a plan which would give electoral votes to whoever won each Congressional district in a state. The candidate with the most votes statewide would get the two extra votes for the U.S. Senators. Nebraska and Maine use a version of the district plan. However, some projections of the district plan indicate that it would have as many failures as the current system, and would be subject to gerrymandered election districts.

The National Popular Vote Compact

The proposal that Michigan voters are likely to see on the ballot next year is the National Popular Vote Compact. Quite simply this plan would give all of Michigan's electoral votes to the candidate with the most votes nationwide. So far 15 states and the District of Columbia, representing 195 electors, have supported the idea, and Michigan could be the next one. It keeps the Electoral College, retains a state role in presidential elections, but gives the votes to the popular vote winner.

What is notable in these divided times is that the proposal is supported by the past chairs of both the Michigan Democratic and Republican parties. Both former Republican Party Chair Saul Anuzis, and former Democratic Party Chair Mark Brewer, are working together to support the proposal. If supported by enough states, with 270 or more electoral votes, it would not eliminate the Electoral College, but would assure that the winner of any presidential election received the most votes

from the public.

It almost got on the ballot in 2022. In the months to come look for petitions to place it on the ballot in 2024.

Maybe it is time to "unelect the electors" or at least change the way we elect presidents.

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

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Education turmoil ...

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Schumer, MDE educational consultant and partnership agreement liaison, participated in the presentation. Pearson told *East Village Magazine (EVM)* that previous partnership agreements were disrupted by the COVID pandemic. He told *EVM*, “The data was not valid.” No districts entered the partnership program in 2020 and 2021.

The previous iteration of a partnership agreement between MDE and FCS covered the years 2018-19 to 2020-21. The goals were threesome: improve student attendance by 10 percent; reduce out-of-school suspensions by 10 percent; increase student attendance to 90 percent.

In November, 2022, the MDE announced that more than 50 districts in Michigan presided over at least one underperforming school and, therefore, would be required to enter into a partnership agreement with the MDE.

In all, there are over a hundred such “partnership” schools in the state. FCS “partnership” schools include: Brownell, Eisenhower, Freeman, Neithercut, Pierce, and Potter.

Other Genesee County schools on the “partnership list” include: Beecher High and Dailey Elementary in the Beecher Community School District; Eagle’s Nest Academy; and Greater Heights Academy.

Schools become candidates for partnership agreements if their four-year graduation rate is 67 percent or less or scores fall to the bottom five percent on the state’s “index accountability system” which includes student academic performance, attendance, graduation rate, availability of career and college preparation courses, and more.

Springtime standardized testing has already commenced for Flint students. Testing windows for at least seven categories of tests began Feb. 2 and end May 26. A full schedule of standardized tests for FCS students is found at the district’s website.

[*EVM* last reported on the test scores of area schools in Sept. 2019.]

FBOE approves D.C. trip despite FCS administration reservations

During the time for “Remarks from Individual Board Members” scheduled near the end of every FBOE meeting – a time when unexpected motions, not on the printed agenda, have often been introduced – another such motion was brought by Trustee Melody Relerford.

Relerford’s motion seeking the board’s approval and support for the upcoming senior prom and a trip to Washington D.C. for some 140 8th graders at Holmes STEM Academy were bundled together in a single motion and approved by a 5-2 vote of the board after a 50-minute discussion.



FBOE member Melody Relerford
(Photo by Tom Travis)

The D.C. trip was approved despite the reservations of FCS central and building administrations who cautioned that trip organizers were “not ready”:

- Assistant Superintendent Keiona Murphy: “This was not initiated properly in the beginning ... The (trip) details are not as clear as they need to be ... I’m challenged by the timeline ... This is not how I do business.”

- Superintendent Jones: “This (trip) is logistically not together ... Safety has been our top priority ... We have to insure that we have enough chaperones ... The (Holmes) principal and assistant principal don’t think they need to take this trip this year.”

Relerford was unable to answer questions about the number of student travelers, travel date(s), or other trip details. “That’s being worked out,” she said.

Rather, Relerford chose to read aloud a letter by an organizer of the trip, a Holmes teacher, that excoriated Jones and his administration for its initial response to the trip. The letter said Jones’s “mind had already been made up.” The letter charged Jones with an “ambush” by “using every lame excuse in the book” to deny the trip.

The letter read by Relerford also accused Jones of “not enough respect for me (the teacher)” and noted his “concern and disapproval of you (Relerford) contacting me.”

“Most of what I’ve just heard is incorrect,” Jones responded. FBOE Treasurer Dylan Luna found it “inappropriate to read a letter like that.”

At the end of the meeting, Clack also cautioned panelists about overstepping boundaries: “As board members, it is not our role to overstep administration and pry into their daily affairs. Our main responsibilities are to set policy for the district and approve the budget.” Nonetheless, Clack voted to approve the D.C. trip despite the “not ready” warnings from the FCS administrative team.

In the end, only King and Luna cast dissenting votes citing “process” and potential damage to the district’s “chain of command.”

The other five members of the panel voted to approve the D.C. trip:

- Relerford: “Everybody up here is saying they’re here for the students; I need you to show it.”

- MacIntyre: “Let’s do this ... Let’s think outside the box.”

FBOE rejects HR hire recommended by FCS central administration

At the April 12 FBOE meeting, the district’s central administration team suffered another setback when the board turned down its candidate to fill the vacant “HR Manager” position by a 3-4, for-against, vote. Dissenting votes were cast by McNeal, MacIntyre, Perkins, and Relerford – an FBOE quartet of panelists that has coalesced into an identifiable voting bloc.

In the end, the oft-heard protesta-

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tions of MacIntyre about a bloated central administration, including a “top-heavy” HR department, won the day. “School districts of comparable size don’t have all these positions,” she said.

Following the rejection, Jones told the board that the HR Manager position would not be filled.

Resignations of two central administrators

It was announced at the FBOE’s April 12 COW meeting that Latisha Wolf, executive director of finance, had resigned her position April 7. That followed an apparent public-private dustup between Wolf and FBOE Trustee Relerford. “I would like you to address Dr. Wolf tonight,” Relerford said at the board’s March 15 meeting before conspicuously asking Jones about the deadline for renewal/nonrenewal of contracts.

Stephenson and Company’s Scott told the board: “That [Wolf’s resignation] brings grave concerns to me ... It’s really important that you get somebody in there.” She said FCS may need to appeal to the MDE for help.

In a document provided EVM by an anonymous source, Sharita Galloway, FCS executive director of human resources, submitted her resignation April 15. Her resignation letter said, in part:

“I have endured endless nights away from my family to stand witness to irrelevant bickering, physical, emotional, verbal violence and abuse at the hands of board members ... I, along with others of the executive team have been victims of thrashing to our personal and professional integrity and character without cause or remorse.”

At its March 15 meeting, an FBOE member summoned Galloway to speak about the alleged excessive payout to a former district employee. Jones cautioned against the request: “Not if it’s going to cause her to be ostracized ... I’ve been here so many times before.”

Galloway told the FBOE that the

board’s \$61,000 payout was done “not according to the policy, the procedure, or the process.” [See “MSP investigation” above.]

Galloway’s resignation also follows the FBOE’s very public rejection on April 12 of an “HR Manager” position recommended by FCS central administration. [See “FBOE rejects HR hire” above].

* * * * *

FBOE meetings are held at Accelerated Learning Academy, 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint, MI 48503. A link is posted at the FCS website to access online viewing; visit www.flintschools.org; or type Flint Community Schools into the YouTube search engine.

Future meetings of the FBOE are: May 10 (Committee of the Whole/COW); May 17; June 14 (COW); June 21. Check the FCS website for any other FCS meetings open to the public

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Village Life coney ...

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granite, onions so fresh and wet they sparkled like diamonds, mustard of pure sunshine, the bun firm but damp with steam, a real Flint Original.”

To cheers and applause, Coyne continued, from their first arrivals, Macedonian immigrants to Flint “stirred up a dry sauce that made mouths water from Seattle to Miami and hearts flutter from Boston to San Diego.”

Mourning the Big Girl, the coney joint she represented, and perhaps summing up the essence of “coney culture,” Coyne concluded,

“I recognized your convictions that humans are fallible because humans are hungry. so you would forgive us and feed us. After all, there is plenty of pain in this world and all of our life is just one long goodbye.” (from “Farewell, My Lovely,” in Atlas: Short Stories, Gothic Funk Press, 2015)

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UM - Flint tenured faculty begin unionization efforts, propelled by governance, pay, work life, university climate concerns

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Editor's note - This article mentions several links which can be followed on our website at eastvillagemagazine.org.

The tenured and tenure-track faculty at the University of Michigan - Flint (UMF) have begun efforts to unionize.

A group of about 16 organizers have been meeting, circulating information and membership cards, and consulting with eligible colleagues. The union would be called UMF AFT-AAUP Local 5671 [American Federation of Teachers -- American Association of University Professors, affiliating with a labor union representing more than 270,000 higher education workers nationwide.

They say they are propelled by concerns about work load, campus climate, pay equity and alleged administration attempts to quash dissent. Answers to all questions posed by *East Village Magazine* were provided as collective replies from the organizing group through emails from Sarah Rosaen, professor of communication. The committee includes both pre- and post-tenure colleagues, though most already have tenure.

"Anyone who has signed a union card is welcome to join the Organizing Committee, and we encourage interested colleagues to do so. We are working toward building a union that is as broad and representative of tenure track faculty as possible, and so we welcome participation from as many diverse voices as possible," they asserted.

"By our count, there are 164 UM-Flint faculty members in the tenure stream across all six academic units who fall into the pool of potential union members. Our Organizing Committee has representatives from five of the six units, but we are always welcoming more as we aim to be as diverse and representative as possible," they said. Those "tenure stream" faculty are those hired into the tenure track with a path to tenure: assistant, associate and full professors.

It would be for the Flint campus only, "though we would be, of course, in solidarity with any efforts by our colleagues on other campuses to unionize," they stated.

In a separate email received April 20, Rosaen said organizers are encouraged by the initial response. In just the first month of the campaign, she reported, 46 percent of those eligible had filled out union cards, in practice a vote for membership.



U of M Board of Regents Trustee Mike Behm speaking at a campaign event for Gov. Whitmer in the Flint Farmers Market

(Photo by Tom Travis)

East Village Magazine requests for comment from Regents Michael Behm and Regent Chair Paul Brown have so far gone unanswered. The organizers said both Brown and Behm, who lives in Grand Blanc, attended their first "going public" meeting. That meeting was closed to the press, so *EVM* was unable to independently confirm what Brown and Behm said there. The Regents are the elected governing body for the University of Michigan system.

But organizers reported the two regents described the university policy on neutrality toward union organizing and said that "they support, in general, the right of university employees to organize."

GEO union strike an ongoing backdrop

The University of Michigan has collective bargaining agreements with many units, detailed here -- but this would be the first, if successful, among tenure-track or tenured faculty.

The path has not always been congenial. In fact, The UM - Flint campaign is occurring simultaneously with bitter negotiations involving another union. The Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), the labor union representing about 2,300 graduate student instructors and graduate student staff assistants across UM's three campuses, went on strike March 29 and was castigated by the Regents in an April 21 statement after GEO protestors stormed a restaurant where UM President Santo Ono was dining with students. At press time, the strike continued; the contract was set to expire May 1.

Asked if UM - Flint's top executive, Chancellor Deba Dutta wished to comment about UM - Flint's unionizing efforts, Robb King, UM - Flint director of marketing and communications, responded, "The university has no comment at this time."

As the organizers explained, "The university policy on neutrality allows for the formation of a union by "card check," meaning that once a majority of employees in a potential unit have signed union cards, they can file for recognition. Essentially, the card check is the election, and this is the path we intend to take to recognition."

Each of the eligible faculty categories for the emerging UM - Flint union are determined by criteria set out by university standards and within each department, including hiring terms, years on the job, whether they have published scholarly work, teaching performance based in part on student evaluations, and participation in institutional processes

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UM - F unionization ... (Continued from Page 10)

such as departmental and unit committees. It generally takes seven years for a tenure-track faculty member to achieve tenure, which usually means a pay increase and job security going forward.

Many concerns animate the unionization efforts. In statements provided to EVM, organizers listed:

- **Faculty governance** – that is, the degree to which faculty communicate and influence institutional issues. UM - Flint is in theory is run by shared governance between administration and faculty, but in fact most faculty say in reality actual decisions are made by the administrative superstructure, sometimes without consultation with faculty.

- **Concerns over workload and workplace climate** – see detailed example below.

- **A desire to advocate for better public funding** for the institution, Of UMF's 2022-23 budget of about \$116 million, an estimated state appropriation of \$26.2 million, or about 22 percent, was approved, a \$784,000 increase over the previous year. The percentage of state support in the UMF's budget has declined from a high of 67 percent in 1987. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's budget proposal for fiscal year 2024 includes a proposed 4 percent increase for all three UM campuses.

- **Pay that does not keep up with inflation.** As detailed in a recent *EVM* report, UM - Flint faculty received an average of 3.5 percent for the current year. Who gets what varies widely, even among tenure-track and tenured faculty.

The average UM - Flint full-time salary, according to 2021-2022 numbers from umsalary.info, was \$69,000. According to one private online workplace survey site, the average pay of UM - Flint professors is \$139,000; to reach that range, a faculty member likely would be tenured or hold an executive position. The UMF's top executive, Chancellor Dutta, received a 15 percent pay raise to \$469,000 this year; 13 others had pay of \$200,000 or more in 2021-2022.

- **Threats to tenure.** In a Winter, 2023

website post of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Marc Stein wrote, "In the last decade, conservatives have launched multiple attacks on faculty tenure in higher education. As we understandably focus on these episodes in states such as Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin, we too readily ignore slow and steady developments that are destroying tenure in California and other progressive states."

- **Fear of arbitrary retaliation by administrators.** At an October, 2022 Board of Regents meeting, a former dean who had been fired complained of bullying and administrative chaos, and was joined by others alleging similar experiences and retaliation for dissent.

- **Concern over sudden and unilateral policy changes.** Faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), for example, recently reported a sudden move of several departments from CAS into the new College of Innovation and Technology (CIT), a decision allegedly made without consultation – or fait accompli notice – with the Faculty Senate Council.

"In the nine months we have been organizing," they report, "we have come to realize that, across ranks and units, we have much more in common than we have dividing us. And whatever our specific issues, so many of us feel undervalued and unheard."

"The UMF AFT-AAUP is a vehicle for us to work together in our common interests, refuse to allow ourselves to be pit against each other, and recognize that all of our fates are tied together, as well as entwined with the fates of our students and the community as a whole."

Not all faculty fall into the tenure stream.

There actually are more non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty than tenure-track at UM-Flint -- about 250 as of the 2022-23 records. In general, NTT faculty get paid less and have less job security than those in the tenure track.

That group unionized in 2004 after a tempestuous campaign in the early 2000s in an effort paralleling what is happening now with the tenure-track faculty. That union, the Lecturers Employee

Organization (LEO), applies to all three UM campuses, and has produced a long list of gains in working condition, health care benefits, and a tripling in minimum pay since 2003.

While a "Strategic Transformation" process underway, led by Chancellor Dutta at the downtown Flint campus since last fall has raised numerous concerns about the lives and work of faculty and the direction of the university, organizers said their efforts are in fact "inspired by concerns faculty have held and voiced for a much longer period of time. That said, the Strategic Transformation has provided a nice moment to reflect upon our place in the university and broader community."

"In some ways you might say that we see unionization as part of the Strategic Transformation, an effort that will make UM-Flint a better institution that is more sustainable and responsive to all of its constituents: students, community, faculty, and staff," they said.

Many faculty have been actively involved in the Strategic Transformation process, wrestling along with the rest of the institution as the campus faces several challenges, including a \$7.3 million deficit and a 25 percent drop in enrollment over the last seven years. Last fall, Dutta predicted that deficit might surge to \$13.9 million in the 2023 fiscal year. Some have bitterly critiqued a contract with the Huron Consulting group to run the process, Huron is a huge international higher education consulting firm based in Chicago that has resulted in a number of similar institutions slashing faculty, support staff, and liberal arts programs.

Asked for examples and detail about some of the nascent union's concerns, organizers emphasized that those would be more fleshed out by members as the union coalesces.

"Our list of concerns is broad and compelling, having come out of nine months of conversations with colleagues. We remain struck by how many of these concerns are shared across units. However, it is difficult to offer much detail at the moment. This is because how we address such issues will be for our membership

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UM - F unionization ...

(Continued from Page 11)

to decide through collective processes once we are recognized as a union.”

However, they suggested one set of developments regarding faculty workload illustrates what they see as the need for unionization.

“Last academic year, the Provost’s Office developed, without faculty consultation, a draft workload proposal that sought to alter expectations regarding how much teaching, creative and scholarly work, and service should be counted as a percentage of overall effort for tenure-stream faculty. In addition, the proposal appeared to involve punitive measures for post-tenure faculty, in particular the possibility of increased teaching assignments for those deemed not productive enough in research.

“When leaked to faculty, the draft policy raised many questions, from how it might violate the principles of tenure to why administrators did not consult faculty during development. In response, UM-Flint’s AAUP chapter offered a statement to the Faculty Senate Council. Later, an FSC representative presented related concerns before the executive arm of UM’s tri-campus faculty governance system, SACUA, which later issued a resolution on the matter.

“As a result, the Provost’s Office pulled the university-wide draft proposal and directed academic units to develop their own workload policies. But we now hear from colleagues that these unit-level proposals mirror the original put forward by the administration. Amid this and reports of still other kinds of changes to workload, consultation with tenure-stream faculty, again, remains minimal. This experience with proposed workload policies over the past two years intersects with many of the concerns that have brought us together.

“Lack of authentic concelation” alleged

“To be clear, developing and/or revising expectations of effort is not the problem. What alarms us is the lack of authentic consultation with faculty, the

disregard of existing institutions of faculty governance, the arbitrariness with which changes are being made or implemented, the ways in which the proposed policies impact the integrity of tenure, and the lack of concern for and devaluing of our work.

“If UM-Flint tenure-stream faculty were already unionized, the administration would not be in a position to unilaterally advance such changes in the middle of an academic year. Instead, any work-related measure would have to be negotiated via collective bargaining. This would also strengthen faculty governance, ensuring that the group most affected by the potential changes, i.e., tenure-stream faculty, was engaged in authentic consultation.

“Thus, the unionization of tenure-stream faculty would strengthen the institution and its ongoing transformation. It would do this by ensuring that the administration and tenure-stream faculty act as partners, supporting faculty governance on our campus, and ensuring that our labor and contributions to students, colleagues, and community are valued. Indeed, the UMF AFT-AAUP has already hosted a series of workshops on workload. At these workshops, over 100 faculty and staff colleagues developed principles for a workload policy that would both allow for changes and value our time, work, and efforts.”

Part of a Flint tradition

Organizers note their efforts have particular significance historically for the city of Flint, where a nationally momentous sit-down strike by Fisher Body/General Motors employees in 1936 led to formation of the United Auto Workers (UAW), and where union efforts through the decades since have yielded layer upon layer of worker benefits and political influence.

“There are faculty within our ranks who are the proud children and grandchildren of union members, including those who participated in the Sit-Down Strike,” the organizers wrote. “We are humbled by this, and we hope that we might, in some small way, take a place in Flint’s storied history of organized labor.”

The organizers said they see their

efforts in a context of a larger movement toward revitalizing the labor movement – in Flint and nationally.

“At our going public event, the presidents of faculty unions at Eastern Michigan and Wayne State welcomed us into this unique moment within higher education, which has seen 25,000 new workers organized across the country,” they wrote.

“This recent rise in labor activism within higher education has been motivated in part by the desire to leverage the shared interests of faculty, students, staff, and the community at large. We know that our success depends on the success of these partners, and we see our efforts as being geared toward strengthening our institution and its positive impact in Flint and the broader Flint community. A stronger faculty means a stronger campus, and together we can all work towards a stronger Flint.”

As detailed in a Jan. 28 EVM story, the UM - Flint campus is a major downtown employer:

According to (constantly changing) data from the UMF’s Officer of Institutional Analysis and the UM Human Resources Information System, as of Nov, 1, 2022, UM - Flint employs 1,013 people, with 717 (71 percent) full time and 296 part time (29 percent).

Of those 494 are Faculty, in the following categories:

- 195 Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty (which includes 23 Academic/Administrators who are tenured faculty members and 1 Emeritus Faculty who is actively working)
- 228 Lecturers
- 8 LEO-GLAM (Librarians, Curators and Archivists)
- 63 Clinical and Adjunct Clinical Faculty”

EVM Consulting Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com. As a UM - Flint non-tenure-track faculty in the English Department for 23 years, Worth-Nelson was part of the successful organizing effort to establish the Lecturers’ Employee Organization (LEO) in the early 2000s. She retired in 2014.

Iconic Saginaw Street brick replacement underway; \$5 million project to continue through 2024

By Elizabeth Ireland-Curtis

The iconic bricks on Saginaw Street, along with the Weather Ball are part of Flint's identity and history. The bricks on Saginaw are being replaced in a two-year project that began Monday, April 10. Mayor Sheldon Neeley presented plans for the historic restoration at a press conference that same day.

A website, FixTheBricksFlint.com, can be accessed by residents for street closings and updates. City Engineer Mark Adas said he hopes to make the project "as painless as possible" which, when completed by the end of 2024, will restore Saginaw Street from Court Street to the Flint River.

750,000 bricks to be laid

The bricks on Saginaw Street were originally laid in 1898. According to a May 5, 2022 *Flint Journal* article, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) removed the bricks in 1936 and re-laid them over new concrete, using 40,000 of labor. At that time, the cost was \$142,950.

In May of 2023, Flint City Council approved contracts with LA Construction of Flushing and civil engineering company Wade Trim for the \$5 million it is costing today. There are 750,000 bricks on the street — and 400,000 hours of them will be new. Part of the current expense includes purchase of special bricks manufactured to withstand the pressure of heavy traffic.

Phase one

Phase one, already underway, started with the section of Saginaw Street from Court Street to Third Street. Traffic is being re-routed to Harrison for northbound, and Beech Street for



Construction begins on Saginaw Street downtown Flint in April 2023

(Photo by Tom Travis)

southbound travel. Construction will be paused for The Crim Festival of Races and Back to The Bricks, both of which occur in August. After Labor Day, the project will resume, according to city officials in an April 10 press conference.



Workers begin tearing out the old bricks at the intersection of Court and Saginaw Streets in April 2023

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Second and final phase

The second phase will restore Saginaw Street from Third Street to Second Street and begin in September. Phase three begins in the spring of 2024 and will renovate Second Street to First Street. The final phase will start in September 2024 and will tackle Saginaw from First Street to the River Trail Crossing next to the University of Michigan -Flint Pavilion, according to a city press release.

Local businesses deal with renovations

Halo Burger has closed according to a sign in their window.

Soriano's, on the corner of Court Street and Saginaw, has remained open.

Owner Erica Soriano told EVM their takeout business was affected initially but has picked up during the second week of construction. She also said her business was not given notice by the city but learned about the street closure from a TV station the day before the work began.

Funding for the project is shared by the City of Flint's Major Roads Fund (\$3.4 million), Michigan Department of Transportation (\$2.3 million), and the Federal WIIN Act (Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation) (\$2 million).

The State's funding is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) passed in January 2021. "The BIL will rebuild America's roads, bridges and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities that have too often been left behind."

Along with the bricks being replaced, underground utilities will be addressed, including replacement of the 12-inch water main, electrical upgrades, lighting and parking meter conduit installation and two gas main replacements.

In addition, the project will replace 80 to 90% of the sidewalks and tree grates on Saginaw Street. American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant crosswalks and ramps will ensure accessibility. In order to reduce the damage to intersections caused by turning vehicles, the intersections will be repaved with concrete that is stamped to replicate the look of bricks but will withstand traffic abrasion.

EVM reporter Elizabeth Ireland-Curtis can be reached at irelandcurtis@comcast.net.

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of May 6. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our June issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by May 26.

The Motown Story

May 4-20, Thurs. and Fri. at 7 p.m. and Sat. at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

The Motown Story by Charles Winfrey is the "story of the Motor Town Record Company's tenure in Detroit."

Tickets are \$10.

The "New" McCree theatre

4601 Clio Rd., Flint

For more info call 810-787-2200 or visit facebook.com/thenewmccreetheatre/.

Spend Time with YOUR Mother Nature

May 13, 1-3:30 p.m.

Celebrate Mother's Day by learning about nature's herbs and oils that will calm and relax you. Find out how to grow and make teas. Then take home a little window garden of herbs.

For ages 16 and up.

Cost is \$20 per person.

Raindrop's Big Adventure

May 10, 10-11:30 a.m.

This outdoor activity is part of the Knee-High Naturalist program and will present activities to teach kids about the water cycle.

Dress to get wet and children must be accompanied by an adult.

Cost is \$5 per student.

Pre-registration is required by May 9.

For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum

2143 N. Genesee Rd., Burton

For more info call 810-736-7100

or visit genesecountyparks.org/for-mar-nature-preserve-arboretum-2/.

Danielle Bollinger with

The Soggy Bottom Band and Special Guests

Wed., May 17, 8 p.m.

This group of local talent including a 17-piece band will accompany Danielle Bollinger's sultry voice amid a dance floor, refreshments and a bar for this free concert.

Tickets are free but must be registered for at tickets.thewhiting.com/9984.

In the Heights

Fri., May 19, 7 p.m.

This film is musical about a group of friends in NYC and features Lin-Manuel Miranda among several other popular actors.

Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$2 for children under 12. Film is rated PG-13.

FIM Capitol Theatre

140 E. 2nd St., Flint

For more info call 810-237-7333

or visit capitoltheatreflint.com.

Flint Institute of Arts

FOMA (Friends of Modern Art) Films for May are "Close," shown Fri. May 12, Sat. May 13 at 7:30 p.m., and Sun. May 14 at 3:45 p.m. This film is

about two 13-year old friends who "drift apart after the intimacy of their relationship is questioned by schoolmates." The film to be shown the following week is "The Fabelmans" on Fri., May 19 and Sat., May 20 at 8:45 p.m., and Sun. May 21 at 3:45 p.m. This film is a dramatization of the young life of the film's creator, Steven Spielberg.

Flint Institute of Arts

1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info call 810-234-1695

or visit flintarts.org.

Festival of Dance

Sat., May 14 at 7:30 p.m. and Sun. May 15 at 3 p.m.

Flint Youth Ballet performs Les Sylphides, one of the first ballets focusing on Mood and dance over storyline and Aqueum choreographed by Flint Youth Ballet alum Alexandra Jennings Bush.

For tickets and more info call 810-238-1350 x3, email fspa@thefim.org, or visit thefspa.org/festival-of-dance.

Flint United Basketball

May 21, 3 p.m.,

Flint United against Lebanon Leprechauns and May 28, 3 p.m.,

Flint United against Jamestown Jackals.

This small professional league plays their games at smaller local venues.

Flint United plays their home games at Mott Community College's Ballenger Fieldhouse.

For more info and how to buy tickets visit flintunitedbasketball.com.



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

Village Life coney ...

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Angelo Popoff.”

Popoff said he and his partners worked 60-70 hours a week, and “took care of everybody.”

Surviving family members and descendants from several of the “coney lineage,” the Branoffs, the Pauls, the Popoffs, the Georges were in the crowd, smiling and chuckling as speakers shared anecdotes from the old days.

Those gathering places helped shape the shared culture of this city, Fisher described, tied together with General Motors, AC Spark Plug, the neighborhoods, ups and downs of the economy, the schools, the unions, the churches. The earliest ancestors were George Brown, Sam Bryan, Steve George, and Paul Branoff, whose Flint Coney Island, thought to be the original, opened in 1919. It was tucked between two railroads downtown -- a perfect location, Fisher said.

Throughout the decades, Fisher said, the history of Flint’s coney islands was, in short, a story of “the perfect food for the perfect people at the perfect time.”

“It’s an American story,” he said.

Of the coney island entrepreneurs, he said, “Their timing was impeccable -- they knew the right thing to do in the right way as the Roaring Twenties swept the country.

“And then later, what better food could you have during the Great Depression than a coney? You could eat them fast, they were an easy way to feed a family.”

Soon Flint was booming with floods of people arriving in the city, not just immigrants from Europe but migrants from the South, sharecroppers, the “American arsenal of democracy,” Fisher said, “and who fed them? The coney islands...” Based on that, Fisher asserted to cheers, if it wasn’t for the coney islands of Flint, “we would not have won the Second World War!”

The boom of prosperity that ensued lasted until the late 70s, Fisher noted, but even in “thin times” the coneys kept afloat.

Describing his personal history

with Angelo’s, Fisher said, “When I smelled the coney sauce today, I thought, that’s what summer smelled like to me. It was July 10, 1979, and I was on the moped and I’d finished collecting on my paper route, going to go get my ‘man dinner,’ with the *Flint Journal* sports section in my favorite booth..two coneys, a cheeseburger deluxe, grilled onions, order of fries and gravy, and a Coke.”

The daughter of Popoff’s partner Carl Paul, Karen Paul Holmes of Atlanta, is now a freelance writer who draws on her Flint roots for her work. I read two of her poems, “Daddy comes home from Angelo’s, Flint, Michigan” and “Sometimes we just want history to repeat.”



Flint author Connor Coyne savoring his first coney of the day

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Here is the first poem, in its entirety:

“My sister reaches into her suitcase for the chilidog sauce: a gift to me more rare than a ’59 Buick. Today in Atlanta, it’s Michigan weather, cold and dull, darkening at dinnertime, like when Daddy would arrive from work, brushing snow off his tweed coat. Once he brought us leftovers from the jukebox. In the stack of 45s, shiny as our patent leather shoes, we found Love Potion Number 9. His mustard-stained white shirt always reeked of onions spiked with cigarette smoke, grease, French fries. When he took off his sweaty shoes, Pico, our Chihuahua, rubbed her body crazily against

them, then against his socks with their old potato odor. We loved the food smells at Angelo’s but not the mishmash Daddy wore home, even in his moustache and the sticky sheen of his forehead as he kneeled to our level. When Mom handed him his cold Coke, he passed it around to each kid, though five sips nearly drained the six-ounce bottle.” (from *No Such Thing as Distance*, Terrapin Books, 2018”)

Here is part of the second one:

“At Angelo’s Coney Island, Father gave customers the menu they expected and wanted again and again. If they moved across country, they’d send for his frankfurters and chili sauce.”

He and Angelo ran the place after WWII and entered Michigan’s coney-dog wars. News stories, even a coffee table book, recount the ongoing clash since 1914: the Detroit-Greeks’ wet chili versus the Flint-Macedonians’ dry.

And we can almost reconstruct Dad’s secret sauce, finely crumbled, spiced and browned beef, moist but never wet!” (poem first published, *Museum of Americana*, November, 2022)

Dan Hall, who Fisher described as “Flint’s Own Musical Minstrel,” invited the audience to sing along to his “Angelo’s Song.”

“Humans are fallible because humans are hungry”

Reading from his book *Atlas*, Flint native author and publisher Connor Coyne shared a eulogy for the “Big Girl” statue --once a cherished landmark on Corunna Road. For decades she stood atop the now defunct Colonial Coney Island. Coyne wrote,

“You held a tray with a tasty coney island carved out of beef heart and ground up Koegels, rough and dry and red like

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**COLLEGE CULTURAL
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**
Sign up to get notices of meetings at
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Village Life

Flint's "coney culture" fed us, brought us together, inspired art, music, literature, poetry -- and even some brawls, presenters declare

By Jan Worth-Nelson

One thing was clear as a sell-out crowd lined up for their food one recent Saturday in a big meeting room at -- where else -- Koegel Meats, the origin and home of the legendary frankfurter.

The coney is more than a hot dog.

The "Salute to Flint's Coney Culture" sponsored by the Genesee County Historical Society, started with a simple formula: volunteers doling out a well-grilled dog slipped into a bun, sauce from the Starlight Diner, buns from Mr. Bread, plenty of mustard and chopped onions. Little bags of chips in a pile on a tray. Pop -- Vernor's, of course -- or A&W root beer.

Emcee Gary Fisher, president of the Historical Society and host of the radio show "Fish and the Flint Chronicles," grew up three blocks from the East Side's legendary Angelo's, and said for his whole life, it was his place, part of his family -- like an uncle's living room, he said.

"What you just ate has inspired art, poetry, literature, music, a couple of good brawls in the parking lot...which could be art if you were good at it, and if you lived on the East Side you better be," Fisher declared.

To prove his point, the event featured a performance of Flint musician Dan Hall's "Angelo's Song," poems by a daughter of Flint's coney aristocracy, and a eulogy for the now gone Colonial Coney Island's "Big Girl" from Flint writer Connor Coyne.

Perfect Flint food -- the coney line a path to simple deliciousness, both humble and cheap and also a source of local pride. No muss, No fuss.

Yes, it was about that. But it was about something else too: As Saturday's speakers retold, it was about a history of

migration, of what was brought from the old countries -- Macedonia in most cases here, how those families made their way in the new country, in Flint in the early 20th Century onward.

It was, as many folks related while savoring their coneys, about the gifts those migrants and their descendants brought, the way their restaurants became hubs for life -- places people had to be for



Bill Ledbetter — a vegan and good sport — and Joe Johnson, both from Flint, were among the hot dog cooks and volunteer servers

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

breakfast, for a business lunch, for consolation after tragedy or heartbreak, for late nights after the bars closed -- their restaurants places where we either felt alone and that was okay, or part of a family.

The coney island was un-self-consciously "democratic." In the old days at Angelo's, you could encounter a national political figure and the neighborhood drunk on the same day, and the waitresses would treat everybody the same, Fisher

fondly recalled.

What people didn't dwell on, holding their coneys in both hands and taking big messy bites end to end, the way you do, was that the Mother Ship of Flint coneys, Angelo's, has been closed for many years, its building at the corner of Franklin and Davison Roads falling apart.

So Saturday's event was, undeniably, about reclaiming something that feels like it's slipped away.

The crowd seemed to say, we can still get happy. We can still do something Flint is good at. We can still sit together at tables with paper tablecloths and paper plates and make jokes and repeat old stories and still eat coneys.

Flint is known for "cars, coneys, and athletes," Fisher said, and "we wanted to pay homage to that -- the coney island culture that it created...it was the culture that stayed with us: something uniquely Flint, it's special."

One of the undisputed godfathers of the Flint coney, Angelo Popoff, 88, longtime co-owner of the Mecca of coney islands bearing his name, sat smiling in a place of honor, holding court as one by one people came up to say hello and get their picture taken.

That coney island opened at the corner of Franklin and Davison in 1949.

He was not the original Angelo, Fisher explained. Angelo Nikoloff was the original "Angelo" in the name. "He died in 1969," Fisher clarified in a follow-up email. His business partner then was "Carl Paul who joined up in 1952. He became ill and ultimately died. By then there were four other owner/partners: Angelo Branoff, Tom W. Branoff, Tom V. Branoff, and our Angelo from today,

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