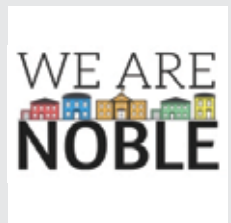


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FutureHeights  
2843 Washington Blvd. #105  
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118

## Top of the Hill Project advances

Robert Brown and Christopher Jacobs

On Jan. 27, in a three-hour meeting that ended at 10 p.m., the Planning and Development Committee of Cleveland Heights City Council considered two funding-related ordinances that advance development of the mixed-use project known as Top of the Hill (TOH).

In February 2018, CH City Council entered into a development agreement with developer Flaherty & Collins Properties to build TOH. After two years of work and more than 40 meetings with residents, property owners, businesses and various city departments, approval of the two funding ordinances is the final step before groundbreaking, anticipated this spring.



A rendering of the Top of the Hill project presented by Flaherty & Collins in October 2019.

Council discussed the two ordinances at length at its Council Committee of the Whole meeting on Jan. 13, and both had first readings at the Jan. 21 city council meeting.

One ordinance (5-2020) authorizes the city to issue \$26 million in

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) bonds. The bonds will be fully paid by the developer from payments that would normally be made as property taxes on the increased value of the property. (TIFs are commonly used develop-

*continued on page 14*

## Library presents Black History Month cooking series for teens



Chef Sediah Hamzah, of Meals Made Easy, will create a vegan soul food dish.

Sheryl Banks

There's a good reason that most ethnic and cultural festivals include cuisine. Food and cooking are inextricably woven into cultural identity, and food is a language that can be readily, and universally, understood.

"To sample the food of a particular culture is to immediately experi-

ence that culture," said Shamekia Chandler, Heights Libraries youth services associate. "That's why I decided to focus on food to celebrate Black History Month this year."

Chandler will be facilitating the Black History Month Cooking Series for kids ages 10 to 18, on Tuesdays in February at 3:30 p.m. at Heights Li-

*continued on page 12*

## University Heights council narrows search to 5 finalists

Kim Sergio Inglis

University Heights City Council has narrowed the field of candidates for the city's open council seat to five, out of 26 total applicants. Those candidates are Sandra Berry, Andrew Grau, Matthew Kaliff, Cathy Rezos, and Ray Stineman.

The other 21 applicants were: Fredric Bolotin, Harrison Crumrine, Michael Ditzel, Carl Divita, Teresa Drda, Gregory Fleming, Curt Kasigkeit, Eric Mack, Mandy Marton, Evan Minor, Yoyo Moore, James Outman, Stacey Pellow, Frank Pines, Clay Poynter, Edward Reichke, Woody Ridgway, Daniel Roche, Sheri Sax, Randal Slifer, Vincent Stokes II.

Mark Wiseman resigned from UH City Council on Jan. 13, after accepting appointment as a magistrate to Cleveland Municipal Court's Housing Division.

In the immediate wake of Wiseman's resignation, University Heights City Council announced that it would be accepting letters of interest and resumes through Jan. 24, from residents interested in serving on council.

On Jan. 29, in executive session following the Council Committee of the Whole meeting, UH council members chose the finalists.

On Feb. 4 and 5, interviews with the finalists are planned, and on Feb. 12, council anticipates swearing in the new council member at a special meeting of city council.

UH City Charter gives council 30

*continued on page 9*

## Track club seeks members ages 4-18

Michael Payne

If you're looking for an activity to absorb your child's boundless energy, the Tiger Youth Track Club (TYTC) may be the answer. The Tigers are recruiting boys and girls, ages 4-18. Registration is Feb. 22 and 29, 1-4 p.m., at the Heights Community Center, 1 Monticello Blvd.

TYTC is part of the Cleveland Heights Tigers Youth Sports Association (CHTYSA), a nonprofit, community-based athletic and recreational program dedicated to the



TYTC's Jayda Davis streaking down the track during the Dick Mann Memorial Open last spring. development of elementary school children in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School

District. Since 2014, more than 300 children have participated in the

*continued on page 11*



## Letters Policy

The *Heights Observer* welcomes letters to the editor. They must be submitted electronically, along with the writer's name, phone number and e-mail address, to: [www.heightsobserver.org/members](http://www.heightsobserver.org/members).

## HEIGHTS OBSERVER

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## About the Observer

The *Heights Observer* is not an ordinary newspaper; it is a nonprofit publication for residents of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

The *Observer* has no writing staff; it is written by you—the readers.

Individuals throughout the community decide what stories they want to write, then submit them for publication. Anyone in University Heights or Cleveland Heights is welcome to contribute regularly, occasionally or even just once.

Is there something you think should be covered in the *Heights Observer*? If so, please write it on your own, or with friends, neighbors or colleagues. Our volunteer editors will make sure it's ready to publish and contact you with any questions.

If you're writing a news article, it should be clear and factual. If you want to express an opinion, submit it as a letter to the editor or an opinion piece. Either way, make sure it's about something specific to our two cities.

- To make a submission of any kind, go to [www.heightsobserver.org](http://www.heightsobserver.org) and click on "Member Center" at the left.
- For information about writing style, article length, etc., click on "Become an Observer" at the left. For questions that aren't answered there, call the FutureHeights office at 216-320-1423 or e-mail [info@futureheights.org](mailto:info@futureheights.org).

Articles to be considered for the March issue must be submitted by Feb. 10. We publish some articles online as they come in—and still consider them for the next print issue. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

# Heights Observer's weekly e-mail newsletter gets a new look



## OPENING THE OBSERVER

Bob Rosenbaum

The new year brought the introduction of our redesigned e-mail newsletter, the *Heights Observer* Weekly E-News. It's only the second time we've overhauled its look since the newsletter was launched in 2012.

While the newsletter needed to be refreshed, the real reason we did it was to make it mobile-responsive—easy to read on small screens.

The old format was built on outdated technology, and the readership data reflected that. The rule of thumb about online content today is that you can expect at least half your audience to access it via smart phones and tablets. But the e-news was getting only 30 percent of its readership through mobile devices. With 5,000 opt-in subscribers, that means there are probably another 1,000 people in Cleveland Heights and University

Heights who would choose to receive the newsletter if it were made mobile-friendly.

Anybody from the media business who reads this will shake his or her head; changing a newsletter template isn't that difficult, and we're a couple years behind in making the change. So I'm not bragging here.

The governing principal in designing for a small screen is that everything needs to be organized for vertical scrolling.

The old newsletter had two side-by-side columns, which works for a desktop computer. It's arguable whether a two-column format even makes for good reading on a full-size screen, but it's a definite no-no on a smart phone. The whole thing has to be shrunk so much to fit on the smaller screen that it becomes unreadable.

So the new version has a single column, larger type and simpler graphics, all of which make it easier to read no matter what kind of device one uses.

The newsletter gets sent out every Tuesday afternoon, 50 weeks a year (we skip the weeks around Independence Day and Christmas/

New Year's). It's free, and contains a combination of information from the current print edition and content being published for the first time.

We don't have any data on how many people read both the print edition and the e-news. Anecdotally, however, we hear from many people who have a strong preference for one or the other.

Either way is fine with us; they're different products but closely related. And both share the same mission: To encourage engagement among Heights residents, transparency in local government, and vitality in the local business community that makes Cleveland Heights and University Heights unique and desirable.

If you're interested in subscribing to the newsletter, here's the link: [bit.ly/HO-enews](http://bit.ly/HO-enews). If you decide it's not for you, you can unsubscribe at any time.

*Cleveland Heights resident Bob Rosenbaum is co-chair of the Heights Observer Advisory Committee, and is responsible for its advertising sales and market development.*

## CH resident thanks UH for its response

To the Editor:

Someone hit a skunk on the street in front of my [Staunton Road] home. I had two days and nights of sleeplessness. I was ill from the stench. It stunk to high heaven and was so strong it woke me up the first night. Headache and nausea weren't the only symptoms. I could taste the skunk all day long and when I was able to sleep at all I dreamt that a skunk was constantly following me around no matter what I did. I made multiple calls to Cleveland Heights City Hall—police, the service department, the mayor, council members, legal department, etc. The only answer I got was okay we know about it, or, we'll get to it when we can. [It was] mostly voicemail messages from me that were not returned. I then called the EPA and tried to find a functioning, real newspaper. No one could or would help.

Then I got smart! I called University Heights! I got a friendly response and quick action! Thank you, thank you University Heights! They never questioned why I called them instead of Cleveland Heights and were quick to pick up the animal. I will remember this always, and anytime I have a problem.

It really is a shame that my taxes are going to a city that cannot be there for [its] citizens, like the time that Dugway Brook smelled like feces. I called city services many times and

never once received a return phone call. I finally figured out that the NEORS would investigate the waterway. They actually came out and ended up fixing the problem.

Thank you again University Heights! You are my heroes.

Judy Torres  
Cleveland Heights

## Yes on school levy for a strong foundation

To the Editor:

Good schools are the foundation of a good community. When that foundation is threatened, you shore it up. That's what the March 17 CH-UH school district levy will do.

We're in the midst of positive change. Voters chose two new CH City Council members. This month, CH council chose two new leaders. In two years, CH residents will elect a mayor for the first time since 1921.

These changes are built on the foundation of a community with wonderful assets: people, businesses, arts, neighborhoods, nature, recreation, location. And schools.

Schools are under attack from the state. Ohio hasn't fixed school funding in the 23 years since it was declared unconstitutional. Ohio won't give schools the additional taxes on increased property value. EdChoice has drained us of millions of dollars and will drain even more.

We're not alone. Every district

must go to voters for levies to maintain operating revenue. Even Solon and Beachwood.

As CH-UH voters, we are alone in protecting our schools. You can vote yes to keep our schools intact and the foundation of our community's success strong—for just \$23 a month for every \$100,000 in home value.

My children, proud Tiger alums who attended Heights K-12, are long gone from the district. But I'm here to vote yes to funding our schools and our future. Join me.

Michael Bennett  
Cleveland Heights

## Vote 'yes' for CH-UH school levy

To the Editor:

I am writing to encourage voters in the CH-UH school district to vote for the levy that will be on the ballot on March 17. Our district is faced with suddenly losing millions of dollars due to last minute changes to the

*continued on page 3*

## Correction to a January article

An article in the January issue of the *Heights Observer* incorrectly stated the age of Communion of Saints School. This year is its 110th anniversary.



# CH-UH taxpayers don't slack in supporting our schools

Mary Hurley

The state of Ohio calculates a “local tax effort index” for each school district in the state, using a four-part formula (read the description of Item 39 at the Ohio Dept. of Education District Profile for more information). The purpose of this measure is to assess how much effort the local community is putting into supporting its schools, in the context of residents’ ability to pay, measured by income. The state average is used as a baseline (set equal to 1.0000), so that every school district’s effort can be compared to the statewide average.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights local tax effort index is 1.4567 for FY 2019, according to the district’s profile. This data shows that we (CH-UH) are making a substantially greater effort to support our schools (given our income) than the state average as a whole (1.0000), and in comparison to “similar districts” (local tax effort: 1.2036) as defined by the state.

We can look at this data in relation to specific other districts,

for example, neighboring Shaker Heights. Why Shaker? Its property tax rates (\$3,949 per \$100K valuation) are similar to CH (\$3,799 per \$100K valuation) and UH (\$3,822 per \$100K valuation), and the city also relies primarily on residential property valuation, with business property accounting for only 11.28% of total valuation, similar to the 16.75% business valuation for CH-UH. The state calculates that Shaker has a tax effort index of 1.1051. This indicates that, even though Shaker has high tax rates, when this is evaluated in the context of its residents’ incomes, its level of effort is slightly higher than the state overall, but considerably below CH-UH’s effort index of 1.4567.

Looking at income data (Ohio Dept. of Education uses tax data from state and federal returns) for CH-UH, the median income is \$37,752, while the average income is \$76,789. In comparison, Shaker Heights’ median income is \$47,045, and its average income is \$138,774. The median measures the income at the 50th percentile, indicating that half of CH-UH taxpayers have incomes of \$37,752 or less (in comparison to Shaker’s \$47,045 and the state’s median of \$34,091). The average income numbers are heavily influenced by the values at the top end, and the CH-UH average income (\$76,789) is lower than both Shakers’ (\$138,774) and the statewide average (\$82,435).

CH-UH residents should feel very good about the extent of our support for local schools, given the resources of our community. We are going far beyond the state average, our “similar schools” comparison group, and even higher-tax neighbor Shaker Heights, in taxing ourselves to support our schools.

While this level of sacrifice is admirable, given the importance of education, it may be leading us to under-support other public priorities (e.g., economic development, public works, road repairs, programs for elders, etc.), and it is undoubtedly a serious burden for a substantial portion of our community, which is filing tax returns with an income below \$37,752 (the median). This should be food for thought as voters consider the next school levy.

[Data sources: tax rates (<https://www.cleveland.com/data-central/2020/01/greater-clevelands-wide-spread-in-property-tax-rates-see-where-your-community-ranks.html>), school district profiles (<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/School-Payment-Reports/District-Profile-Reports/FY2019-District-Profile-Report>).]

Mary Hurley has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for the past 15 years.

LETTERS continued from page 2

EdChoice voucher program inflicted by the state board of education.

In 2016, the state took 7 percent of our district’s state monies to use for private school scholarships. This school year, it took almost five times that—34.6 percent of our state dollars. Next year, that number will go up by nearly \$3 million more. Then, almost 50 percent of our state allocated dollars will be used to pay for private school scholarships instead of funding CH-UH schools.

The money taken by EdChoice will affect every child in every building in the district. If this isn’t fixed, it will negatively impact our educational programming, class sizes, and our ability to attract quality teachers and professionals.

CH-UH is one of several local districts placing levies on the ballot in 2020. Passing this levy will allow our school system to stay intact.

As a community, fighting among us and against our schools is harmful to everyone. None of us is to blame for this funding problem, but we must work together to protect our community from the devastating impact losing this money will have.

Please vote for the passing of the CH-UH levy on the ballot in March, and contact your state representatives to request that they stop deducting EdChoice voucher payments from school district funds. Instead, fund new vouchers from state funds directly.

Vote “Yes” for the CH-UH school levy!

Christy Connor  
Cleveland Heights

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# Neighbors’ kindness inspires

Lois Jeavons

Christmas 2019 has come and gone, but our family has a memory that will linger on. At 96, I can recall many past Christmases, but this memory stands out because it so beautifully expressed that true meaning of the season that we all seek, but that so often gets lost in our flurry of decorations, wrapping paper and tinsel.

I live with my granddaughter and her husband in University Heights. Two days before Christmas, they were rushing around the house, preoccupied with last-minute preparations for the big event. The doorbell rang, and we all wondered who or what was interrupting our Christmas “busyness.”

When my granddaughter opened the door, we were anticipating a plea for donations to a charity. Instead, before us stood two of our neighbors’ very young children. They were handing out homemade Christmas cookies to all of the neighbors on our street. I was so moved by this simple gesture that tears came to my eyes. They were grinning from ear to ear as they sang out, “Happy Holidays.” These

children were learning at a very young age that it’s more blessed to give than to receive. What thoughtful parents to take time out of their busy lives to think of their neighbors. I know that both parents have high-pressure jobs, and I was impressed with their gift of time.

This simple, thoughtful gift meant more to us than words can express. This is a memory I treasure and will not forget—the highlight of our holiday season. What the world needs now is LOVE, LOVE, LOVE. Reaching out to your neighbors, to the newcomers on your street, and to those whose cultures are different than yours is a good place to start.

P.S. Thanks for the cookies, they were delicious. Happy New Year to all. Here’s to a new beginning. Next comes Valentine’s Day, and this family will be first on my list to receive a very special Valentine with a note of thanks.

*Lois Jeavons is the author of Manners, Morals and Myths, a novel about Cleveland society before and after WW II. She is currently working on a sequel, Moving Beyond the Myth, to be published sometime in 2020.*

# Support our children and our community

Rachael Collyer

The first time I took part in a school levy campaign, I was a toddler and my mom was holding a neighborhood meeting in support of the levy in our backyard on Bradford Road. From the time I could walk, I was knocking on doors and handing out literature in support of the levy.

My mom, a graduate of Cleveland Heights High School herself, impressed on me from an early age how deeply important it is that public education be free and excellent, and how crucial our public school system is for the health and strength of our community. Even when I attended Hathaway Brown for middle school, we went door-to-door as a family, campaigning for the levy.

I returned to public school my freshman year of high school, graduating from Heights High

in 2011, and I would not trade the experience for the world. Heights prepared me in a way that private school never could have: it taught me about community and about my own stake in ensuring that everyone in the community has what they need to thrive. It taught me how to relate to people with a range of life experiences wholly unlike my own. It equipped me with a quality education that allowed me to start college with a number of credits already completed, and it led me to community organizing, which is my profession and my passion today. It is what motivated me to move back to Cleveland Heights and put down roots here, to sit on the Heights Schools Foundation board, and to write this.

As I write, I am sad and angry. The way our schools are funded was determined to be unconstitutional 23 years ago, before I even started school, and throughout my entire life we have had to fight back against ongoing attacks and disinvestment in public schools on a state level. EdChoice is just the latest, but it is particularly vicious; next year, HALF of the money Heights public schools should be receiving from the state will be used to pay for private school scholarships. My youngest sister will graduate from Heights this spring, and I worry about the devastating impact this loss of funding will have on the children coming after her.

I don’t have children yet, but when I do, I will send them to public school in Cleveland Heights. However, this isn’t just about how this loss of funding will affect my future family; this is about how every child in our community deserves access to a quality education like the one I received. I want to live in a community where every child is supported and able to unlock their full potential, regardless of how much money their family makes, regardless of whether their parent has the time or capacity to be able to navigate the voucher system and put them in private school, regardless of who they are, where they live, or how they learn.

It isn’t fair that we have to make up for this immoral and disgusting disinvestment on the part of state politicians. It is even less fair that our children will have to pay the price for it. I believe in supporting our children and our schools. If you believe the same, I urge you to vote yes with me for the levy on Tuesday, March 17, and to join the fight against EdChoice and all of the state policies that harm our children, our schools, and our community.

*Rachael Collyer is a professional community organizer, a Heights Schools Foundation trustee, and a 2011 graduate of Cleveland Heights High School.*



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# CH-UH schools are the foundation of our cities

Michael Dylan Brennan

We are rebuilding University Heights. After years of hearing it can't be done, we're redeveloping University Square. We are building new houses and townhomes. We have added bike lanes, improved our housing stock, rebranded our city, and worked together to build a sense of community through events such as Fall Fest, our revamped summer concert series, and our inaugural City Beautiful 5K run.

But the foundation of any successful city is a successful public school district. University Heights was established on the foundational strength of educational opportunities. We need to protect our foundation on March 17, by voting Yes on the CH-UH school levy.

Like you, I wish there wasn't a need for school levies in University Heights, or in any school district in Ohio. The way Ohio funds its schools was declared unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court 23 years ago. For nearly a quarter century, we have waited for down-state politicians to fix it. But they haven't, in spite of the efforts of our own representatives. The burden falls on us to protect our public schools.

Paying more isn't easy—even if it is just 76 cents per day, per each \$100,000 of home value. But what's the cost of not passing the levy?

Around the state, communities that have failed to invest in their schools are paying the price. Fewer people want to live there. In addition to the lost opportunities for our children, property values fall.

In contrast, people want to live in University Heights. In the first half of 2019, more homes sold in our city than were sold in all of 2018. In 2019, the median sales price for homes in University Heights exceeded \$150,000 for the first time since the real estate crash of 2008. Property values are growing stronger in 2020. We need to protect our home values, and protect the families who live in those homes. We need to ensure University Heights continues to be viewed as a great place to live and raise a family. Passing the levy helps to do that.

If we don't pass the levy, our kids and our community will be increasingly at the mercy of the whims of politicians in Columbus, or worse, their continued inaction. I trust Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby to fight for what's best for our students. I trust University Heights' own Jodi Sourini and the rest of our school board to do the same. Passing the levy gives them the resources they need to continue this work for the children of our community.

Columbus has failed to address the inequities in school funding. They've implemented a state report card system that fails to reflect the merits of our school district, and considers data from eight years ago instead of the improvements instituted by our current school board and its recent successes.

Nobody locally is to blame for the school funding problem, but we have to take responsibility for protecting ourselves from it. We're all in this together, including those of us who don't have children enrolled in the public schools. Even if your children attend private school, our public school district acts in a supporting role, from busing, to facilities and playing fields, to developing IEPs (Individual Education Programs).

The future of our students and our cities depends on keeping the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District strong, and working at making it stronger. We must protect the foundation of our cities.

Please join me in voting Yes on the school levy on March 17.

*Michael Dylan Brennan is the mayor of University Heights.*



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# Truth in our school funding numbers



A TEACHER'S VOICE

Ari Klein

School funding in Ohio is terribly confusing. Although the allocations, forecasts and balances are published in many forms, not only by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), but also by local public school districts, this information is often overwhelming and unclear.

One of the areas that can easily be misleading is how we talk about per-pupil spending in our CH-UH district. The simplest way might be to divide district's annual expenses by the number of students in the school district. The glaring flaw in this method concerns the district's expenses related to voucher, transfer and charter school students, but these students are not counted in this calculation.

There are also several district employees dedicated solely to serving our nonpublic-school students. Additionally, more than half of the district's transportation costs are for students we do not educate. At the school district's voucher funding meeting on Jan. 9 , the numbers used for per pupil spending were taken directly from the ODE's website under Report Card Resources.

Another bewildering area of finances is how to best calculate per-pupil aid from the state. I believe there are two good methods. At the Jan. 9 meeting, the district used \$2,169 per student to make the point that each voucher student removes more than that from the amount that CH-UH is allotted by the state.

Basic Foundation Aid from the state is \$6,020 per pupil multiplied by the percentage of this amount that the state determines each district can contribute. Last year, the state determined, through a complicated (and unfair) method, that CH-UH should get 36% of the

Basic Foundation Aid, which is \$2,169. The district was allocated this amount for every student educated in the school district—each voucher student, each charter student, and each transfer student.

Additional funds were given to the district for a variety of other earmarks, such as special education and career technical education. The district's presentation made the point that each charter and EdChoice voucher student generated only the \$2,169 from the state at the same time that the state removed \$4,650 or \$6,000 for the same students. Each of these students created a deficit that lowered the state aid for students who were educated by the district.

For purposes of comparing districts, the Heights Coalition for Public Education looks at all state aid, divided by all the students that generate that aid. State aid for CH-UH last year totaled \$21.3 million for 6,727 students, resulting in an average of \$3,239 per student.

After all the deductions for vouchers, charter, and transfer students, this left only \$10.6 million for the 5,111 students educated in our public schools. In other words, 25% of the students generating our district's share of state funds ended up costing our district 50% of its state funding. For more information from the Heights Coalition and how we used the Legislative Service Commission to calculate some of our numbers, visit <http://chuh.net/coalition>.

Because I teach math, I believe numbers should mean something. Facts should be verifiable and from reliable sources. Too often, numbers are conflated to tell a story that is not true. Please take the time to distinguish fact from fiction.

*Ari Klein is a lifelong community member, math teacher at Cleveland Heights High School, and president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.*



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# Time to choose: governance or grudges?



HEIGHTS OF  
DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

On Jan. 6, Cleveland Heights' newly elected and sworn-in city council president/mayor Jason Stein addressed his colleagues and members of the public. "This council has a diverse group of people with a wide array of experiences, expertise and opinions to offer," he said. "I believe that this council can accomplish a lot of good, *if we choose to work together and treat each other in a civil manner.*" (Our emphasis.)

Stein's statement was not a mere bromide. Just minutes before, council members Mary Dunbar, Michael Ungar and Melissa Yasinow had voted against Kahlil Seren for council vice president/vice mayor.

Given that Seren was running unopposed, the three could have made the conciliatory gesture of voting for him. Such a vote, however, would have required them to set aside a grudge of at least two years' duration.

In 2018, council elected Carol Roe president/mayor and Yasinow vice president, ousting Cheryl Stephens and Jason Stein. Roe and Yasinow had been nominated by Ungar, presumably with the support of Dunbar. With a seven-member council, as the saying goes, you have to be able to count to four. Stephens and Stein counted and voted with the majority. Seren registered his objection by voting against both candidates.

As we have mentioned before, between us we have attended most committee of the whole and council meetings over the past several years. We have witnessed two years of implacable, overt hostility toward Seren on the part of Ungar and Yasinow. Obstructing virtually all legislation he introduced, they have sneered, scolded and, in Yasinow's case, shouted at him. Dunbar and Roe were more restrained, but joined with Ungar and Yasinow to constitute a majority in most instances.

Answering a Charter Review Commission questionnaire, Seren wrote candidly that he believed the majority on council had pushed to

establish the commission in order to head off a citizen-led ballot initiative, which they believed would lead to Stephens being elected mayor. Enraged by Seren's refusal to parrot the "official" line, Ungar delivered a blistering lecture, and the faction of four engineered a public reprimand.

In a middle school context, this behavior would be characterized as bullying; Seren has borne it stoically.

Ironically, the officials who engaged in these power games also enthusiastically backed the anti-elected mayor campaign, under the slogan, "Say no to political deals."

The newly constituted council has a substantial list of responsibilities awaiting its attention. These include stabilizing and restoring the city's declining housing stock, expediting the still-controversial Top of the Hill and other economic development projects, responding to recommendations from the Refuse and Recycling Task Force and, most importantly, planning for a smooth transition from a city manager to an elected mayor system in time for the November 2021 election season.

We do not suggest that all differences of opinion should be suppressed, or that members who find themselves in the minority on a particular issue should simply knuckle under to the majority. We would like to see frank, thoughtful, mutually respectful inquiry and discussion, by elected representatives who bring their best selves to the table.

Meanwhile, we wonder about the meaning of Dunbar, Ungar and Yasinow's Jan. 6 "no" votes. Were they paying Seren back for his 2018 opposition to Roe and Yasinow, or registering a last-ditch protest at finding themselves in the minority? Or were they signaling that the vendetta will continue? Will we see more obstructionism, with pressure on newly elected council members Melody Joy Hart and Davida Russell to vote with the Dunbar-Ungar-Yasinow faction? Or will all of our city legislators put aside their personal ambitions and petty resentments, and focus on the critical job of governing Cleveland Heights?

*Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.*

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## TOH 2016 to 2020: What has been lost?

Joyce and Steve Rajki

In 2016, when interviewed by the city developer Flaherty & Collins (F&C) presented to CH City Council the idea of an iconic development and community gathering place [for Top of the Hill (TOH)].

In April 2018, the signed development agreement stipulated 20 for-sale town homes (now gone from the plan), a five-story height maximum

(gone), Port Authority financing (not chosen because it required prevailing wages), public gathering and green space (gone, with the nominal exception of a small knoll, intersected by a retaining wall, west of Nighttown).

F&C has been skilled in leading our city's project leaders down the primrose path ending in maximum monetization of a highly desirable 4-acre site.

*continued on page 14*

## State lawmakers created a problem for us



### THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

I became an activist in the era when bumper stickers were equivalent to a tweet. My car was a traveling billboard. The yard sign, another kind of short-form communication, still works for me. Forget social media. At election time I still clutter up my yard with these temporary message boards.

My basement is an archive of school-levy yard signs. I've lived in Cleveland Heights for more than 40 years, and levy campaigns are necessary every four to five. I've got a half a dozen signs to prove it.

I will be sporting a new sign by the time this column hits the streets, because public school students in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District need us to vote yes to fill the crater that vouchers have created in the district's operating budget.

The state legislature created three voucher programs that use the deduction method to pay for private school tuition. This means the local school district must foot part of the voucher bill. The legislature never asked local communities if they agreed to spend their funds on children they don't educate. According to CH-UH Treasurer Scott Gainer, only 90 of the 1,664 students who live in our district and use vouchers to attend a nonpublic school ever attended one of our schools. Vouchers don't save money; they increase costs.

Voucher costs for this school year in the CH-UH district will exceed \$10.5 million. They are an uninvited expense that increases the per-pupil cost of operating the district, even though public-school students never see those funds.

Because of the deduction funding method, voucher payments deplete school-district resources and divert them from public-school students. The payments increase inequality in funding across districts and increase reliance on property taxes.

Last year the [district's] total voucher bill was \$7.3 million, and the

state contributed about \$3 million in per-pupil aid. This year the total cost jumped to more than \$10 million, but, because state funding is frozen, the state contribution will stay at \$3 million. Public-school students, who would have otherwise benefited from those funds, are shortchanged. You can't just tighten your belt to get around a loss of more than \$7 million.

Opposition to school levies typically makes the case for mismanagement and waste and being too generous with teachers. It's standard fare to try to show that the stewards of our precious public resources have somehow failed to be adequately vigilant. That argument does not hold water. This budget hole, created by a reckless legislature that disregards its responsibility to public education, is not the fault of an irresponsible school district. It is the fault of an irresponsible legislature.

Vouchers weaken an already broken state funding system. Instead of increasing the state's investment in school district budgets and reducing reliance on property taxes, as has been required by the Ohio Supreme Court, the legislature chose to defy this ruling and invest in private education.

I am grateful that our state legislators, Janine Boyd and Sandra Williams, have paid attention to this destructive policy and advocated for legislative fixes that would bring relief.

The legislature imposed its values on local communities and, in so doing, betrayed the local community partners with whom it shares responsibility for funding a high-quality system of schools. We need to hold our noses and vote yes, and then demand that state leaders stop robbing public schools. If we can't stanch the bleeding of local budgets caused by vouchers, it will be too expensive to ever provide a state funding system that is both adequate and equitable.

Voters have a right to be critical. This time it's state policy that needs to be the target, not public-school students

*Susie Kaeser is a 40-year resident of Cleveland Heights and the former director of Reaching Heights. She is active in the Heights Coalition for Public Education and the League of Women Voters.*

Opinions continue on pages 11 and 14, and online at [www.heightsobserver.org/read/news/opinion/](http://www.heightsobserver.org/read/news/opinion/).



# Weiss is new vice mayor of University Heights



University Heights Vice Mayor Michele Weiss and Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan.

Mike Cook

It's a new year, and University Heights residents have new council members and a new vice mayor. Prior to the first council meeting of 2020, on Jan. 6, a ceremonial swearing-in was held to welcome new council members Barbara Blankfeld and Justin Gould, and to welcome back re-elected members Michele Weiss and John Rach. Her council peers unanimously elected Weiss as the city's vice mayor, and UH Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan praised Weiss after her selection. "In my time as mayor, Michele Weiss has sponsored the most legislation of any member on council. Besides that, she is a strong community leader, responsible for outreach throughout our community, and especially within the Jewish community. While every member of

council brings strengths and merits, and while every member of council is exceptional in their own right, Michele is a first among equals. No one works harder or gets better results," Brennan said. "I have observed firsthand the respect she commands among both men and women in the orthodox community," continued Brennan, "as well as the empowerment she inspires among women—both within and outside of the Jewish community. "I am delighted that tonight she was selected unanimously by her peers to serve the city of University Heights as our new vice mayor. I look forward to working together with her in this new capacity." *Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.*

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS continued from page 1

days after Jan. 13 to fill the vacancy; otherwise, the mayor is responsible for the appointment. The appointment is for an abbreviated term of approximately two years, until the end of December 2021. The appointee, if interested in continuing to serve on council, will have to run for election on Nov. 2, 2021. *Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and is a Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer.*



Mark Wiseman, former University Heights councilman.

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# Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights

JANUARY 6, 2020

Council members present were Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell, Kahlil Seren, Jason Stein, Michael N. Ungar and Melissa Yasinow.

The meeting lasted from 7:40 p.m. to 9:07 p.m. The swearing in and other organizing procedures lasted 50 minutes; public comments, 33 minutes; and other business, approximately 4 minutes.

**Swearing in council members**

After “The Star-Spangled Banner” was sung, the clerk of council reported the results of the 2019 election, in which Mary Dunbar, Kahlil Seren, Melody Joy Hart and Davida Russell were elected to council. All four swore oaths of office.

**Swearing in mayor and vice mayor**

President of Council/Mayor Jason Stein was elected unanimously by his peers. Vice President/Vice Mayor Kahlil Seren was elected by a vote of 4-3, with Dunbar, Ungar and Yasinow voting no. County Council Member Cheryl Stevens administered the oath of office to each.

**Council committee structure**

Council passed a resolution to appoint council’s standing committees’ membership and outline the general responsibilities of each committee. (Details can be found at [www.clevelandheights.com/943/Council-Committees](http://www.clevelandheights.com/943/Council-Committees).)

**The committee chairs are:**

- Administrative Services – Kahlil Seren
- Community Relations and Recreation – Davida Russell
- Finance – Melody Joy Hart
- Municipal Services – Mary Dunbar
- Planning and Development – Michael N. Ungar
- Public Safety and Health – Melissa Yasinow

**Council member comments**

Each council member elected in 2019 spoke briefly. Of note, Hart announced the first of the listening sessions she promised will be held on Jan. [29]. Russell mentioned the importance of counting each resident of Cleveland Heights in the 2020 Census, to leverage federal funds. Stein stated his confidence in the diversity of expertise and opinion among the council members.

**Public comments**

Top of the Hill: Joan Mallick asked all council members to listen and take the concerns of residents seriously, especially regarding revenue bonds and school funds. Mary Kelsey said there is no market study for Top of the Hill (TOH) financing that “holds water,” and that the revenue bonds as proposed will “mortgage our future.” She urged that the city “do it right or don’t do it at all.” Joyce Rajke stated the project is “dreadful” and has diminished with each [new] set of drawings, and said she hopes the new council will be more transparent. Mayor Stein noted that next Monday’s committee of the whole meeting will focus on TOH. Richard Bozik said he cannot understand the financing, despite many meetings.

Medusa Cement building: Rodger Bliss



of Madison, Ohio, a former Cleveland Heights resident, is involved in the Medusa Cement Building and Severance Center projects. He introduced himself to council and explained that partners on the Medusa development “got cold feet.” He projected optimism, stating he is looking for new partners and a possible restructuring.

Transportation: Sam Bell from the city’s Transportation Advisory Committee thanked and congratulated the city for its Complete and Green Streets Policy, credited the Heights Tree People for its hard work planting trees, and welcomed new members.

County council candidate: Mansell Baker, a former Cleveland Heights resident, introduced himself as a candidate for the District 10 seat on Cuyahoga County Council.

Overnight parking: Scott Weber, a landlord, complained that a tenant, who has purchased a permit to park on the street overnight in an area where the parking code is suspended, has nonetheless repeatedly received tickets and must contact city hall each time to correct them. The mayor connected him with Police Chief Mecklenburg to resolve the problem.

Issue 26 concerns: Garry Kanter congratulated the president and vice president of council. He called again for the resignation of three council members because he feels they were not impartial and violated their oath of office by campaigning against Issue 26 and making donations. He has been demanding this since July 2019 and stated that the law director excused their conduct.

Environment: Marietta Applegate urged the city to aspire carbon neutrality in the future.

Charter change: Tony Cuda, chair of Citizens for an Elected Mayor, said that campaigning [for the issue] was “a joy,” and noted that the people voted to change a charter that had stood unchallenged for 100 years. He praised this example of democracy in action, and said he is looking beyond the many troubling incidents that occurred when citizens were out petitioning, and the committees were negotiating ballot language.

**City manager’s report**

(City Manager Tanisha Briley’s detailed report can be found on pp. 2 – 10 of the council meeting packet, which can be accessed at [www.clevelandheights.com](http://www.clevelandheights.com), under *Government/Archived Agendas and Minutes*.)

Council authorized issuance of request for proposals to upgrade the Cumberland Park Playground.

**Property easement**

Council authorized the city manager to allow the owners of 2217 Tudor Drive to expand their easement on Nottingham Lane, to extend their parking and porch areas.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

Expanded reports are available online at [www.heightsobserver.org](http://www.heightsobserver.org).

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## Cleveland Heights sees national Census as a priority and opportunity

Joel Moss

Recently sworn-in Cleveland Heights City Council Member Davida Russell identified the upcoming 2020 U.S. Census as an agenda priority. Heights Libraries, the League of Women Voters, and FutureHeights are also supporting the initiative to see every adult and child included in the city’s population count.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, thousands of Cleveland Heights residents are predicted to go unaccounted for by the survey. For each person not counted, the city is estimated to lose between \$1,800 and \$2,700 annually in federal funding, which means that it could miss out on millions of dollars in government spending over the coming decade. Programs directly affected by the census count include Medicaid, Medicare Part B, SNAP, special education grants, National School Lunch program, Head Start/Early Head Start, foster care, health care programs, and public housing.

Russell is convening a hiring session at which Cleveland Heights residents can apply to be census workers, on Feb. 8 at 10 a.m., at

Imani Temple Ministries, 2463 North Taylor Road. Census takers will be paid up to \$22.50 per hour. In addition, representatives from Cuyahoga County will be on hand to help residents aged 65 or older apply for the Homestead Act tax exemption.

Why be counted? The framers of the U.S. Constitution chose population as the basis for sharing political power, not wealth or land. By being counted, Cleveland Heights residents stand to get their share of a \$675-billion pot of federal money for development, transportation and schools—all of which help make Cleveland Heights a desirable place to live.

The U.S. Census Bureau will send out invitations to participate in the survey in mid-March, with the official count starting on April 1. Residents can answer the census questions online, by standard mail, by phone, or through an in-person interview.

To RSVP to the hiring session, e-mail [councilwomanrussell@gmail.com](mailto:councilwomanrussell@gmail.com). For more information, call 216-333-3137.

Joel Moss is a MSSA/MNO intern at FutureHeights.

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# TOH revenue bonds: more deceit and giveaways

Joan Mallick

CH city staff and some council members are determined to build the Top of the Hill project regardless of the financial consequences to the city. Until now, the primary financial issues have been the loss of city revenues. However, now the city is trying to issue debt to pay for some of the costs of the project. The debt is being justified because all TIF developers ask for and receive financial commitments from governments as a show of good faith in a project.

In December 2018, CH City Council authorized giving \$1.8 million to the TOH developer, Flaherty & Collins, to help it get a construction loan. At that time, the city finance director certified that the money was in the city treasury; it was not. So the city spent the last year unsuccessfully looking for outside funding. And it still could not find treasury money.

On Dec. 3, 2019, City Manager Tanisha Briley proposed issuing \$2 million in city debt in the form of revenue bonds. She presented these as “good news” because tax money cannot be used to repay them. She did not mention, however, that they are necessary because the city never had, and will not have, money to pay the pledge. She described the lack of funds as a shortfall. She also failed to mention that the city is giving away parking fees, which were the only

possible source of TOH non-tax revenues. It will give the parking garage to the developer once it is complete.

Briley stated in January that the city has found a revenue source in the form of permit fees for TOH construction. What a change of tune. Early on, she justified the project by saying TOH permit fees would help fill the city’s coffers. Now Briley deceitfully argues that this is a painless way to pay the bonds. That is, the city is not losing money because it would not have received any permit fees if the project wasn’t being done. In fact, there will be pain. Permit fees that would normally go toward operations will be diverted to pay the bonds. Eventually, inflation will require more operating funds, and residents will face increased taxes or a reduction in services.

How can these permit fees possibly repay the bonds? They will be issued only during the two-year construction period, and are hardly an ongoing source of revenue. Briley estimates the total amount will be about \$700,000—hardly enough to pay off \$2 million plus service fees. She seems to have an alternative plan though: issue a series of bonds, each to pay the service fees on the previous one. Even with that scheme, there is no identifiable source of revenue to pay bondholders the principal when the bonds mature. The debt, therefore, could be end-

less.

Bond lawyers and creative accounts will find a way to issue these bonds within legal and accounting rules. However, the issue is whether the city should go into debt for a project that has no guarantee of being successful. (See University Square as an example of a poorly designed and poorly timed TIF project that failed.)

Briley said the city will not issue bonds to pay for new police cars (\$22,000 each, through a state program) and garbage trucks (\$100,000 each), because there are no revenues to pay for them. But she is actively searching for a way to issue bonds for the TOH developer. The \$2 million of revenue bonds being directed toward TOH would buy a lot of equipment for our safety departments.

For an \$80 million project, the money is a pittance for the developer. But it will have a significant short- and long-term effect on city services. This gesture of good faith [on the part of the city] will give money to a for-profit developer and steal money from residents. Please contact council members and ask them to explain the wisdom of this proposal.

*Joan Mallick is a 48-year resident of Cleveland Heights. She cannot imagine living anywhere else, but is concerned about the direction the city is going in, in terms of viable economic development.*

TRACK continued from page 1  
track club.

“There were quite a few track clubs around the area, but none in the Heights,” said Derrick Fair, head coach and one of the founding members of the club, and a former assistant coach for Heights High’s varsity men’s track and field. “It was frustrating to see so many of our kids running for other summer track clubs,” he said. “We got with the athletic director and the varsity coach and put a club together. It’s been a much-needed asset to the school district and the city ever since.”

In a city that boasts an active and thriving recreation department, the addition of track and field, along with youth wrestling, football and cheerleading, provides children with choices to keep them active and, of course, tired late into the evenings.

“My daughter absolutely loves this program,” said Nicole Hodge, Heights High graduate and mother of Na’Kyla Ford, a sixth-grader who ranked fifth in the nation in shotput in 2018. “We had no idea she would take so well to track and field. It’s been life-changing for her. Hopefully, she’ll continue and land a college scholarship.”

“We do our best to give the kids in our program positive instruction that is both fun and rigorous,” said Coach Sierra Simmons, assistant director. “We work them hard, but not too hard where they no longer enjoy running. If the kids don’t come back the following year, or develop a love for running, then we’re not doing our jobs as coaches.”

“Developing a love of running and competing is huge at this age level,” added Fair. “The high school program greatly benefits from the youth club’s existence. We work hand-in-hand with the school district and recreation department. Both have been very supportive in keeping this program thriving. We are very fortunate, as other clubs don’t get half the support that we do.”

The support has started to pay off: 29 athletes qualified for the American Athletic Union (AAU) National Championships held in North Carolina last year. “Those kids worked hard all spring and summer,” said Simmons. “It’s always a blessing when we can take so many athletes out of state to compete. It gives them something to shoot for during the season, especially those high school and middle school athletes who continue to train into the summer.”

“We are very excited about the kids we have returning for 2020,” said Fair. “Our goal is to have over 100 kids running with us this year. But in order to do that, we’re going to need a few more coaches,” he said with a laugh. “If anyone is interested in joining our staff, we’d love to have you.”

Visit the Tigers’ website at [www.heightstigersyouthsports.org](http://www.heightstigersyouthsports.org) or like its Facebook page for more information. If interested in volunteering as a coach, contact Fair at 216-773-6075 or [mrshoes@hotmail.com](mailto:mrshoes@hotmail.com).

*Michael Payne, a biomedical researcher at Case Western Reserve University, serves as president/executive director for the Cleveland Heights Tigers Youth Sports Association Inc., and vice president of North Coast Youth Football Conference.*

## Development without tax abatement isn’t realistic

Lee Batdorff

In a January 2020 opinion published in the *Heights Observer*, Cleveland Heights resident Joan Mallick advocated that CH City Council not approve the final “financial subsidies” required for the Top of the Hill (TOH) project to proceed.

According to Mallick, among the costs to the city that TOH would incur is a tax rebate of \$1.2 million a year for a total of \$36 million over 30 years, part of a total cost to the city of \$43,970,000. She estimated a net loss to Cleveland Heights of \$23,719,700 over 30 years.

If this \$36 million dollar figure were not included, the total income to the city would actually be \$7.97 million over 30 years, instead of a huge loss.

Given the manner in which most development in this region occurs these days, Mallick presents a specious argument.

In the 1990s I was an environmental activist on the suburban-sprawl issue for the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club. I pointed out in public meetings that developers have put cities and states in a bind on tax abatements. Tax abatements started in earnest years before then, and were meant only for distressed neighborhoods. Unfortunately the powers that be

(property developers of all kinds) lobbied for tax abatement for almost all new construction, which became what we know it as today.

Taking the original legislation to abate taxes in economically deprived areas and corrupting it to spread the benefits to developers across almost all development is onerous and not good for civilization. Even so, we (activists, cities and states) grew to embrace this perverted tax-abatement system that has been in use for at least 40 years. So, if old-time full taxation on new construction is instituted, you’re a city or state that won’t work with developers.

Now, if Mallick wanted to change the whole corrupting tax-abatement system (probably a hopeless task), she might have a colleague in me.

TOH is not for the middle class, as CH resident Don King pointed out in a letter published in the January 2020 *Heights Observer*. Cleveland Heights has a surplus of so-called middle-class rental suites at this point, even with a large loss of multi-family housing stock in Cleveland Heights in recent decades (you can see for-rent signs in our multi-family districts now). While I have no survey of landlords about this, I know a small landlord who has difficulty renting suites.

Decades ago, it wasn’t like this

here. In 1979 I spent much effort finding an apartment in Coventry Village. There were no for-rent signs. Apartments in Coventry Village listed in newspaper classifieds were snapped up like this was Manhattan. Even with Craigslist now, this is no longer the case. So, building more new middle-class housing, which would likely need additional public subsidy, is not an effective strategy for the future of Cleveland Heights.

What residential rental market is vastly underserved in Cleveland Heights, compared to places such as Shaker Heights and Beachwood? It is the wealthy residential rental market. Why are wealthy renters wanted? They pay more in taxes than they consume in public services.

While I’ll likely never qualify financially to take a suite in TOH, I’m looking forward to wealthy people living there. Some of them [will likely] work at the institutions in University Circle, and some of them [will] have raised their families in Cleveland Heights and want to “empty nest” here.

I want these people to live here, not elsewhere, contributing to our taxes and supporting local businesses.

*Lee Batdorff has lived in Cleveland Heights since 1966.*



# Noble Neighbors celebrates six years of growth

Brenda H. May

Noble Neighbors gathered on Jan. 7 to celebrate six years of working together to make the neighborhoods along Noble Road friendlier, safer and more attractive. While enjoying a potluck dinner, participants recounted the activities of the previous year.

The newest initiative was the Noble Gardeners' Market, held on Saturday mornings during the summer. Sellers offered backyard- and community garden-grown vegetables and flowers. Buyers learned to arrive early for home-grown shiitakes, heirloom tomatoes and garlic. Children bought bags of cherry tomatoes and ate them like penny candy. Growing community identity was a priority for the market, and the stories told around the potluck tables attested to its success. According to one participant, "People came to buy vegetables and stayed for the conversation."

In 2019, Noble Neighbors established a new relationship with Neighborhood 9, the East Cleveland community group that shares its Noble Road geography. Using the Noble

Road Corridor planning project as a springboard, the organizations worked together to host a hot chocolate and cookie tent when GE Lighting threw the switch on its annual holiday display at Nela Park. Residents have a tradition of walking to the event and strolling along the sidewalks to see the lights. This year, neighbors were delighted with the treats as they learned more about both neighborhood groups.

Thanks to funding from Future-Heights' Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program, a team of neighbors—the Litter Busters—don blue vests and patrol the streets of the neighborhood to pick up litter. Noble Road is certainly looking cleaner for their efforts, as well as those of the many residents who pick up litter on their own.

New groups formed for friendship as well as affinity. The Street Strollers met twice a week at Denison Park for exercise and conversation, and a book group is reading Melody Warnick's *This Is Where You Belong* to gather ideas on how to make the area even more cohesive. Two film nights with TED Talk videos about urban gardening in Detroit

and placemaking in Memphis sparked conversations about possibilities for the neighborhood.

Green Noble met in person and on Facebook to consider gardening, ecology, renewable energy, habitats and human social impacts, with an eye to implementing projects in Noble. Its most popular project in 2019 was growing microgreens in windowsill containers.

Noble Neighbors invited residents to create chalk-art greetings to welcome students back to Monticello Middle School on the evening before it reopened. Old and young, parents, adults without children, and able-bodied and mobility-challenged neighbors wrote words of encouragement on the sidewalks near the entrance.

Several projects and events were continued from previous years. Beautification remained a priority. Volunteers maintained five perennial gardens that were complemented by the city of Cleveland Heights' stunning hanging pots and container installments. Noble Road was ablaze with floral color through the summer and fall.

"We Are Noble," the annual cel-

ebration of the neighborhood, brought visitors to experience the culture of our Bhutanese population, buy used tools at Home Repair Resource Center, browse yard sales, visit open houses, and enjoy the offerings of Noble's institutions and businesses. New in 2019 were kite-building and a chalk-walk, and a bounce house in Denison Park.

Election forums asked candidates and issue representatives to address the concerns of the Noble area, and "Light Up Noble!" encouraged residents and businesses with Noble Road-facing property to display lights for Nela Park visitors.

Noble Neighbors is actively affecting the northeast quadrant of Cleveland Heights. Visit [www.nobleneighbors.com](http://www.nobleneighbors.com) to see the organization's "quote wall," and learn more about how it is changing the neighborhood.

*Brenda H. May is one of the leaders of Noble Neighbors.*

COOKING continued from page 1

braries' Lee Road branch. Each week, a different local chef will demonstrate how to make simple meals that are rich in flavor, and history. "This series will not only teach kids culinary skills, but will give them a cohesive understanding of the African Diaspora and its place in our country's history, through food," Chandler said.

On Feb. 4, Chef Sediah Hamzah, who operates the meal service company Meals Made Easy, will create a vegan soul food dish. "I believe it is important for this generation to learn about cultural foods because so much of our history has been stolen from us," said Hamzah. "We're taught that our only tie to food is soul food, but our people knew so much more than the limitations given to us by those who owned our ancestors."

On Feb. 11, Chef Eric Wells, who owns and operates Sky LaRae's Culinary Services, will make a West African dish. Wells, who was born and raised in Cleveland, is a graduate of the International Culinary Arts and Sciences Institute, and the Loretta Paganini School of cooking.

On Feb. 18, home cook Denise Miller will make a Jamaican dish. Originally from Jamaica, Miller moved to the United States 36 years ago and has lived in the Heights for the past 25 years. She learned to cook from her grandmother, mother and aunts.

Last, but not least, on Feb. 25, Chef Eric Rogers, well-known in the eastern suburbs for Black Box Fix, Sweet Fix bakery and the Fresh Fix, will make a New Orleans-Creole dish. Rogers has been cooking since he was 8, starting out in his grandparents' East Cleveland restaurant.

The Lee Road branch is located at 2345 Lee Road in Cleveland Heights. Program registration is required, and can be made online at [www.heightslibrary.org](http://www.heightslibrary.org), or by phone at 216-932-3600.

*Sheryl Banks is the communications manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.*

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# School levy forum to be held Feb. 20

Joel Moss

Three community groups will host a public forum to discuss Issue 26, the school levy that will be on the March 17 ballot. The event will take place on Thursday, Feb. 20, at 7 p.m., at the Cleveland Heights Community Center, 1 Monticello Blvd.

The League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, Future-Heights and Reaching Heights are hosting the forum, which is free and open to the public. A balanced panel of community activists will discuss the delicate balance between public school funding and tax burden.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education has asked residents to approve a property tax levy of an additional 7.9 mills. The levy would add \$23 per month

for each \$100,000 of home value, according to the school board.

The hosts have invited representatives of two groups formed in response to the levy proposal—Tiger Nation 4 Lower Taxes and Citizens for Our Heights Schools—to participate in the forum.

On its website, Tiger Nation 4 Lower Taxes said it opposes the levy because “extreme taxation is a burden on so many of our residents and puts the future of Cleveland Heights & University Heights in extreme danger,” and “is becoming unsustainable and unaffordable! The high taxes are a threat to our most vulnerable citizens; the elderly, retired, those on fixed income, low income, our impoverished and young individuals/couples with high debt.”

Citizens for Our Heights Schools posits on its website that “failing to

pass this levy will place all of us at the mercy of the State of Ohio and will force us to start dismantling parts of our school system. Passing this levy will make sure the money is there to keep our schools intact and the foundation of our community’s success strong.”

Both sides will present their arguments and answer questions from the public. As at all League of Women Voters-sponsored forums, attendees will submit their questions in writing.

*Joel Moss is a MSSA/MNO intern at FutureHeights.*

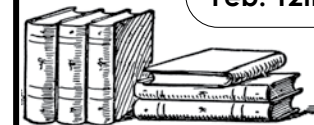
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## Ohio HB 305 co-sponsor to speak on proposed revisions to school funding



State Rep. John Patterson speaking about the school funding proposal he co-authored with Rep. Bob Cupp.

Krista Hawthorne

State Rep. John Patterson, co-author of bipartisan legislation to remake Ohio’s school funding system, will speak at a Feb. 10 forum at Cleveland Heights High School, “School Funding in Ohio: The Possibilities and Challenges of Creating a Solution.”

The 7 p.m. event is free and open to the public.

Rep. Patterson (Democrat-Jefferson) and Rep. Bob Cupp (Republican-Lima) led a three-year process to develop state policy that complies with the 1997 DeRolph decision, with declared Ohio’s funding system unconstitutional.

Their bill, HB 305, which seeks to create a new school funding system, is currently making its way through the legislature. The Cupp-Patterson legislation includes di-

rect funding of vouchers and other non-public school expenses.

At the event, Patterson seeks to help the public understand the imperative, process, and unfinished business surrounding this legislative opportunity.

Co-sponsors of the event include the Heights Coalition for Public Education, League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, Reaching Heights, CH-UH PTA Council, the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union, and other civic groups.

Cleveland Heights High School is located at 13263 Cedar Road. Child care is available during the event; e-mail coalition@chuh.net to make arrangements.

*Krista Hawthorne is executive director of Reaching Heights, and a proud and grateful Heights Tiger.*

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TOP OF THE HILL continued from page 1

ment incentives, used in Shaker Heights for the Van Aken development, for example.)

The CH-UH City School District will continue to receive the same real estate tax revenue that it does now for the parking lot, approximately \$20,000 a year. The school district agreed to the TIF; in exchange, the developer agreed to pay the school district an additional \$400,000 per year as “payment in lieu of taxes”—a common feature of TIF agreements with school districts.

The city estimates that it will receive \$308,000 in additional annual income tax revenue from the approximately 70 percent of TOH residents who are expected to be new to the city, as well as temporary income tax revenue from the construction workers on the project.

The second ordinance (6-2020) authorizes the city to issue non-tax revenue bonds of no more than \$1.85 million as the city’s contribution to the project. City Manager Tanisha Briley and the city’s bond counsel, Jeff Bomberger of Squire Patton Boggs, explained that these bonds would be repaid from project-related fees received by the city, including fees for licenses and permits, not tax revenues.

At the Jan. 27 meeting, Council Member Mike Ungar, chair of the Planning and Development Committee, read aloud questions that residents had e-mailed to the committee; the developer’s representatives, city staff, and the city’s legal and economic development consultants responded to the questions.

Council Member Davida Russell reiterated her support for a provision that has been added as an exhibit to ordinance 5-2020, requiring the developer to make best efforts to hire minority-owned and female-owned contractors, with a workforce that maximizes demographic diversity

and the employment of local residents at prevailing wage levels for construction jobs. [According to City Manager Briley, “this information is in the term sheet and is . . . still in flux.”]

The \$84-million TOH project, located on four acres of land at the intersection of Cedar Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard, will include 261 market-rate apartments, garage space for approximately 550 cars for residents and businesses, 11,400 square feet of storefront retail space along Cedar Road, and 25,000 square feet of green space, including a public gathering space adjacent to Nighttown.

The parking lot that TOH will replace has remained undeveloped since the eight-story Doctors’ Hospital was demolished in 1968, and has been the subject of past development proposals.

TOH construction will begin with a parking garage that will serve those who now park in the surface lot, as well as future residents and customers of the proposed development.

Ungar has expressed strong support for the project and has stated that it has been “thoroughly vetted by our professional staff and by a team of highly skilled and experienced professionals, as well as through a robust community engagement process.”

CH City Council will hear second readings of both ordinances on Feb. 3, and council may take final action at its Feb. 17 meeting, on third reading of the ordinances.

*Robert Brown is a city planner with 40 years of experience, including nine years as Cleveland’s City Planning Director. He has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for more than 40 years. Christopher Jacobs is partner with Renner, Otto, Boisselle & Sklar, LLP and a longtime Cleveland Heights resident. Both serve on the FutureHeights Board of Directors.*

TOH 2016 TO 2020 continued from page 8

Where is the public realm that citizens were promised and deserve to enjoy?

This public/private partnership seems almost entirely to have been skewed for short-term private gain. To allocate \$1.8 million in city money for a neighborhood that doesn’t want the F&C version of TOH, and will be confronted by it every time residents drive up Cedar Hill, seems the height of folly.

Cleveland Heights’ housing stock is a point of pride, a drawing card, and its quality and character

should be enhanced by anything built at the city’s most prominent and heavily traveled entrance.

No more city time and money (bonds or other) should be spent on this dreadful project, which was presented with such high aspirations, but has diminished in its desirability every time a new set of drawings has appeared.

*Joyce and Steve Rajki, 49-year residents of Cleveland Heights, are advocating for quality design and construction that will stand the test of time.*

## Kids’ Comic Con returns to Coventry’s Lake Erie Ink

Eli Millette

Young people ages 8–18 will have the chance to attend workshops with experienced comic creators at Lake Erie Ink’s (LEI) eighth annual Kids’ Comic Con on Saturday, Feb. 29, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus. Last year’s event drew 150 kids and teens from across Northeast Ohio.

Workshops will cover the two aspects of comic creation—drawing and writing—and include the ever-popular “create your own comic character in clay.” New this year, a teens-only (grades 6–12) program will feature a “Make Change with Comics” panel. Teens will have the opportunity to learn about the difficult balance of making money through art while simultaneously making a positive difference in their community. The program will also feature a cosplay fashion show, and a Snack n’ Sketch ’zine exchange.

Kids and teens will have the opportunity to learn from artists and writers who represent a wide range of styles, experience and backgrounds. This year’s featured artists and writers include Terri Libenson, a nationally syndicated comic strip artist who worked



on the “Pajama Diaries” from 2006–20, and Miguel Hernandez and Michelle Littlejohn of Studio JS, whose most recent projects include a family-friendly comic called Tickle Pickle James and the Sweet Pickles.

Doors open at 9 a.m., and workshops begin at 10 a.m. Costumes are encouraged. Admission is \$10 at the door, and scholarships are available. Lunch will be sold on site, and kids may bring their own. Comics and graphic novels will be for sale. Adults are welcome if accompanied by a child; teachers are welcome with a staff ID. Register at <http://lakeerieink.org/kids-comic-con> or by calling 216-320-4757. Pre-register to reserve a spot.

Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide creative expression opportunities and academic support to youth in the Greater Cleveland community.

*Eli Millette is communications and marketing manager for Lake Erie Ink.*

## CH Senior Center News

Amy Jenkins

The Cleveland Heights Senior Activity Center (SAC) announces the following “not-to-be-missed” programs for February:

“Consider the ‘Spring’,” Friday, Feb. 14, 11 a.m. Semi-retired mattress store owner Marti Webster will host a talk and demonstration covering all you ever wanted to know about mattresses. The program will feature games, prizes, and plenty of time to ask questions.

“Amazing Women of the 19th Century,” Tuesday, Feb. 18, 11 a.m. In honor of the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote, Norton London, a historian with a special interest in the Civil War, will present the stories of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Perhaps the most famous African American woman in 19th-century America, Truth traveled the country for more than 40 years as a forceful and passionate advocate for the dispossessed, using her quick wit and fearless tongue to fight for human rights. Tubman, born into slavery, was an African American abolitionist, humanitarian, and Union spy. In the post-war era, she worked hard for women’s suffrage.

A discussion on “The 1619 Project” will be held at the senior center on Tuesday, Feb. 25, at 11 a.m. Facilitated by Heights Libraries, the program is based on an initiative of *The New York Times* that re-examined the history and the lasting influence of American slavery on American society.

The Cleveland Heights SAC, located in the CH Community Center at 1 Monticello Blvd., offers programs for those 60 and older. A complete schedule is published in the community center’s newsletter, available online at [www.chparks.com](http://www.chparks.com).

SAC membership is \$5 for Cleveland Heights residents. To sign up, bring a recent piece of mail (such as a bill) and a photo ID.

University Heights residents who would like to join SAC must first register with Patrick Grogan-Myers, UH community development coordinator, at 216-932-7800, ext. 203, or [pgrogan@universityheights.com](mailto:pgrogan@universityheights.com). Membership is \$10 for University Heights seniors.

*Amy Jenkins is supervisor at the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging and the Senior Activity Center. She can be reached at 216-691-7379 or by e-mail at [ajenkins@clvhts.com](mailto:ajenkins@clvhts.com).*

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# Swim Cadets are ‘Out of this World’ for 2020 show

Andrea C. Turner

The Cleveland Heights High School Swim Cadets, a 15-member synchronized swim club, will present its annual show March 5-7, 7 p.m., at the Heights High pool. The theme of this year’s show is “Out of this World.”

High school synchronized swim teams are a rarity, and this group maintains special significance as the oldest extracurricular club at Heights High, with 81 years in existence.

The young women are responsible for all the creative aspects of the show, including choreography, music, theater lighting and costuming, as well as recruiting “guy cadets” to perform during costume changes. The club fundraises regularly in order to present a high-level, entertaining production, full of athleticism, grace and teamwork. The annual performance is the result of five months of 12- to 15-hour practice weeks.

Julianna Clark, this year’s new swim cadet advisor, is an alumna cadet (2011-15) and graduate of John Carroll University.

“As a past swim cadet, my journey has come full circle and I now have the opportunity to pass my experience on to this group of swimmers, as well as remembering my own time as a swim cadet,” said Clark. “This year’s group is unique because we have a lot of fresh talent. We have been working hard since the end of October and, as we get closer to the show in March, the swimmers are looking great and having fun. I’m looking forward to the rest of the season and the performance this talented group is going to give.”

Emma Hubbard, a senior and club member since her freshman year, said, “Swim cadets gave me a sense of responsibility and leadership that I couldn’t have gained elsewhere. As president of the club, I try to keep everything organized and running smoothly, and I try to create a welcoming and loving environment for all the girls on the team.”

Along with Hubbard, club

members are senior Nives Lablanca (AFS exchange student from Italy); juniors Anna Turner, Sophia Forniti, Arden Lindberg and Zoe Burns; sophomores Ella Herr, Lily Fawcett-Dubow, Estelle Covault, Sophia Marotta and Serenity Parker; and freshmen Ruby Blackman, Rachel O’Keefe, Clarissa Gorjanc and Callie Williams.

Tickets (\$10 for adults; \$7 for students) are available from Swim Cadets in advance, and at the door. About 50 tickets per night will be available for purchase at the box office, which will open at 6:15 p.m. each night. Show tickets sell out quickly; visit the club’s Facebook or Instagram accounts for more information.

Heights High is at 13263 Cedar Road. The pool’s entrance is on the west side of the building.

Andrea C. Turner is the owner of ACT One Communications, LLC, a marketing communications consulting

firm based in Cleveland Heights. Her daughter is a swim cadet and the club’s treasurer.



The 2020 Swim Cadets will perform their annual show March 5-7.

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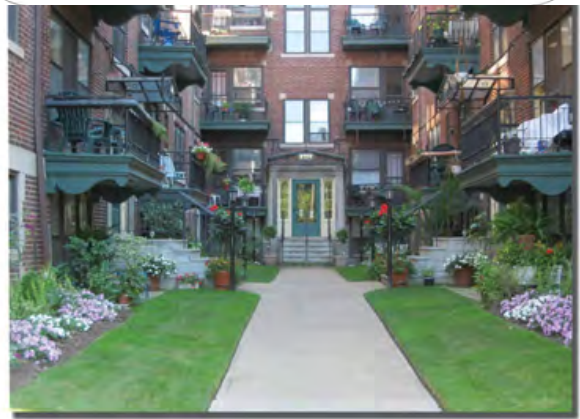
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# CH-UH schools to host kindergarten info nights

Cathan Cavanaugh

Beginning Feb. 25, each Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District elementary school will host a Kindergarten Information Night for incoming and prospective families.

Attendees will have the opportunity to meet the school principals and teachers, ask questions, and tour the buildings. Several of the schools will also offer dinner, and childcare or playtime services.

To find the school that corresponds to your place of residence, use the district's online interactive boundary map, at [www.chuh.org/InteractiveBoundariesMap.aspx](http://www.chuh.org/InteractiveBoundariesMap.aspx).

Here is a list, by date, of each elementary school's information night:

- Tuesday, Feb. 25, 6:30–7:30 p.m. Boulevard Elementary School, 1749 Lee Road
- Thursday, March 12, 6–7 p.m.

- Roxboro Elementary School, 2405 Roxboro Road
  - Thursday, March 12, 6:30–7:30 p.m. Gearity Elementary School, 2323 Wrenford Road
  - Thursday, March 19, 5:30–7:30 p.m. Fairfax Elementary School, 3150 Fairfax Road
  - Thursday, April 2, 5:30–7:30 p.m. Canterbury Elementary School, 2530 Canterbury Road
  - Wednesday, April 15, 6–7 p.m. Noble Elementary School, 1293 Ardoon Street
  - Thursday, April 16, 3:30–4:30 p.m. Oxford Elementary School, 939 Quilliams Road
- Visit [www.chuh.org](http://www.chuh.org) for additional details as the dates get closer.

*Cathan Cavanaugh is the supervisor of communications for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.*



Beginning Feb. 25, each CH-UH City School District elementary school will host a Kindergarten Information Night.

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Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education Meeting highlights



DECEMBER 9, 2019  
Members present were President Jodi Sourini, Vice President James Posch, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis and Beverly Wright. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer. The meeting began at 7:05 p.m., after executive session, and ended at 9:17 p.m.

JANUARY 7, 2020  
Members present were President Jodi Sourini, Vice President James Posch, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis and Beverly Wright. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer. The meeting began at 7:05 p.m., after executive session, and ended at 9:47 p.m.

University Heights Civic Awards

The school board and University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan recognized Jodi Sourini as University Heights Public Servant of the Year and Fiona Connor as University Heights Educator of the Year.

Middle school inequities

Sam Bell spoke on inequity in the middle schools and the difficulty the off-campus career tech programs have in marketing their programs. President Sourini said that the equity task force will be meeting.

Five-year forecast

Scott Gainer presented and discussed the five-year forecast. The board unanimously approved it.

University Square redevelopment

Kowitt & Company will redevelop University Square into two- and three-bedroom apartments, and open the area for green space. The property is deteriorating and has changed hands many times. Kowitt promised to continue to own the building. Target and Macy's will stay. The district unanimously passed a resolution for a 30-year, 100-percent TIF (tax increment financing) plan commencing in 2020. (Details are available on BoardDocs, at [www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx](http://www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx); select Dec. 9, 2019 meeting, and click on View the Agenda.)

School levy

The board unanimously agreed to proceed with an additional 7.9 mill levy for current expenses, to be put before voters on March 17.

Final report on middle school renovations

Project Management Consultants and Regency Construction gave the final report on the final cost of the middle school renovations. The project was finished within budget and may have some funds left.

Other business

The board held the first reading of board policies Group A, and the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school calendars.

Organizational meeting

Before opening the regular meeting, the board held an organizational meeting. All officers remained in the positions in which they served in 2019. Treasurer Gainer administered the oath of office to re-elected board members James Posch and Beverly Wright.

Recognition of students, teachers, staff, and the board

The board recognized students participating in the middle school spelling bee, Power of the Pen, Stop the Hate, and Sing the Hate Out. They also recognized the teachers and administrators working to increase Advanced Placement enrollment.

Public comments

Two members of the community spoke on equity in student fundraising, and one spoke on high taxes in the district.

Resolution opposing voucher expansion

Dan Heintz introduced a resolution opposing Ohio's expansion of EdChoice vouchers. He noted that the district has lost \$15 million to the voucher program. (The resolution can be viewed on BoardDocs, at [www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx](http://www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx); select Jan. 7, 2020 regular session, click on View the Agenda, and go to New Business.) After many comments, the board unanimously passed the resolution.

Other business

Julianna Johnston, executive director of the Heights Schools Foundation (HSF), and Susan Carver, president of the HSF Board of Trustees, presented an update on the foundation.

The board held the second reading for policies group A. The board unanimously voted to adopt the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school calendars.

LWV Observer: Adele Cohn.

Expanded reports are available online at [www.heightsobserver.org](http://www.heightsobserver.org).

LWV Observer: Adele Cohn.



Roxboro students ‘Walk for Water’



After reading *A Long Walk to Water* in their English classes, sixth-graders at Roxboro Middle School organized their own Dec. 20 walkathon, and raised more than \$2,000 for the Water for South Sudan Project.

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Canterbury students create art to accompany music



An illustration for “Tom Thumb”.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

Students at Canterbury Elementary School know a thing or two about synesthesia or, more specifically, chromaesthesia—seeing colors or shapes while listening to music. The school practices Mindful Music every morning, when students are encouraged to close their eyes, let their minds wander, and “picture” the music.

They recently had an opportunity to put this skill, and their knowledge of classical music and mixed media art forms, to good use under the guidance of Holly Spooner, art teacher at Canterbury. Students in grades two through five created visual images to accompany the Cleveland Suburban Symphony Orchestra’s Concert for Families at the Maltz Performing Arts Center on Dec. 8.

The orchestra played Maurice Ravel’s “Mother Goose Suite,” which features five classic fairy tales. Each grade first listened to a story in art

class. They closed their eyes, imagining the scenes, and then brainstormed ideas for illustrations to go with the music, narrowing them down to one idea per story.

Second-graders chose a watercolor and collage garden scene for “Tom Thumb,” while third-graders drew pagodas and used a tie-dyeing technique for their background illustrations for “Laideronnette: Empress of the Pagodas.” The fourth-grade classes chose an elaborate wintery scene featuring a castle for “Pavane of Sleeping Beauty,” while the fifth-graders made a mixed-media collage of the famed stained glass rose for “Conversation of Beauty and the Beast.”

Spooner photographed every piece of art, and the orchestra projected each image on a screen behind the musicians either during the performance or at intermission. The audience of 450 was impressed, and many sought out the students to congratulate them. The musicians said they were inspired by the beautiful artwork.

Spooner has an audio recording of the concert to show to all the students, along with the slide show of the images, as not all were able to attend the concert. “They were very proud,” she said of those who attended. “I don’t think they realized how special it would be.”

*Krissy Dietrich Gallagher, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a former district teacher, and a freelance journalist under contract with the CH-UH City School District.*

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Heights High students ‘Sing Out’ against hate



The Heights High English classes of Donna Feldman and David Jurns competed in the Maltz Museum’s “Stop the Hate: Youth Sing Out” competition at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on Dec. 11. The two tied for first place, out of 27 competitors, winning a \$5,000 award that the school will use for anti-bias education. In the photo above (from left), Marissa Vecchia, Emma Vail, Alexis Dixon, Daymonique Judge and Maple Buescher perform.

RoxArts hosts ‘leap day’ benefit

Andrea C. Turner

Celebrate leap year at a “FUN”draising event for the RoxArts in Tiger Nation Fund on Saturday, Feb. 29, at the B-Side Lounge, 2785 Euclid Heights Blvd. in Coventry Village. This “extra night” in 2020 is an opportunity to enjoy fabulous food, drinks, dancing, live music, fashion and fun, all while benefiting arts and science enrichment in Cleveland Heights-University Heights public schools. Attendees are invited to show their Tiger Nation pride by dressing in black-and-gold attire.

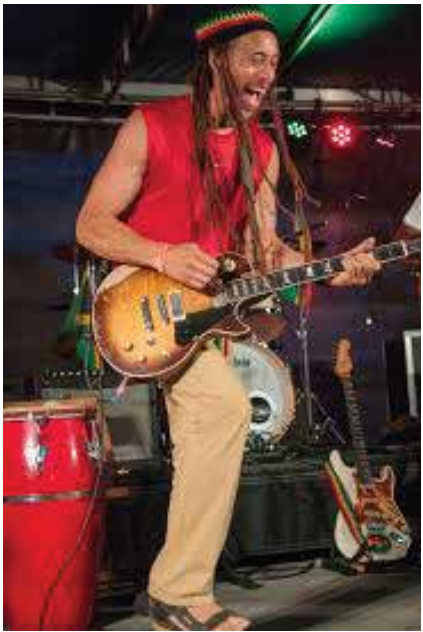
RoxArts invites the entire CH-UH community to take a “leap forward” in 2020 by advancing the inclusivity of arts and science enrichment for all CH-UH schools, grades K–8.

General admission tickets are \$35, and CH-UH teachers get in for just \$25. VIP tickets are also available. Ticket holders receive admission to three events: Benefit party with hearty appetizers, beer and wine until 9 p.m., Silent Disco (\$10 value), and the Carlos Jones reggae concert (\$15 value).

Tickets are available online at [www.roxarts.org](http://www.roxarts.org). Free babysitting (limited availability) by Heights students may be reserved by e-mailing [emgisel@aol.com](mailto:emgisel@aol.com).

RoxArts expanded its mission several years ago to supplement arts and science enrichment education in all of the CH-UH public elementary and middle schools. In doing so, it responded to the community’s desire for a more-unified, inclusive approach to providing access to the funds that were raised. (To learn more, watch a video on the RoxArts Facebook page.)

“The enrichment experiences RoxArts provides inspires children to be thinkers and allows them to explore concepts, reflect and solve problems critically,” said Rosemary Pierce, president of RoxArts governing board. “When children are given the space, time and resources to dabble in arts and sciences, they grow as learners.”



RoxArts Black & Gold event ticket holders can see Carlos Jones perform live at the Grog Shop on Feb. 29.

In 2017, the board established the Tiger Nation Fund with the Heights Schools Foundation (HSF), led by Executive Director Julianna Johnston Senturia, a Heights alum. HSF, the district’s internal nonprofit partner, was asked to implement a process to equitably distribute programming funds across the district.

Anna Costanzo, music teacher at Boulevard Elementary School, praised the program: “Because of its support, we are able to fund a 10-week ballroom dancing program. It is amazing to see the transformation from girls and boys to ladies and gentlemen! Our hearts are filled with happiness and hope for the future.”

All proceeds from the event will be distributed equally among CH-UH elementary and middle schools.

For more information about the Feb. 29 event, “like” the Facebook event, or visit [www.roxarts.org](http://www.roxarts.org). Anyone interested in joining the RoxArts benefit committee is invited to e-mail [roxarts4schools@gmail.com](mailto:roxarts4schools@gmail.com).

*Andrea C. Turner is a board member of RoxArts, and the owner of ACT One Communications, LLC, a marketing communications consulting firm based in Cleveland Heights.*



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Library wants to ensure everyone is counted in the 2020 Census



Sheryl Banks

Along with voting, being counted in the U.S. Census is one of the most patriotic activities an individual can perform.

Beginning in mid-March, every home in the United States will receive a postcard in the mail that serves as an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Residents can respond for their household in one of three ways: online, by phone or by mail.

To ensure the community is ready to participate, Heights Libraries will be encouraging community members to learn about the 2020 Census with informational programs and fliers; comprehensive answers to common questions about the census process, including issues of security and privacy; and a special Web page of census-related resources.

The library will kick off its efforts on Monday, Feb. 10, at 7 p.m., at the Lee Road branch, with “The 2020 Census: What You Need to Know.” Audrey Wynne, a partnership specialist for the U.S. Census

Bureau, will discuss why getting a complete census count is critical for future funding to Cuyahoga County, and will also answer questions about the census.

“The data collected by the census has a profound impact on communities,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director. “Decisions about the amount of money spent on roads, where hospitals are built, how many new schools open and how many representatives states get in the House of Representatives are all determined by census data, so we will be ready to help our citizens understand the process and get their forms filled out, whether online, over the phone or on paper.”

Inaccurate population counts can lead to inadequate funding for necessary services. According to Flo Gutierrez from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the 2010 census undercounted children under five years old by 10%, which directly lead to funding cuts for nutrition, education and social support services for these children.

In addition to making focused efforts to reach the undercounted—groups such as African Americans, Hispanic/Latinx, immigrants, and the very young—this year’s census will also focus on possible technical challenges. For the first time, the U.S. Census Bureau is trying to collect the majority of its data online. This will likely raise questions with

citizens about Internet access, as well as data security.

“We want to make sure people understand that filling out the census is a safe process that will benefit our community,” said Levin. “That’s why we’re making sure folks have access to accurate information at each of our branches, as well as on our website. It only comes around once every

10 years, so we don’t want to miss our chance to be counted.”

Comprehensive Census 2020 information can be found at [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov) and [www.heightslibrary.org](http://www.heightslibrary.org).

*Sheryl Banks is the communications manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.*

What’s going on at your library?

**Coventry Village Library**  
1925 Coventry Road, 216-321-3400

Thursday, Feb. 13, 7 p.m.  
*Step Out of Time: Yoga for Neck & Shoulders with Laura Santoro.* Learn simple yoga moves to relieve pain and stress in your neck and shoulders. This class is appropriate for all abilities and can be done from a chair.

**Lee Road Library**  
2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Sunday, Feb. 9, 2 p.m.  
*Sherlock Holmes Meets the Bully of Baker Street.* Join the world’s greatest detective as he uses his remarkable observation and deduction skills to confront his most sensational mystery. Who is the Bully of Baker Street? An intrepid band of actors from Great Lakes Theater will use humor, logic and song to perform this original tale. For

children in grades one through six.

**Noble Neighborhood Library**  
2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Wednesday, Feb. 5, 3:30 p.m.  
*Children’s African American Read In.* At this special event, volunteers from the community will read children’s books featuring African American characters and authors. Join us for an open hour of literacy, socializing and sharing.

**University Heights Library**  
13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 7 p.m.  
*Nailed It! Adult Edition.* Inspired by the hit Netflix show “Nailed It!” amateur decorators are invited to try their hand at making beautiful cupcakes and cake pops. Can you recreate a Pinterest-worthy confection before time runs out? Registration begins Feb. 4.

### Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 16, 2019

Board members present were President Chris Mentrek, Vice President James Roosa, Dana Fluellen, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto and Vikas Turakhia. Suzann Moskowitz was absent.

**Financial report**

The board reviewed and accepted the November financial statement. Total cash balance across the operating accounts, Bauer Fund accounts, and investment accounts at the end of September was \$16,084,034.59. In separate resolutions, the board approved the 2020 permanent appropriation; property, liability and cyber insurance; authorization to request tax advances; staff dental insurance renewal; and staff long-term disability renewal insurance.

**Strategic plan FY 2020–22**

Strategic focus areas approved by the board are:

- Foster diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Seek opportunities to promote an environment of safety and security for the community.
- Be proactive in facilitating communication, and be a bridge-builder for community concerns.
- Be a bedrock for community workforce development.

**Consultation services**

The board approved two consulting contracts. One is with JMC Consultants (not to exceed \$15,000) for budget development and proposal writing for building renovations, as well as construction of a new playground in Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park. The second is with Compass Consulting (not to exceed \$30,600), a local minority-owned business, to assist with a diversity audit to assess the Heights Libraries organization in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**LEWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER CLEVELAND**

**“The 1619 Project”**

On Sept. 30, the Adult Services Department hosted more than 90 people for a discussion on slavery in America prompted by the “The 1619 Project” published in *The New York Times Magazine*. Seventy-eight people attended a follow-up discussion held Nov. 18. A third discussion will be held Jan. 27.

**Circulation milestone**

Heights Libraries will exceed two million item circulations sometime during the month of December. This threshold has never before been crossed. Some of these circulations are the result of automatic renewals for customers who keep their materials beyond the borrowing period as part of the fine-free policy. About 9 percent of circulation is the result of digital material borrowing, which is steadily growing. Participating in the Clevnet Consortium enables Heights Libraries users to borrow from the 12-county area, and for others in that area to borrow from Heights Libraries.

**New electronic newsletter**

The communications team, with input from the Youth Services Department, began work on a new electronic newsletter, “Heights Little Learners,” aimed at caregivers of children 6 and younger. They also plan to create one just for adults.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy.

Expanded reports are available online at [www.heightsobserver.org](http://www.heightsobserver.org).

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# New CH bakery is 'boujie'

Robert Brown

“Luxurious in lifestyle yet humble in character” is one definition of the hip term “boujie.” That is a perfect description of the new The Boujie Bakery at 1774 Lee Road in Cleveland Heights, across from Boulevard Elementary School, a couple blocks south of Mayfield Road.

Walking in the door of this rather plain-looking building, one is immediately enveloped in pink, and a little lavender, on the walls and the displays. Then, ones eyes are drawn to the beautifully decorated cupcakes and cakes.

The owner, artist and lead baker at Boujie is Autumn Oliver, a 23-year-old Heights High graduate, who returned to Cleveland Heights to open the bakery in October 2019, after studying business at the University of Cincinnati.

Oliver first learned her baking and cake-decorating skills by working with her mother, Kim Henderson, who operated BabyCakes on Taylor Road for 10 years. Henderson now works with her daughter at The Boujie Bakery.

What she loves most about the bakery, Oliver said, is “seeing customers enjoying what I’ve made.” With more than 7,000 Instagram followers, Oliver is no doubt feeling a lot of love.

Boujie has been featured on Fox 8’s “Kickin’ It With Kenny” segment and on WKYC.

The Boujie Bakery specializes in creating gourmet cupcakes and customized cakes for birthdays, weddings, baby showers, graduations and



Kim Henderson and Autumn Oliver of The Boujie Bakery in Cleveland Heights.

other special events. If one is in an “à la mode” mood, Boujie accommodates with a soft-serve ice cream machine that dispenses mango ice cream along with the traditional vanilla and chocolate.

Cupcake flavors include snickerdoodle, strawberry crunch, wedding cake, cookies ‘n creme, marble, banana nut, green tea, ice cream sundae, chocolate chip cookie dough, birthday cake, chocolate, and pink champagne.

The Boujie Bakery (216-400-7277, [www.theboujiekakery.com](http://www.theboujiekakery.com)) is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, noon to 8 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

*Robert Brown is a city planner with 40 years of experience, including nine years as Cleveland’s city planning director. A Cleveland Heights resident for more than 40 years, he is president of the FutureHeights Board of Directors.*

# Heights business anniversaries

**The Stone Oven Bakery & Café** has just turned 25. Owners Jon Emerman and Tatyana Rehn opened the doors of their popular meeting place on Jan. 25, 1995, in the former Society Bank branch at the corner of Meadowbrook and Lee roads. Several years later, they bought the building at the current location, 2267 Lee Road, and also opened a second loca-

tion at Eton Chagrin Boulevard in Woodmere.

**Reflections Interior Design**, at 12423 Cedar Road in the Cedar Fairmount Business District, marked its 10th anniversary under the ownership of Marissa Matiyasic with an open house on Jan. 17. Matiyasic is an NCIDQ-certified designer (National Council for Interior Design Qualification).

# Compost service expands

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

It happens to most of us—forgetting that container of leftovers at the back of the fridge until it’s too late. Finding mixed greens wilted and slimy, or the remains of another partially eaten sandwich is . . . well, yucky.

Food waste may not seem like a huge deal but, according to scientists, once it’s in a landfill all those scraps release dangerous methane gases into the atmosphere. In fact, if global food waste were its own country, it would be the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases on earth, after the United States and China.

What to do? Backyard composting is great in theory, but actually pretty difficult. City ordinances require that compost bins be located a specific distance from structures and property boundaries, making placement a hassle. Furthermore, meat and dairy products can attract vermin, other animals and worms.

Enter Rust Belt Riders (RBR), a five-year-old organization dedicated to reducing food waste and promoting community gardens. “Feed people, not landfills,” RBR says. For the past several years, the organization has conducted a successful program to collect and compost food waste from restaurants and cafes. RBR added a household drop-off program in Shaker Heights, Tremont, Lakewood and downtown Cleveland.

RBR is currently launching a household pick-up program in Cleveland Heights, Univer-

sity Heights, Shaker Heights, Beachwood, South Euclid, and the Larchmere-Buckeye neighborhood. For \$30 per month, RBR will deliver a lined, five-gallon bin to homes, which can be filled with everything—fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells and coffee grounds, meat, dairy products, and small bones.

Because this waste will be composted on a large scale, RBR is able to accept items that one wouldn’t put in a backyard compost heap, including those labeled as BPI-certified compostable, such as utensils and paper cups.

Residents can place their full bin on their porch or doorstep on Wednesday, when it will be picked up and replaced with a clean bin. In addition to composting services, subscribers receive 10% discounts on all tilth (probiotic/nutrient) soil products and access to educational workshops.

Dan Brown, RBR’s co-founder, said, “This is how an individual who can’t afford a Tesla or solar panels on their house can make a difference.” He and his colleague, Mitchell Robinson, are offering readers of the *Heights Observer* a 10% discount for the first three months if they sign up for an annual or semi-annual plan. For more information and to sign up, go to [www.rustbeltriders.com](http://www.rustbeltriders.com). Choose a plan under the Services tab, and use the coupon code HeightsObserver2020.

*Krissy Dietrich Gallagher, a longtime CH resident, is excited to start RBR’s at-home composting service.*

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# Celebrate Heights Arts' 20th and Beethoven's 250th

Lauren Freeman

Heights Arts continues its yearlong 20th-anniversary celebration with a month of events showcasing the wonderful talent of local artists, musicians and poets. The ambitious schedule features concerts, poetry readings and visual art exhibitions.

On Feb. 13 at 7 p.m., Heights Arts and Cleveland Heights Poet Laureate Damien McClendon collaborate to present *Ekphrastic: Artists Speak + Poets Respond*, an event for art enthusiasts and poetry lovers alike. Artists from the current *Point-Line-Pattern-Plane* exhibition will speak about the inspiration and process behind the creation of their work. Poets Damien McClendon, Ray McNiece, John Burroughs and Carson Evans will join the artists to recite original poems inspired by pieces in the show. Cleveland is home to a bustling community of authors and poets who garner regional and national recognition, and Heights Arts *Ekphrastic* series provides a unique opportunity for



COURTESY HEIGHTS ARTS

A March 1 concert will feature music by Beethoven.

these talented writers to express their work.

Heights Arts has a busy concert season, featuring free gallery concerts with local ensembles as well as its popular Close Encounters chamber music series held in interesting venues throughout Cleveland. The upcoming gallery concert on Saturday, Feb. 22, at 7 p.m., features the Shibagaki Shung Duo, with pianists Natsumi Shibagaki and

Dr. Irwin Shung. The eclectic program will feature four-hand piano works by Beethoven, Rachmaninov, Schubert and Gershwin.

On March 1, 3 p.m., at a Shaker Heights mansion, Heights Arts will present world-class musicians in performance in *Heights Arts and Beethoven Birthday Bonn-anza*, the third concert of its annual Close Encounters series. The series provides an up-close and personal experience for hearing world-class Cleveland Orchestra members perform in beautiful, intimate settings.

Isabel Trautwein, artistic director of the Close Encounters concert series, said, "You can't miss Beethoven's 250th and Heights Arts' 20th birthday concert. Richard King, our Heights neighbor and one of the top horn players in the world, performs a rarely heard horn sonata by the young Ludwig, followed by the famous Ghost-trio, named for its haunting slow movement, plus a

late work, his *Cello Sonata C-major*, with the elegant cellist Tanya Ell." Performers are Patti Wolf (University of Texas, Austin), piano; Isabel Trautwein (the Cleveland Orchestra), violin; Tanya Ell (the Cleveland Orchestra), cello; and Richard King (the Cleveland Orchestra), French horn.

"This program will illuminate Beethoven's path from gifted young composer to the rule-breaking Genius," said Trautwein, "and gives an opportunity to reflect on a true Heights community accomplishment: two decades of serving and supporting artists in our region through a vibrant nonprofit we love: Heights Arts."

For more information on Heights Arts' community programs and events, including artist calls, concert tickets, gallery performances and outreach, visit [www.heightsarts.org](http://www.heightsarts.org).

Lauren Freeman is a marketing intern at Heights Arts.

## Heights High's BOPO parents to host musical fundraiser



CARL M. JENKS

Cleveland Heights High School students perform at Severance Hall in the 2019 Reaching Heights concert.

Julie King

The parent organization for the Cleveland Heights High School Band & Orchestra (BOPO) will host a fundraiser, A Musical Feast, at Nighttown restaurant (12383 Cedar Road) on March 1, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The event will include a scrumptious brunch and an auction. It will feature live music performed by Heights High musicians alongside Cleveland Orchestra members Kathy Collins (violin), Beth Woodside (violin), and Richard Waugh (viola), and other professional musicians. There will be a special performance of the Mozart piano/wind quintet played by Cleveland Orchestra musicians who are also Heights residents: Frank Rosenwein (principal oboe), Afendi Yusef (principal clarinet), Gareth

Thomas (bassoon), Richard King (French horn), and Carolyn Gadiel Warner (piano).

In addition, violinist and Heights High alum Kelsey Ferguson, Cleveland Orchestra cellist Brian Thornton, and pianist Paul Ferguson will perform *Tango*, written by Paul Ferguson, director of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra.

All proceeds will go toward funding the Heights High Instrumental Music Department, including its annual tour.

Tickets for A Musical Feast are \$40 and are available at [www.heightsimd.org](http://www.heightsimd.org).

Julie King is a resident of Cleveland Heights, a CH-UH parent and a professional cellist.

 <p>Japanese &amp; Malaysian Cuisine 216-320-2302 1763 Coventry Road, CH <a href="http://www.pacificeastcoventry.com">www.pacificeastcoventry.com</a></p>	 <p>Casual Asian Fusion 216-320-9008 13911 Cedar Road, S. Euclid <a href="http://www.pacificgrillcedar.com">www.pacificgrillcedar.com</a></p>
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- Finding common ground, using subsidies, and common sense policy that will allow for Ohioans to have access to necessary medicine without making life altering or life-threatening decision regarding medical care because of lack of resources and funding.

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# Forest Hill Church presents annual Black History Month concert



Caleb A. Wright

Ajah Hales

*Ascension: An Evening of African-American Music* is the seventh-annual celebration of Black History Month

at Forest Hill Presbyterian Church. The event has transformed into an exciting and soul-stirring celebration that many in Cleveland Heights and its surrounding communities look forward to each year. This year's concert will be led by musical director Caleb A. Wright, who has been a member of Forest Hill Church for more than 10 years. Wright is a member of Cleveland Heights' own Wright Family Singers, a family gospel group that has performed for more than 40 years. Wright has spearheaded this annual event since 2013. This year's concert is filled with

talented musicians and amazing vocalists, such as jazz pianist Theron Brown, guitarists Joseph Rangel and Charise Grimes, percussionist Deion Williams, and saxophonist and songwriter Robin Blake and members of his band, The Robin Blake Sound Experiment. Several well-known Cleveland-area vocalists will participate in the event, including Reginald Bowens, Victoria Hubbard-Barnes, Michael Hives, Toyia Wright-Reynolds, Adrianna Miller, Le'vaughn Leath and Jaali Boyd. Wright will perform in the concert as well as musically direct the event. The evening will be hosted by Minister Shannon Garrett

Headon and narrated by poet laureate Eris J. Dyson of the LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland. Forest Hill Church is located at 3031 Monticello Blvd., Cleveland Heights. Music will begin promptly at 6:30 p.m., with a community dinner served before the concert at 5 p.m. in the fellowship hall. Those interested in a preview of the concert are invited to listen to the band and vocalists on "Live From Cleveland" with Rachel Hunt on 91.1 FM on Thursday, Feb. 20, at 9 p.m. *Ajah Hales is a member of the Forest Hill Church Black History Month Celebration Committee.*

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# Jazz and poetry return to First Baptist

G. Michael Skerritt

Jazz and poetry have a lot in common. Both art forms can be free-flowing, innovative and challenging to understand, and both are created from imaginative, spontaneous psyches. In response to many requests from last year's appreciative audience, the Music and Fine Arts ministry of the First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland is bringing back its Jazz & Poetry Night on Friday, Feb. 21, at 7:30 p.m. The evening will start with a Jazz Prelude by the Demetrius Steinmetz Jazz Ensemble, featuring Steinmetz on bass, Brian Kozak on guitar, and Eileen Burns on vocals. Steinmetz spent four years as Artist-in-Residence at the Cleveland School of the Arts and has been an instructor for the instrumental music after-school program for the 21st Century Community Learning Center. He has taught saxophone and bass at The Fine Arts Association in Willoughby and Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood. He has performed professionally in Greater Cleveland and has been recorded on Cadence Records. The Jazz Prelude will be followed by two or three poetry readers, among the 14 readers scheduled to participate in the program. Last year, poems by Marie Oliver, Langston Hughes, Drew Dellinger, Louisa May



Demetrius Steinmetz

Alcott and H. W. Longfellow, among others, as well as some original compositions, alternated with jazz interludes featuring music selections that often were related to the subject of the poetry. The evening, which is free and open to the public, will be held in Spahr Center of the First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland at 3630 Fairmount Blvd. (at Eaton Road). Refreshments will be available during the program. *G. Michael Skerritt is a retired engineer and a member of First Baptist Church. Music and theater are his avocations.*

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SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

This month would have been my father’s 99th birthday. But he didn’t quite make it. He died at the age of 68. But, you know . . . nice try.

At the time of his death, when I was 31 years younger than I am now, I told myself, “Well, he lived a good, long life.” Now I tell my younger self, “Whoa—not so fast, there. Sixty-eight is . . . young.”

My father was born in the city of Cleveland, on Columbia Road, near E.105th Street, but his family moved to Cleveland Heights when he was 3 years old, in 1924, when the population of Cleveland Heights was only about 15,000. In 1903, Cleveland Heights was incorporated as a village; the year my father was born, 1921, it was incorporated as a city.

The Budins moved into a house on Washington Boulevard, three houses behind the plot of land on which the Coventry Library was being constructed. The first Cleveland Heights library was located across the street, inside Coventry School, starting in 1911. The Coventry Library building opened in 1926, the year my father started kindergarten at Coventry.

His kindergarten teacher was Miss McClelland, who was also my kindergarten teacher there, 28 years later. Most people knew my father as Joseph. Family and close friends called him Joe. Miss McClelland, the few times I can remember my father coming into my kindergarten class, still called him Joey.

After they had lived in that house on Washington for a couple of years, my grandfather, who was always kind of restless, came home one day and announced to my grandmother that he wanted to build a new house near what is now Cedar and Taylor. My grandmother refused. She said, “I’m not moving out to the country!”

My father’s family needed to downsize during the Depression, so they moved three or four times while he lived with them, but always stayed in Cleveland Heights, and always close to Coventry Road. My father attended Coventry Elementary, Roosevelt Junior High and Heights High—except for a few weeks when he was about 16 and stole the family car and ran away to Florida. I have a Cleveland *Plain Dealer* article about that from back then. My grandmother, who spoke very little English, and didn’t speak it very well, was “quoted” as saying, “He spoke often of going to Hollywood to write music and act.” I doubt that she said that, but someone must have told the reporter something like that.

He did enjoy playing the sax. He was a member of the Heights High Marching Band and he began music

school after high school, but in the middle of his second year, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II. And rather than wait to get drafted into the Army, my father enlisted in the Navy—because, he said, he hated walking.

After the war, he didn’t go back into music. But I remember him walking around the living room and dining room playing his sax. It was an instrument that his oldest brother, who was born in 1910, had played as a kid. When my older brother went to Roosevelt Junior High, he played that sax in the school’s band. And when I went to Roosevelt, I played it in the band, too. In fact, when my daughter was about 12, she decided she wanted to learn how to play the sax, so she took some lessons, on that instrument. I still have it. I have grandchildren, you know . . .

It was convenient that my father always lived near Coventry Road, because when my parents started dating, in junior high, my mother lived on Coventry Road. She lived there until my father got stationed in San Francisco during the war and she moved out there, at 19, to marry him.

They stayed there for a few years, and my older brother was born there. But then my father’s brother, David—the one who had played that saxophone—died, six months before I was born, and when my father came home for the funeral, he decided to move the family back here. And that’s why I was born here, and why



COURTESY DAVID BUDIN

Feb. 9, 1964. I was one of 73 million people watching “Ed Sullivan” that night. My downstairs neighbors were watching Walt Disney’s “Wonderful World of Color,” but they were hearing the Beatles, from my TV.

my name is David, and why I played the sax. But it’s not why I went into music for a living.

I think I made that decision when I was in the ninth grade and my parents went out to dinner when my father turned 43, one Sunday night, leaving me home to turn the TV’s volume up as loud as I wanted, for the Beatles’ American debut, on “The Ed Sullivan Show.”

That was an event that changed the lives of everyone around my age who became a professional musician. And that’s how I remember my father’s birthday was in February.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications, the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author, and a professional musician and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop-music history.



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