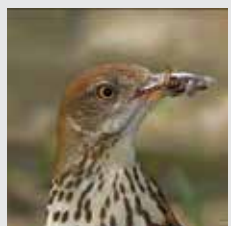


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FutureHeights
2843 Washington Blvd. #105
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118

University Square poised for rebuild

Mike Cook

University Square's long-awaited and much-needed makeover could begin as soon as this summer.

"We are on the verge of doing what once seemed impossible," University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said. "The partnership led by Kowit & Company Real Estate Group is the right local developer for the redevelopment at University Square. They share our vision of something bigger, something better, something beautiful, something worthy of this city, worthy of this community, worthy of University Heights."

In January, UH City Council approved new Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to allow the redevelopment of University Square. The redevelopment plan was made possible through coop-



A bird's-eye view of phase one of the University Square redevelopment.

eration with the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, the Cuyahoga County government, the county prosecutor's office, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County

Port Authority, and bond holders of the original 2001 University Square development.

A development agreement and

continued on page 11

Heights Tree People prepare for spring



Have trees, will plant, just ask! From left: Tadas Barkus, a friend, and Heights Tree People Margy Weinberg, Bill Hanavan, Kathy Smachlo, Laura Marks, Sue Wolpert and Elsa Johnson.

Jewel Moulthrop

Thirty-some years ago, Bill Hanavan planted a tree in his yard on Yorkshire Road, and fell in love. He couldn't stop looking at trees, buying trees, and planting trees. In Kalamazoo, Mich., where Bill and Pat Hanavan raised their two daughters, their yard became a

veritable forest. Retirement and grandchildren brought the Hanavans back to Cleveland Heights, where Bill still looks at, buys, and plants trees—free of charge—for anyone who wants one.

A notice in Nextdoor, the social networking service for neighborhoods, elicited some interest,

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Cedar Lee district welcomes CIFF East

Kristen Romito

The 44th Cleveland International Film Festival (CIFF) will return to its Heights roots in April 2020.

With generous support from PNC Bank, CIFF East will take place at the Cedar Lee Theatre the second weekend of the festival, starting on the evening of Friday, April 3, followed by two full days of programming on Saturday, April 4, and Sunday, April 5. There will be 18 screenings at the Cedar Lee throughout the weekend, comprising features, documentaries, shorts and family films.

Cedar Lee Theatre owner Jonathan Forman founded CIFF, the annual festival of films from around the world, in 1977. That year, the festival screened eight films over eight weeks at the Cedar Lee Theatre.

For CIFF East screening information, visit www.clevelandfilm.org. Program guides can be found at the Cedar Lee Theatre, Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library branches, and at Lee Road merchants.

FutureHeights, Cleveland Heights' community development corporation, is a sponsor of CIFF, and FutureHeights members can receive a \$1 discount off ticket prices by using a special discount code. Members should contact FutureHeights at 216-320-1423 or info@futureheights.org to receive the code.

During CIFF East, the city of Cleveland Heights will offer free 24-hour parking at all metered spots on

continued on page 12

Seeking participants and hosts for dinners about race

Joel Moss

On Saturday, April 25, and Sunday, April 26, a special discussion will be taking place around dinner tables in Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

As part of the advance planning for "Heights Dinners: Conversations About Race," organizers are currently seeking participants—hosts, facilitators and guests—for the dinners, which will be held in private homes and other locations in the two cities.



At each dinner, a host, a trained facilitator, and up to eight guests will gather for a shared meal and guided conversation.

Several community groups are coordinating the dinners: Heights Community Congress (HCC), Fu-

tureHeights, Reaching Heights, Heights Libraries, Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School Districts, and Home Repair Resource Center.

"Our goal is to raise awareness of our communities' challenges with race, racism and equity, and to begin generating ideas for positive change while building community," said Eric Dillenbeck, executive director of HCC, the lead organizer of the event. "We recognize a need to come together

continued on page 9

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.

HEIGHTS OBSERVER

The *Heights Observer* is a citizen-based news source published monthly by FutureHeights, a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization dedicated to civic engagement and quality of life.
2843 Washington Blvd. #105,
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118
216-320-1423
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DISTRIBUTION
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The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the *Heights Observer*, its publisher and staff, or of FutureHeights, its staff and board of directors.

Seed funding for the *Heights Observer* generously provided by the Cyrus Eaton Foundation, the Dominion Foundation, and the Katherine and Lee Chilcote Foundation. Powered by the 9th Estate.

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 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.

Articles to be considered for the April issue must be submitted by March 16. 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.

Fairmount-Taylor business to close; another to move

To the Editor:

So long, farewell, *auf wiedersehen* to you!

After nearly 40 years as a children's specialty retailer—25 of them in Cleveland Heights—the time has come to say goodbye. Pinwheel Kids, at 3469 Fairmount Blvd. will close at the end of March so I can kick off my retirement.

I feel lucky to have called Cleveland Heights my second home for over two decades. Being on "main street" in this vibrant neighborhood has been so gratifying. The loyalty and enthusiasm of the Cleveland Heights community for its small businesses is exceptional. Few things are more fun than the energy generated when friends run into friends at the store.

Many thanks to everyone who appreciated our merchandise and who delighted in discovering the perfect gift for a little friend.

Happily, a collection of favorite Pinwheel items will available at Jubilee! Gifts in the Heights at its new location in the loft at Eastwood Furniture, at the corner of Fairmount and Taylor.

Please stop in to say goodbye and enjoy bargain shopping until March 28.

It's been a blast.

Janet Nelson
Pinwheel Kids owner
(Janet Nelson has owned Pinwheel Kids since 2013. Prior to that, she was the manager/buyer for Sunbeam-a Shop for Children, for 33 years.)

FH supports Integrity Realty's Euclid Heights Blvd. project

To the Editor:

The following letter was sent to members of the CH Board of Zoning Appeals on Feb. 19:

Dear Members of the CH Board of Zoning Appeals,

FutureHeights has reviewed the proposed Integrity Realty Group project at 2235 Overlook Road and 2345-61 Euclid Heights Blvd., and offers its support of the developer's request for variances to Code Sections 1123.08, 1161.11, and 1123.07.

We are pleased that Integrity plans to retain the historic buildings and stone wall on the site. We are also pleased with the developer's efforts to address and incorporate neighboring property owners' concerns into the plans. We believe the project respects the scale of the adjacent apartment and carriage house buildings, and that the reductions in parking, paving, and building distances will not prevent this project from benefitting the neighborhood and community.

We are also pleased that Integrity plans to use high-quality materials in construction of the new buildings and that the project will achieve a LEED Silver status. In reviewing the project, FutureHeights' Planning & Development Committee suggested that Integrity consider installing charging stations for electric vehicles and a bicycle-repair station.

We know that some residents may be concerned about the use of the term "boarding house" to describe this project, which is merely a term in the city's zoning code to describe properties in which there are more than three unrelated people living together. The density and configuration of the units are in line with current trends for co-housing options; and, moreover, the units could easily be converted to standard apartments in the future should the need arise.

This high-quality project will enable the city to attract new residents by increasing housing options. It will enhance the reputation of the city and appropriately increase density to support economic activity in our business districts.

Sincerely,

Deanna Bremer Fisher, FutureHeights executive director
Robert Brown, president of the FutureHeights Board of Directors

School board reaches deep into the family budget

To the Editor:

Which pocket will the money come from? For a family of two adults and two children, with a house valued at \$150,000 and income of \$75,000, the school board's tax increase of \$414 will take a big chunk out of their disposable income.


I went to Taxformcalculator.com and to the liberal Economic Policy Institute for some estimates of a family budget in Cleveland Heights:

- Take-home pay after a 10-percent 401(k) contribution and all taxes: \$58,560.
- Property tax: \$6,114
- Housing: \$9,239
- Food: \$9,077
- Transportation: \$13,047
- Health care: \$10,476
- Necessities: \$7,389 (including apparel; personal care; household supplies, including furnishings and equipment, household operations, housekeeping supplies, and telephone services; reading materials, and school supplies.)

That leaves \$3,218 in disposable income for college savings and quality-of-life expenses, such as entertainment, an occasional restaurant meal, tutors, dance/piano lessons, gifts, charity, and a family vacation.

What should this family give up so that a few dozen CH-UH administrators can take in annual salary and benefits in excess of \$150,000?

Robert Shwab
Cleveland Heights



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An unexpectedly timely look at filling CH council vacancies



HEIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

This column is about how Cleveland Heights needs to revise its process for filling unexpected vacancies on CH City Council. Shortly after finishing it, we learned that such a vacancy may arise soon.

We received a tip that Council Member Melissa Yasinow is planning to move out of the community. As of Feb. 25, her Washington Boulevard house was showcased on real-estate website Zillow with a notation that it was scheduled to go on the market Feb. 27. Meanwhile, the Chagrin Falls address that she and her husband supposedly contracted to buy on Dec. 10, with a March 3 closing date, is no longer listed by Zillow as being on the market.

When we contacted her directly, Yasinow said she was upset about being confronted with the information, but she would not directly confirm nor deny it.

As long as she actually resides in Cleveland Heights, Yasinow can legally retain her council seat. The city charter does not specify how far ahead council members must resign, or inform council of an upcoming resignation, if they plan to leave the city; but real estate

transactions are difficult to keep secret.

Meanwhile, just a month ago, University Heights was working to fill a vacancy on its council. Per the University Heights City Charter, that process was required to be completed within 30 days. Cleveland Heights council members, on the other hand, rejected a 90-day time limit for filling council vacancies proposed by that city's Charter Review Commission (CRC), in the First Amended Charter presented to council in February 2019.

The CRC had exhaustively discussed the council-appointment process. As commission members knew, many citizens consider this practice undemocratic and subject to gaming. It gives appointed council members the advantage of incumbency if they subsequently run for election; it allows council to choose friends or political allies over better-qualified applicants; and it can be subject to other types of manipulation, such as timing resignations to coincide with certain dates on the political calendar.

The proposed consequence for failing to meet the 90-day limit was this: The vacancy would be filled by the voters at the next primary or general election scheduled at least 120 days after the missed deadline. The CRC calculated that 120 days would allow candidates time to circulate petitions and meet Board of Elections filing requirements.

CH City Council had every right to dismiss one of the few substantive changes to the 1921 Cleveland Heights

City Charter proposed by the CRC. But we find their stated rationale, that 90 days are insufficient, unconvincing. Shaker Heights, Lakewood and Euclid have 60-day limits; Brunswick, Mentor and University Heights councils are given 30 days. The original Cleveland Heights charter places no time limit on filling vacancies by appointment. Our council preferred that.

We are tired of our city's inability to efficiently complete tasks that other communities accomplish with ease—and we have plenty of company. That fatigue could be viewed as a major factor in November's 64-percent "yes" vote to change CH's form of government from council/manager to mayor/council. (Note: The Issue 26 ballot initiative could not address council vacancies or other issues due to a state rule that limits citizen ballot initiatives to a single subject.)

What happens in other cities if council fails to fill a vacancy within the specified time frame? Somebody else chooses the new member. In the Cleveland Heights CRC's proposal, it would have been the voters. In many other city charters, including that of University Heights, the mayor makes the appointment if council misses its deadline. But the threat of someone else choosing seems to impel councils to finish on time. Amazing.

The recent appointment process in University Heights worked as follows: After Mark Wiseman resigned on Jan. 13, council called for applications by

Jan. 24, and 26 residents applied. In executive session on Jan. 29, the six sitting council members selected five finalists. On Feb. 4 they interviewed each finalist for 20 minutes. On Feb. 8, Cleveland.com reported that Sandra Berry, a longtime resident of the Cedar-Taylor neighborhood, had been chosen. Berry was sworn in on Feb. 12—29 days after Wiseman vacated the seat. Congratulations to Ms. Berry—and also to University Heights City Council on its timely completion of a relatively straightforward, if not always easy, task.

Cleveland Heights City Council's rejection of a firm time frame for appointments is symptomatic of its resistance to change. Now we have a partially reconstituted council, with new leadership. Perhaps it will be willing to take a fresh look at some of the prerogatives and practices—in a word, the culture—handed down over the past 100 years.

As for Yasinow, if indeed she intends to move out of Cleveland Heights, she should resign immediately, and allow the six remaining council members to get on with the business of replacing her—we hope without delay.

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Rautenberg served on the Cleveland Heights Charter Review Commission 2018–19. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.



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In support of our public schools

To the Editor:

I am a homeowner, mother and teacher living and working in Cleveland Heights. Living here was a no-brainer for me; [it's] an inclusive, walkable, artistic community with historic homes, independent businesses and access to all of Cleveland's cultural assets. When I was lucky enough to land a student-teaching placement at Noble Elementary School in my 20s, I knew this was where I wanted to put down roots.

Over the next decade I taught at both private and public schools before landing my dream job, teaching studio art at Heights High.

The fall after my daughter was born, my husband and I brought her along as we toured the brand-new Heights High. I will never forget walking those hallways as my husband whispered to the baby girl he wore on his chest, "This is going to be your school."

My family decided to live here for many reasons; but none are as important as my belief in our strong public schools. I walk into my classroom each day with a single goal: to be worthy of the level of education and sense of community that I want my own child to experience. I want her to have access to all the amazing programming that drew me to the Heights; rigorous academics, and music and arts that are unsurpassed.

I will always support my schools and I urge you to do the same for our students and the future of our community.

Laura Skehan
Cleveland Heights

The value of teachers' work



A TEACHER'S VOICE

Ari Klein

The complexity of teaching in public schools today is difficult to explain to retired colleagues or friends who are not in public systems. Much has changed in the last 30 years.

Today's teachers have so much to learn beyond curriculum and teaching techniques. When I began my career, I was given a textbook and a course of study as my guides. Now there are teaching materials and supports, pacing guides, programs for attendance, grading, and parent contact logs, among many other teaching and classroom management tools.

There are board policies; state and federal laws regarding students with disabilities; a student code of conduct, with its own implementation guidelines; and a 189-page employee code of conduct that we are responsible for understanding.

With today's accountability standards, teachers must be aware of every student who has documentation of his or her specific needs. Learning how to access and fill out the proper forms is also always changing, and time consuming.

There are procedures for everything—from a level 1 lockdown to any sort of emergency you can think of. Teachers must know which words are acceptable when addressing students and which to avoid using, which may not always be obvious. Teachers must use student data to analyze, prioritize and individualize instruction. The list goes on and on. Any one of these items could take a long time to master.

On top of all this, teachers are expected to motivate students to be engaged in their coursework.

Moreover, we are all required to continue taking graduate-level courses and to participate in professional development.

What is the economic value of our teachers?

A few years ago, I heard that, in an affluent Cleveland suburb, a school board member stated during contract negotiations that teachers needn't be paid salaries that would enable them to afford to live in the community in which they teach. In CH-UH, I have heard anti-public-school residents say that teacher salaries should reflect the income level of the residents in the district.

If this were policy, a third-grade teacher at Gearity elementary school in University Heights would make more than a third-grade teacher at Fairfax elementary in Cleveland Heights—because the median income in University Heights is higher. Obviously, this makes no sense.

There is a market rate for teaching in our region, and salaries in CH-UH fall into that range—not the highest and not the lowest. Our salaries depend on our licenses, skills, and experience. There is also a predictable set of salary steps established for our teachers and support staff. Wild fluctuations from year to year would result in teachers and staff going elsewhere.

The same is true for our health care benefits. We have the benefits that all working people deserve in order to attract and retain the best possible people to work in our district. This is what we, the community, pay for. We want the best possible people to work and stay in CH-UH. It is the only way to be competitive in a tight labor market.

Working in public schools is challenging and demanding. There is much to know, and the requisite knowledge is constantly changing. Maintaining competitive benefits and pay is essential to the health of the school system.

Investing in our schools equates with an investment in the value of our community. No one wants to pay more in taxes, but we have little choice until there are major changes at the state and federal level to support public schools.

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

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This is no time for despair



THE COMMON
GOOD

Susie Kaeser

I'm a hopeful person. I believe deeply in democracy, and I am devoted to the contribution our public institutions, especially our public schools, make to society and human advancement. But lately I've felt a lot more despair than hope.

When it comes to lawmaking, Ohio legislators seem to prefer sneaking their pet ideas into closed-door budget negotiations. When it comes to education, the legislature has imposed policy after policy focused more on destroying our public schools than elevating them. The policies advance a narrative of failure, not success, and justify disinvestment and flight rather than support and participation.

This bleak landscape makes me weary.

On Feb. 10, State Rep. John Patterson, a four-term Democrat from Ashtabula, spoke at a public forum at Heights High about bi-partisan legislation that he and his best friend, Lima Republican State Rep. Bob Cupp, have worked on for more than two years, to "get right" Ohio's system for funding public schools.

I am grateful to Patterson for restoring both my confidence in elected officials and my hope that the legislative process can advance public policy that is informed by facts and serves the common good. As a policy wonk, I'm interested both in process and substance. This effort hit the target on both. I came away with a flicker of hope that we might even get a new funding system for public education that is adequate and equitable.

Bill Phillis, Ohio's leading advocate for school-funding reform, set the stage. He offered the long view of the funding problem and the legislature's constitutional obligation to fund a public system, not private education. To make the funding system constitutional, it must increase the state's investment in the public system and reduce school districts' reliance on local property taxes. He was adamant that this is the moment to solve the problem, and that House Bill 305, the

Cupp-Patterson proposal, is the solution we need.

Moving back and forth across the stage, Patterson, a retired high-school teacher, described the contents of the bill and the process used to develop each component. He stopped frequently to inquire, "Are you with me?" The legislation would establish the amount of money that should be invested in the education of every public-school student, and the formula for distributing state funds to local districts.

Patterson explained that the working group that developed the proposal included practitioners and finance experts. They addressed several key variables, including the actual cost of providing a quality education and operating a school district; the unique needs, special costs, and circumstances of the state's 612 school districts; and a fair assessment of the capacity of each community to share in funding its public schools. The proposal includes a basic funding amount plus multiple add-ons for special costs.

Drafters of the plan wanted to respect the roles of local boards of education, which will decide how to spend the funding, and the interests of the taxpayers, who will pay for it all. It directly addresses over-reliance on property taxes, something that harms every community.

The presentation detailed a careful, well-informed process that respected information, reality and complexity, and it was not sugar coated. Implementing the proposal will be costly, and it will be a challenge to build the necessary political will. The proposal was convincing and sound. There was no wringing of hands or partisan blaming. The ultimate solution resides with us, and our job is to press for adoption.

Despair will not get us a better funding system. Thanks to leadership by a likable, down-to-earth legislator who is not deterred by the noise around him, we have a solid proposal on the table. This is no time for despair and the disengagement it produces.

Good legislators need engaged constituents and advocates. That's us.

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.

Vote 'no' to keep the Heights affordable

To the Editor:

My family has been in the Heights for four generations. Both my husband and I are alumni. I have volunteered as a tutor in the elementary schools, and was campaign treasurer for two former school board members. That said, I am writing to ask people to vote "no" on the operating levy.

Understanding our community is primarily residential, we still have had an unprecedented number of levies and increases in spending in recent years—despite large decreases in school enrollment. Roughly 40 percent of our school-aged children opt out of the public schools, yet our spending is amongst the highest in Ohio. I know there have been calls for the district to have a State Performance Audit to address concerns, and I echo this sentiment.

There has been a lack of transparency. The refusal to allow any questions at the school levy presentation, as well as neglecting to answer the majority of submitted written questions even one month later, is cause for concern.

On Jan. 31, the [state] legislature voted to provide an additional \$10 million in funding while reworking the EdChoice funding formula for the April 1 deadline.

Burdening taxpayers with an \$8.8-million permanent levy for a short-term budget problem, as well as many outstanding questions, requires a "no" vote on Issue 26.

Susan Jhirad
Cleveland Heights

City councils should consider impact of school levy

To the Editor:

If passed, the proposed school levy increase would give the Heights the highest property tax rate in Ohio. That is quite a severe burden when one considers the large number of low- and middle-income taxpayers here. Has any organization or elected leader in the Heights studied the impact on the community? How will this affect population, tax delinquencies, vacancies, home ownership, the quality of housing, and local businesses? The long-term trend of all of these is negative.

Where are our city councils? Has

any city found success in being #1 for property tax rates? The school board, [teachers] union, and all others supporting this levy are not concerned with these questions.

The cities [of Cleveland Heights and University Heights] should be considering the needs and future of the wider community. Instead of wasting money on college loan and municipal broadband studies, the cities should commission an economic impact study on this school levy.

One day our cities will need to come to taxpayers for additional funds to support some vital improvement or services, but we will be tapped out by the school district.

Bonnie Dolezal
Cleveland Heights

School spending, not vouchers, is the problem

To the Editor:

On March 17, please vote "No" on Issue 26. The problem is school spending, not school vouchers, and here's why: Cleveland Heights already owns the title of highest-tax-burden city in the state of Ohio. We currently give more money to the schools than almost any other school district in Ohio—and we are not wealthy!

This monstrous school levy adds another \$415 to the property tax bill of a \$150,000 house. This is not sustainable.

And let me say something about Cleveland Heights and why this is so morally wrong: We are an aging city located next to Cleveland and East Cleveland. Our houses are all 100 years old and new families are not moving into our community. We have had a slow but steady decline in population over the past 15 years, and this trend is not going to reverse. This is why it is so morally wrong to burden the taxpayers yet again with more money—that we do not have. The right thing to do for the school system would be to tighten its own belt and control its own outrageous spending!

It is not a voucher problem, it is a spending problem. The city of Cleveland Heights no longer has the income base to sustain yet another school levy. For the sake of the community, please Vote "No" on Issue 26.

Joe Miller
Cleveland Heights

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Issue 26 is symptom of larger problem

Dan McNeil

Voting against Issue 26 doesn't mean that we don't support our schools, nor that we don't love our community. Voting against Issue 26 at this time will help ensure a bright future for the Heights. The CH-UH Board of Education (BOE) prefers to ask for more money before making a substantial effort to cut expenses. Furthermore, the state of Ohio has yet to determine the future of the voucher program for 2020, and to request a tax increase at this time is entirely premature.

The BOE threatens that vouchers are robbing the public system to pay for the various school alternatives. The reality is that the impact of vouchers is minimal compared to poor budgeting and overspending by the BOE. [In its] own publications, the BOE cites it has cut \$750,000 from its annual budget. Do the math: this is 0.5 percent of the budget—one half of one percent! Not a very earnest reduction in spending.

The district continues to overspend on services and an expensive teachers' union with heavy contracts, benefits and pension plans. The BOE needs to reconsider heavy administrative costs and overpriced services, consolidate elementary schools, sell assets, and re-negotiate benefit packages. And, when necessary, jobs must relocate—the same efforts that individuals make when faced with a budget challenge. Personally, I've changed jobs four times in nine years due to downsizing—it's a fact in America; why should a teachers union be exempt?

The CH-UH BOE perpetuates an unsustainable, failed strategy of raising taxes. Our community has proven its support of our schools by approving 10 school levies in the past 19 years—tax levies that never expire. If approved, Issue 26, combined with the other 10 levies, [will] cost homeowners \$5,100 per \$100,000 of property value. That's an impactful amount of money to every

homeowner in the Heights.

Why do we choose to live in the Heights? Because of unique homes at an affordable price that lie along tree-lined streets of safe, walkable neighborhoods. Another tax increase will make Cleveland Heights the highest-taxed city in Ohio, and discourage new arrivals while driving current residents out of their homes. Without clarity on the state's position on vouchers, approval of Issue 26 would be premature. Voting "no" on Issue 26 encourages the BOE to remain within its budget and ensures the future vibrancy of our unique community.

Dan McNeil is a 25-year resident of Cleveland Heights, who has lived at four different addresses. He is a community volunteer, married father of two, works in healthcare, and is apolitical.

School district comparisons should consider many factors

To the Editor:

Attorney Geoff Johnson's letter [in the January issue of the *Heights Observer*] about excessive educational costs in Cleveland Heights is neither informative nor convincing. He needs to do his homework. He compared the total [district] budget of [CH-UH] to other cities, [and] fails to consider the many other factors he needs to consider in order to understand why costs are different from one city to another.

To name a few . . . how about per pupil cost? How about population characteristics? How about teacher pay?

There are probably a lot of things that can be improved in every school system, but comparing costs doesn't help get to the answers nor [to] an understanding.

Gerald Seidel
Cleveland Heights

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Smarter state policy would bring equality in education and taxation

Greg Donley

Here comes another school levy. Here come the same letters and arguments we've heard over the past 20 or 30 years. And here comes the aftermath of the vote, with a small majority of voters relieved, and a large minority discouraged but determined to try again. This same drama has played out over and over for decades, with the local actors stuck playing roles defined by a tired old script. What would it take to change this predictable and unsatisfying plot?

Let's set aside for the moment the effect of school vouchers siphoning off local school funding, or whether we think teachers and administrators are overpaid. Even without those factors, there is a kind of triple whammy with taxes and schools in a place like Cleveland Heights:

One, for any given amount the CH-UH district spends per student, that given amount will be a higher percentage of property value (thus a higher tax rate) compared to the Solons and Beachwoods of the world, because the average home in CH-UH costs less and thus is a shallower well for revenue generation. Two, the student body is more expensive to educate than average, with the most successful college-bound students getting many of the same

kinds of advanced offerings as those in Beachwood and Solon, but with many more disadvantaged and special-needs students requiring higher spending. Three, the higher proportion of disadvantaged and special-needs students ends up pulling down the district's average scores on standard tests. These are effects of the district serving a community with a much broader economic range than the districts that cruise to "A's" on state report cards.

One suspects that a big reason the state's mode of funding local schools through local property taxes remains substantially unchanged, despite being declared unconstitutional decades ago, is that the legislators who dominate Ohio politics understand that older urban and inner-suburban places have long borne a disproportionate financial burden because of the funding model, and why would people representing exurban areas willingly give up a competitive economic advantage?

That said, one can question the wisdom of any state in encouraging its communities to cannibalize one another, rather than working together toward common statewide goals. That's why it is so heartening to hear Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder's recent comments about rethinking Ohio's funding model.

Maybe it's time to get away from Ohio's long tradition of communities using their local schools to compete against one another. Instead, commit to the notion that if you go to public school anywhere in Ohio, you're going to graduate with a strong set of skills and knowledge that prepare you to contribute to our state's economy and civic life.

This would not mean eliminating the concept of the power of competition—not at all. Rather, we re-scale competition so what we're talking about is how Ohio can best compete against other states, rather than how advantaged Ohioans can hold down disadvantaged Ohioans.

So, eliminate the local property taxes that go to local schools. Instead, institute a flat, state-level property tax of maybe 2 percent on all property, private and commercial, and use that to fund all Ohio schools. This would provide significant tax relief to the communities that have been paying a disproportionate share of their own wealth toward the cost of educating Ohio's students. Continue standardized testing, using it not to pit communities against each other, but to identify which students need what help in which areas and help them: supplemental resources targeted to the need at the individual student level. We

need every player on this team to be fit and capable.

A shift to equitable state-level funding could well mean that local communities would look at their local schools less as a means of competing for residents against other towns, and more as a point of state pride, and that's the idea: a diploma from any Ohio high school should mean the same, good thing.

Let schools specialize a bit in the subject matter and learning styles they emphasize, and let students choose among local options.

For parents who, for whatever reason, feel that a particular child may not thrive in the public system, we have a wide variety of fine private options, especially in and around the cities. Meanwhile, for most Ohioans, knowing that the public system will do the job well, and will be funded equitably at the state level, would be a revolutionary and life-changing improvement—for people individually and for our state's long-term competitive prospects.

[Editor's note: A full-length version of this opinion can be read at www.heightsobserver.org. This version was edited for print.]

Greg Donley is a longtime Cleveland Heights resident, and a volunteer editor and contributor to the Heights Observer.

Top of the Hill is a cautionary tale for future development in CH

Joan Mallick

The city of Cleveland Heights passed an ordinance in December 2018 approving the purchase of a property on Euclid Heights Boulevard, to be added to the Top of the Hill (TOH) site. The city authorized Liberty Development—a partner of Flaherty & Collins (F&C), the main TOH developer—to buy the property from the owners, then turn it over to F&C, who would then sell it to the city for no more than the property's purchase price, plus closing and due diligence fees.

The maximum amount the city authorized Liberty to pay for the property—known as the "Green House"—was \$395,000. The actual total came to about \$311,000 (the purchase price, plus closing and due diligence fees), yet the city paid \$369,000. The city has just, as of mid-February, provided public records, requested in November 2019, that explain the difference in the purchase price and the price it paid.

By the time CH City Council authorized the purchase in December 2018, Liberty Development was 215 days into a contract with the original owners to purchase the property for \$310,000. Liberty apparently put down \$10,000 earnest money, which it lost because the contract allowed only 150 days before that money was forfeited.

Liberty then had to pay an additional \$5,000 to the owners to extend the contract. Thus, \$15,000 was added to the purchase price quoted to the city. There is no explanation of why there was a more than five-month lapse between when Liberty signed the contract and the city passed the ordinance approving the property's purchase.

Liberty never bought the property. F&C bought it, but not until July 2019—another seven-month delay. This apparently encouraged Liberty to charge a \$24,800 administrative fee, probably for the hassle of managing the contract for 14 months. But the ordinance did not authorize administrative charges. F&C added more charges, including closing and due diligence fees of about \$1,100, and legal fees of \$18,000. The original development agreement stated that F&C would pay all legal fees associated with the project. There was nothing in the amendment authorizing legal-fee payment.

City representatives are not worried about the extra charges for the property. They say that the property's purchase was part of a \$1.85-million pledge the city made to the project. The city's position is that it was obligated to give the full \$395,000 that council authorized for the purchase, in order to honor its pledge. So, whether the city overpaid for the property or

not, F&C would have received that amount of money. This became a convenient way for the city to avoid having to closely scrutinize the invoice and avoid a potential confrontation with the developer.

The city believes TOH is a unique project, and therefore (a) exceptions are allowable and, (b) none of the irregularities in its financial transactions are likely to occur in other city financial dealings.

It was in the best interests of city officials to keep the property purchase transactions quiet. Only repeated public record requests unearthed the details of some city-developer interactions. The documents suggest that either one or all of the parties involved had a role to play in the delays that seem to have led to the excessive charges. The best way for them to deal with the problem was to do a little creative accounting, move on, and hope residents would accept the rationale that the money was just part of a bigger debt.

TOH will probably have received final approval by the time this article is published. CH City Council members pledge to do a better job of processing future developments. But they have rejected many opportunities to postpone TOH until citizen concerns about design, financing, and traffic are resolved.

It is likely that if council members decide that Lee/Meadowbrook, the Medusa Building, and Severance developments must go through, residents will be given the same perfunctory treatment that residents concerned about TOH have received.

I don't want to watch. My personal plans are to leave Cleveland Heights as soon as possible.

Joan Mallick is a 49-year resident of Cleveland Heights whose home is a 100-year-old brick Georgian which she and her husband and restored. She earned a Ph.D. in community health nursing, and served as commissioner of health for the city of Cleveland.

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HEIGHTS OBSERVER

Public education and citizenship

Michael Knoblauch

Public education creates citizens. A public education is the most powerful, positive and transformative relationship a person will have with any government activity. It is the beating heartbeat of every community. The public education heartbeat of Cleveland Heights and University Heights is weak. This weakness is not from a lack of money, inadequate buildings, or poor teaching. It weakened over years, the consequence of the community's diverging perception of its reality with the reality of many students in CH-UH schools.

Put another way, tax dollars collected and spending per student do not match the community's perceived reality of expected outcomes, state test scores, and other subjective and dubious evaluation criteria. We are in a spiraling trap without a way out; costs continue to rise and community ambivalence toward the schools increases. The perception has become "the schools are bad," "we won't send our children to Heights schools," "we won't move to Cleveland Heights," "we are moving," "we won't vote for a tax levy." Students still attend Heights schools; advance, graduate, go to college, enter the workforce—and too many don't achieve their potential.

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census data report that more than 90 percent of all K-12 students attend public schools, and 5 percent of all public schools are charter schools supported with public education funds. In 2017, only 44 percent of children ages 5-19 living in Cleveland Heights and University Heights attended a public school. We must ask ourselves, "Why the hugely significant disparity between national public school participation and CH-UH public school participation, and how can we increase the number who attend our schools?"

Change and improvement are possible. It starts with setting meaningful, achievable goals: Reach a 75 percent school participation rate in 10 years; increase the graduation rate; aim to have all students participate in extracurricular activities; establish yearly mentoring engagements; and more. To meet these goals the school

district must lead—developing and implementing supplemental community-based programs; partnering with community groups and individuals, as program managers, tutors, mentors, or advisors working with students, individually or in groups. A modest number of such programs exist; we need more.

We are resource rich, but too few of our personal and institutional resources are engaged with CH-UH schools. Many churches and temples have outreach or social justice programs focused on education and families. They would be credible partners. They need to be asked!

The city governments of Cleveland Heights and University Heights must be active partners in this program, creating a real partnership between the cities and the school system. The infrequent joint meetings are insufficient.

Open Doors Academy is an extraordinarily successful community-based school program. St. Paul's Episcopal Church started Open Doors in the 1990s for Roxboro Middle School children, as a safe place to come after school. Open Doors grew and established a goal that every participant in the program graduate from Cleveland Heights High School. Open Doors is now a stand-alone organization with programs in other public school districts. To date, 100 percent of Open Doors students who have been in the program for the three middle school years graduated from high school, and many go on to college.

Open Doors is an example of how a community and a community institution, responding to a need, improved public education. Building a community of citizens through public education is a constant and continuous process. This is the time for the school district to lead: [by] bringing the community into the schools, and the schools to the community, we can get to work strengthening the heartbeat of our community. If you agree, contact Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby at 216-371-7171.

A 40-plus year resident of Cleveland Heights, Michael Knoblauch is a former board member of FutureHeights, sponsor of Citizens for Great Design, and father of three adult children who are graduates of Heights High.

TREES continued from page 1

and Hanavan planted more than 20 trees for friends and neighbors. But in this time of climate consciousness and controversy, Hanavan was looking to meet up with other tree enthusiasts.

A fundraising event for the Western Reserve Land Conservancy helped connect Hanavan with Margy Weinberg, Sue Wolpert and Laura Marks, founding members of Heights Tree People, a group of local residents who plant and care for trees in their neighborhoods.

Each member of this small, but energetic, group brings to it a special skill: Weinberg is the organizational expert; Marks knows everyone in town, and who to call for what is needed; Kathy Smachlo specializes in native plants; Elsa Johnson is active in the East Cleveland Parks Association and is a leader in the restoration of Forest Hill Park. Wolpert's training in nonviolent communication guided the group in defining its purpose, and Hanavan brings muscle, enthusiasm, and a shovel.

Since its founding in winter 2019, Heights Tree People members have established their mission, which, in addition to planting trees, includes sharing knowledge and advocating for an enduring tree culture; and increasing the health, vitality, and happiness of our local habitat, and the planet.

These may be large goals for a small, all-volunteer group, but with determination and dedication, Heights Tree People has already gifted more than 100 trees to residents in Cleveland, Shaker Heights, East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights.

The group is especially proud of "changing the landscape of the entire street"—East 130th—where residents organized themselves with help from Heights Tree People and planted 11 trees on a single block.

The benefits of trees are numerous. Trees enhance the visual appeal and health of a street or neighborhood by moderating climate, improving air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and harboring wildlife.

Heights Tree People hopes to plant 200 trees during the next growing season, especially in front yards, and on entire streets, with the help of residents.

In the doldrums of winter, think spring! Don't wait for Heights Tree People to knock on your door. Request a free tree now by sending an e-mail to heightstreepeople@gmail.com.

Jewel Moulthrop, a Heights resident, edits and occasionally writes for the Heights Observer.

Parent wishes she'd used Heights school sooner

Chandre Ford

When my son was ready for kindergarten, I looked at the school report card and, like many, decided that I would never send my son to Heights schools. After a long search, I enrolled him in a charter school where we had one problem after another. I felt like his teacher had written him off after just two months in class. She only listed problems without ever giving solutions. I felt like I was failing my son—the worst feeling in the world.

After another year of poor (or nonexistent!) communication and the school constantly switching my son's classroom, I was fed up! They made me feel like he was unable to learn, and I just didn't believe that.

I finally called CH-UH and explained my situation through tears. The next week, my son started at Boulevard Elementary School, and on his first day I met not only his teacher and principal but also the office staff, nurse, and social

worker. The social worker and I discussed my concerns, which she passed on to his teacher, who discussed them with me the next day and offered a clear plan.

Two weeks later, my son told me that at the other school he felt like he was always in trouble, but at this school he feels smart. He learned more in four months at Boulevard than he had in the previous year and a half.

Boulevard is everything I wanted for my child: a diverse learning environment with teachers who are genuinely invested in their students; and a firm but gentle leader who listens to both students and parents. I know that my concerns will never fall on deaf ears. My only regret is listening to the negativity and not sending my son to a CH-UH school sooner. We are truly blessed to be Heights Tigers!

Chandre Ford is a Cleveland Heights resident, proud parent of a Boulevard Elementary School first-grader, and active member of the Boulevard PTA.



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10:00am Annual Easter Egg Hunt

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Opinions continue
on page 21.

Saundra Berry sworn in as UH City Council member



Judge J.J. Costello swore in Saundra Berry as a new member of UH City Council on Feb. 12.

Kim Sergio Inglis

Saundra Berry was sworn in as the newest member of University Heights City Council at a special meeting on Feb. 12, filling the seat vacated by former council member Mark Wiseman, who resigned on Jan. 13.

Since 2007, Berry has served as Clerk of Courts at the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. She previously worked at the Ohio Department of Education as director of Cleveland scholarship and tutoring.

Berry brings auditing experience to council, as she served as an auditor for the Cleveland Municipal School District 1983-99. A former math teacher, Berry is a certified public accountant.

Berry earned a master's in business administration from Atlanta University, and earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics from Central State University.

A deacon at Antioch Baptist Church, Berry is the former president of the Wiley Middle School Parent Teacher Association. She has also worked for the campaign committees of U.S. Reps. Marcia Fudge and Stephanie Tubbs Jones.

UH City Charter gives council 30 days to fill a council vacancy; if it does not do so, the mayor becomes responsible for the appointment.

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. From a total of 26 applicants, council members selected five finalists in executive session on Jan. 29, and interviewed them on Feb. 4 and 5. On Feb. 6, UH City Council announced it had appointed Berry to fill the vacant council seat.

Various UH council members and the mayor spoke at the Feb. 12 meeting, in advance of Berry's swearing in. In his remarks, Mayor

Michael Dylan Brennan recognized council's role in appointing Berry.

"This was, of course, wholly council's appointment, per the charter, as it should be," said Brennan. "The only reason the mayor would make the appointment is if council was unable to decide. Even though we had 26 excellent applicants, it does say a lot that, obviously, one rose to the top, and understandably so."

Addressing Berry, Brennan added, "I'm excited that you'll be joining city council—I'd be as happy if it were my choice."

In introducing CH Municipal Court Judge J.J. Costello, to conduct the swearing in ceremony, Brennan cited the "personal and professional connection" between Costello and Berry, who work together at CH Municipal Court.

Prior to the meeting's adjournment, Brennan invited Berry to speak to those in attendance, and her fellow council members. Berry said, "I just thank all of you for having confidence in me. I really feel a part of this council—you've all been so gracious." She thanked her church, her family and friends, and the people she works with who came to the ceremony. She then made a motion to adjourn the special meeting.

Berry's appointment is for an abbreviated term of approximately two years, until the end of December 2021. If interested in continuing to serve on council, Berry will have to run for election on Nov. 2, 2021.

Wiseman resigned from UH City Council upon his appointment as a magistrate to Cleveland Municipal Court's Housing Division.

Video of the Feb. 12 special meeting can be viewed on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oRNX6hfvt2&t=81s).

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and is a Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer.

DINNERS continued from page 1

to explore issues of race and equity, discrimination, gentrification, poverty and political division. We hope that exploring our community through the lens of race, and gathering around a table to share a meal, will help build community and create an opportunity for learning about different perspectives and how to better support one another."

Anyone who lives, works, worships, or plays in Cleveland Heights or University Heights is welcome to participate as a host, facilitator or guest.

Hosts will provide a spaghetti dinner (ingredients provided) and beverages (non-alcoholic only) for 10 people (host, facilitator and eight guests) in their home, place of worship, or another facility with a kitchen and restrooms.

Facilitators, who will guide each group of 10 in the conversation about race, must attend one of two training sessions, which will take place on Tuesday, March 31, 3-8 p.m., or Saturday, April 4, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Guests can sign up to attend an April 25 or April 26 dinner, on their own or with a partner. The organizers will assign guests to available locations, and notify them, by April 21. Guests are asked to note any dietary restrictions or religious observances in their application.

For complete information, and to register to be a host, facilitator or guest, visit www.heightscongress.org.

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Founded in 1972, HCC is an advocate of social justice, a monitor of fair-housing practices, and a facilitator for building strong, diverse communities. Among its goals are generating inclusive communities and neighborhoods; instilling a sense of community spirit and involvement among residents of all races, religions, cultures, ages, ethnic heritage, and socioeconomic levels; and stimulating active involvement of community residents in the identification and solution of issues of mutual concern.

Joel Moss is a MSSA/MNO intern at FutureHeights.



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Brennan declares UH 'back on the map'

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor Michael Brennan reported on Feb. 11, in his second State of the City address, that University Heights is "back on the map."

Brennan began his speech by relaying a discussion he had with

resident Ari Jaffe, prior to the 2017 election, in which Jaffe asked Brennan if he was considering merging University Heights with a neighboring city. Paraphrasing the conversation, Brennan said Jaffe felt at the time that University Heights was "adrift, without direction, without purpose, without identity."

In just two years, Brennan said, there's now an energy in the city. "I didn't do it alone," Brennan said. "We did it, working together—the mayor's office, city council, the good men and women who come to work every day for our city. Citizens like him [Jaffe], who step up and serve our community. And the residents who expect good things, and deserve good things."

Brennan described University Heights as strong, and growing stronger. "We have found our identity, we are back on the map, and we're building something special here in University Heights," he said.

Brennan reported that construction is set to begin in 2020



University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan delivered his State of the City speech Feb. 11.

on redevelopment at University Square, and on new infill housing and new townhomes.

Phase I of the University Square rebuild will comprise approximately 203 market-rate apartments, and 5,000 square feet of new retail, some of which might be live/work space. "As Phase I is completed," Brennan said, "we will work together on Phase II, and for what is worthy of this high-profile center of our community."

Brennan praised city council, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, and county officials for working together with the original bond holders and Kowit & Company Real Estate Group [the developer] on the project.

Brennan credited the City Beautiful CIC for coming to terms with Knez Builders to construct three infill homes on vacant lots in the city. The homes will have architectural characteristics consistent with current homes in University Heights, but with modern construction, open floor plans, and today's amenities.

Brennan said the new townhome development, planned for the north end of Cedar-Taylor, will be marketed toward young professionals and empty nesters, and will feature luxury finishes and rooftop views of downtown Cleveland.

Brennan said his administration is working on building a sense of community with new events, such as Fall Fest and the City Beautiful 5K, and revamped events, such as the city's Summer Concert Series, Civic Awards, and the Memorial Day parade. "Our city is and ought to be a community of neighbors," Brennan said. "Neighbors who interact, socialize, and have fun together."

Brennan praised the city's police and fire departments. "In their first full calendar year in their respective positions, Chief Dustin Rogers and Chief Robert Perko built upon their departments past successes, and are well positioned to continue to do the hard and important work to protect the safety of everyone in University Heights—not just those who live here, but those who work here, go to school here, and those who shop and visit," Brennan said.

Brennan also congratulated UH Building Commissioner James McReynolds on his upcoming retirement, and Housing and Community Development Director Patrick Grogan-Myers on his new position with the city of Maple Heights.

Under UH Finance Director Dennis Kennedy, Brennan said the city has revised both its investment and reserve policy. "One of the reasons we brought in an expert like Dennis Kennedy," Brennan said, "was to have a sure hand to show us the way financially and make good long-term decisions."

Brennan concluded by contrasting University Heights with what's happening in Washington, D.C. "I don't have to tell you, this country is tearing itself apart," he said. "We have seen our national office holders put the 'coarse' in discourse."

"I resolve to continue to be the change I want to see in our country—positive, progressive, responsive, sensitive, open, and strong," Brennan vowed. "I could not be prouder to hold the honor of being your mayor and leading this city, and all it represents."

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.


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UNIVERSITY SQUARE continued from page 1

a cooperative agreement are currently being drafted. Simultaneously, drawings are under way that will be reviewed by the University Heights Planning Commission, Architecture Review Board, and Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). Once plans are approved by those entities, and then city council, construction can begin.

Any interested UH resident or business owner can provide feedback at planning commission and BZA meetings, as well as at regular city council meetings. The city plans to update the community throughout the process via the media, and its own social-media platforms and publications (e.g., *Mosaic* magazine, *At Your Service* monthly newsletter). Feedback is also welcome on this issue, and all others, in the form of a call, e-mail or letter to UH City Hall.

Brad Kowit of Kowit & Company outlined Phase I of the redevelopment at a recent council meeting. Target and Macy's will remain, and the space in between the stores along Cedar Road will be rebuilt as approximately 200 apartment units, leasing at rates of \$1,400 to \$1,900 per month.

Kowit explained there is a local need for an upscale, market-rate housing development. The University Square units will be mostly one-bedroom, but will include a limited number of two- and three-bedroom units. Kowit said the leasing prices will "be an alternative to Beachwood and University Circle."

Phase I will include "live-work" and retail spaces, which could include a coffee shop, art studios or professional offices. Amenities will likely include a fitness room, business center and conference center. There will be newly created outdoor space, which could include a dog park, bocce ball courts, and a volleyball pit.

The redevelopment will fix another area of concern at University Square—the parking garage.

There is currently a dark alleyway between the garage and the back of the building. "One of the first things we're going to do is take the garage and open it up," Kowit said. "We'll create about 100 feet of outdoor space, and area and light, and that's accomplished by taking off just one bay of the garage."

Kowit's improvements to the garage will be in addition to nearly \$1 million in safety improvements that were made in 2019.

Susan Drucker, former Solon mayor, was hired as University Heights' economic development director to help make redevelopment projects like this happen. "While this is a team effort," Brennan said, "it doesn't get done without the strong work and diligence of Susan."

Drucker said the long-neglected and mostly vacant University Square was a "black eye for this community," and that local residents and small business owners deserved "so much more." She noted, "A redevelopment project of this type is not only desirable in order to serve the needs of the community, but it is essential to boost economic development across University Heights."

Drucker said the plans for redevelopment at University Square have already sparked inquiries from several



A map of the proposed University Square rebuild.

businesses that have expressed interest in locating there.

UH Vice Mayor Michele Weiss said the redevelopment will benefit local taxpayers. "The potential income from new tenants will enable the city to move forward with other initiatives that we simply do not have funding for," she said.

Jodi Sourini, CH-UH school board president, said she is happy the project keeps what works at University Square. "Keeping Target and

Macy's was a key issue," Sourini said. "I'm pleased we were able to work with the city to find a way to redevelop University Square."

Construction could begin as early as this summer. "Our goal is to finish up our due diligence [and] finish up the development agreement [with the city] this year, and in the summer break ground and start building," Kowit said. "It's probably a 14-month process from start to finish."

Kowit said Phase II planning will

begin after "the feel" of the project is learned from Phase I. Options for the second phase could feature additional mixed-use space, including more retail and apartments, entertainment venues, and senior housing. The feel being sought is one of an active lifestyle, and a center in which to live, work, shop, and play.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

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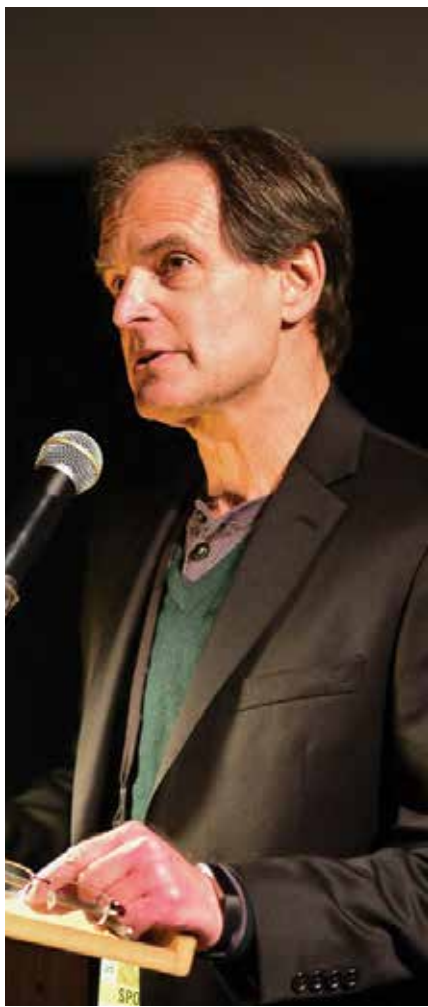
CIFF continued from page 1

Lee, Meadowbrook, and Silsby roads; in lots 5, 16, and 17; and in the Cedar Lee district’s municipal parking deck; from 9 a.m., Friday, April 3, through 9 a.m., Monday, April 6.

CIFF44 will be held March 25 through April 5 at Tower City Cinemas. More than 600 screenings will take place during the 12 days of the festival, and 400 guest filmmakers from around the world will visit Cleveland during the festival. For more information visit www.clevelandfilm.org.

Festival tickets go on sale to CIFF members on Friday, March 6, 11 a.m., and to the public on Friday, March 13, 11 a.m. They can be purchased online, by phone, or in person at the CIFF Box Office in the lobby of Tower City Cinemas. Day-of-show tickets, when available, can be purchased at the theater where a film is being shown beginning one hour prior to the start of the screening.

Kristen Romito is marketing manager for the Cleveland International Film Festival.



Jonathan Forman spoke at the CIFF’s Cedar Lee Rick Whitbeck evening in 2019.



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Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights



JANUARY 21, 2020

Council members present were Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell, Kahlil Seren (vice mayor), Jason Stein (mayor), Michael N. Ungar and Melissa Yasinow. The meeting lasted from 7:44 p.m. to 8:59 p.m.

Public comments

Top of the Hill: Several residents expressed concerns [about] and opposition to the Top of the Hill (TOH) project. One e-mail in support came to council from CH-UH school board member Dan Heintz, who [indicated he] felt it was important for future revitalization efforts.

Brick roads: Howard Pierce expressed support for the continued maintenance of the city’s brick roads (such as Exeter Road). He went on to state that the roads have needed very little maintenance over their lifetime of 100 years, but that now it is time. The city manager responded that there are no imminent plans, and the city must pause and come up with an approach. They will reengage with residents in the spring.

2540 Arlington Road: Josefita Fehn presented a letter to council regarding the history of the property at 2540 Arlington Road as a nuisance, and asked that [council members] respond to the situation by enforcing the city ordinances, correcting problems in the current design plans, and properly overseeing the construction progress. Two other residents also expressed concern and frustration over this property.

City manager’s report

City Manager Briley referred, and council accepted, three project bids: 2020 street resurfacing and ADA curb-ramp replacement, 2020 surface-treating program, and Shannon Road waterline replacement.

Financing revenue bonds

Council Member Hart provided the first reading of ordinances related to TOH financing.

Overnight parking

Hart followed up on the overnight parking problem that had been brought to council’s attention at the last meeting. It was corrected with the affected individual, and the related policy was clarified with the police department.

Public works projects

Council approved agreements with GDP Group for services and compensation related to the Selwyn Rehabilitation and Waterline Replacement and Shannon Road Rehabilitation projects.

Issue 26

Council Member Yasinow stated that the city of Cleveland Heights does not wade into ballot issues and does not take a position on the school levy.

Mayor’s report

Mayor Stein shared the Cleveland Heights High School magazine highlighting the College Credit Plus and Heights Career Tech programs, and encouraged everyone to read about the high school offerings.

LWV Observer: Jeannine Gury.

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kahlil Seren, Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart and Melissa Yasinow. The

meeting lasted from 7:40 p.m. to 9:09 p.m.; public comments took approximately one hour.

Public comments

Top of the Hill: Six residents discussed TOH. Their remarks included statements of concern that there is a mismatch between risk and reward, investment, and anticipated income.

2540 Arlington Road: Two neighbors complained about haphazard and long-unfinished remodeling projects at this home, which they called a “disaster property.” They questioned the qualifications of the contractors, and the provisions of permits and inspections. Richard Wong, planning director, and Susanna Nierman O’Neil, vice city manager, responded to all complaints. The city is continuing to meet with the owners and contractors, and assured the neighbors that the port-o-san, debris and dumpster will be removed soon.

Elected mayor: Len Friedson asked about work on the transition to an elected mayor. City Manager Briley responded that staff and council are beginning to study the issues. Ordinances, operations, salary, ethics concerns, and the balance of power are all in discussion.

Tree canopy: Laura Marks of Heights Tree People spoke about the Tree Commission Academy, distributed maps of tree-canopy decline in Cleveland Heights, and urged council to be more involved in this vital environmental issue. More information is available at www.gardenopoliscleveland.org/2020/01/heights-tree-people-what-you-need-to-know/.

City manager’s report

Briley’s detailed update can be found on pages 3–8 of the Feb. 3 packet, at www.cleveland-heights.com. Go to Government/2020 Agendas and Minutes.

Top of the Hill financial ordinances

Ordinances providing for the issuance and sale of economic development tax increment funding (TIF) revenue bonds and issuance (Ordinance 5-2020), and sale of economic development non-tax revenue bond anticipation notes (Ordinance 6-2020) both received second readings, but no vote was taken.

Ordinance 12-2020, providing for real property improvements at TOH to be exempt from property taxes, and to collect service payments in lieu of taxes for deposit into a TIF fund, received a first reading, but no vote.

Consent agenda

Council unanimously authorized use of a “Consent Agenda” for future council meetings. This will streamline meetings by collecting several non-controversial items into one agenda item to be voted on as a whole, after suspension of the usual rules. Council could thus address routine or non-controversial matters without separate discussion, debate, or vote on each item.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

Expanded reports are available online at www.heightsobserver.org.

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Two CH residents join United Way board

Savannah Heck

United Way of Greater Cleveland has named two Cleveland Heights residents to its Board of Directors—Andrew “Randy” Paine, and Vanessa Whiting.

Paine, president of Key Institutional Bank, serves on the board of the Key-Bank Foundation. He previously served as chairman of the board of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, chairman of KeyBank’s corporatewide United Way campaign, on the board of visitors for DePauw University, and on the board of directors for Special Olympics Indiana, and Meals on Wheels in Indianapolis.

Whiting, president of A.E.S Management Corp., is an attorney with extensive experience in real estate and small business enterprise law, focused on affordable housing as well as community and economic development. She is chair of the MetroHealth Board of Trustees, and chairs its Legal and Government Relations and Governance committees. She also serves on the boards of the Tri-C Foundation, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, and the Greater Cleveland Partnership. Whiting co-chairs the Karamu House Capital and Sustaining Campaign, and is a Life Member of the NAACP.

“We are thrilled to welcome United Way of Greater Cleveland’s new directors to the board,” said Augie Napoli, United Way of Greater Cleveland’s president and CEO. “United Way is fueled by the volunteerism of accomplished and dedicated



Vanessa Whiting



Andrew “Randy” Paine

community leaders like these.”

For a complete listing of United Way of Greater Cleveland’s Board of Directors, visit www.unitedwaycleveland.org/who-we-are/leadership-in-action/our-board-of-directors/.

Savannah Heck is the strategic communications writer for United Way of Greater Cleveland.

Koonce named to Boys & Girls Clubs of NE Ohio leadership post

Ken Wood

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio (BGCNEO) has named Robert Koonce chief development officer. Koonce, who lives—and grew up—in Cleveland Heights, brings more than 13 years of nonprofit fundraising experience to his new role.

Koonce previously headed development for Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC), beginning in 2015.

In his new role, Koonce will oversee all fundraising, development operations and communications for BGCNEO, an organization created last year by the merger of clubs in Cleveland, Akron, Lorain County and Erie County. BGCNEO serves more than 8,600 kids at 39 locations, providing safe, fun, after-school places for kids ages 6–18, focusing on healthy lifestyles, academic success and character.

“Robert has done an outstanding job of building strong relationships with our donors and connecting them to our mission,” said Ron Soeder, BGCNEO’s interim president and CEO.

Koonce, who earned his undergraduate degree in classics at Case Western Reserve University and a master’s in theology from St. Joseph’s College of Maine, has worked in development at University Hospitals, Western Reserve Land Conservancy and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. At BGCC, he helped build a development program that enabled the organization to expand to 14 clubs serving 900 kids per day.

Koonce also is president of the Board of Trustees for Home Repair Resource Center, is a trustee for Lake Erie Ink, and is board secretary of the Ko K Yo Foundation, which builds schools in rural Ethiopia.

Ken Wood is a former Sun News writer and Suburban Journalist of the Year for the U.S. and Canada. He is communications director for Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.



CH resident Robert Koonce.

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Free talk series aims to bring nature home

Peggy Spaeth

Early spring is the perfect time to think about what to plant in our yards. These days, we know that the choices we make impact nature as never before. We have a declining tree canopy, declining insect and bird populations, and a global climate emergency.

An upcoming series of free talks, Bringing Nature Home, is intended to help attendees take positive actions at the ground level. The speakers, presented by Friends of Lower Lake and the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership (DBWP), will journey from the tree canopy, to the shrub layer, to the ground layer for a holistic look at what makes up

healthy habitat in public and private green spaces. The series' tagline, "It's About Time," reflects the urgency of restoring urban habitat to good health, as well as how the sequence of plant life supports insects and birds throughout the growing season. Personal choices can make a difference, and this series of talks is intended to provide a guide.

On Saturday, March 7, Courtney Blashka, director of conservation and community forestry at Holden Forest and Gardens, will address declining tree canopy and talk about the overstory. Blashka's talk is at the Cleveland Heights Community Center, rooms 1A-1B, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. At the end of this event, attendees will have an opportunity to meet the



This white oak (c. 1700–2019) at Lower Lake park came down in the fall 2019 microburst. Oaks and other beneficial trees will be the subject of a March 7 talk.

Heights Tree People, who can help them select and plant a (free!) tree in their own yards this spring.

On Saturday, March 14, John Barber, an experienced birder, will explain how to create a healthy bird habitat one's own yard. Imitating how nature feeds the birds can save money on birdseed, as well as increase species diversity. Barber

will be speaking at the University Heights Library from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

On Saturday, March 21, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., at the Shaker Heights Library, Stefanie Verish will present an array of native plants that attract birds, butterflies and other pollinators. A Cleveland Metroparks naturalist, Verish will discuss native alternatives to conventional, and sometimes harmful, shrubs, such as Japanese barberry, a popular prickly shrub with bright red berries introduced to the United States in the late 19th century. A common plant at garden centers, Japanese barberry grows unchecked, even by deer, and has invaded natural areas, outcompeting native shrubs that feed insects and birds. According to www.habitatmatters.org, "research shows that a barberry's dense foliage creates a perfect, humid climate for blacklegged ticks that carry Lyme disease—a fact that also creates a public health risk."

In time for spring planting, and in advance of the annual plant sale at the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, Nick Mikash, natural resources specialist, will discuss planting the right plant in the right place on Saturday, April 4, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., at the Nature Center. Learn how to create a pollinator path on your street, like the one Bradford Road residents created on theirs. (The annual plant sale at the Nature Center will be on Saturday, May 9).

DBWP, the Friends of Lower Lake, and the Nature Center all work closely with local municipalities. Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, University Heights, and Cleveland, for example, all have sustainability goals. But they uniformly say that the residents of their communities are the biggest drivers of adopting sustainable practices and policies. The more residents demonstrate and demand leadership to meet climate goals, the faster municipalities will work to restore earth's systems and communities.

For more information and to register for one or more of these talks, go to www.doanbrookpartnership.org.

Peggy Spaeth is co-chair, with John Barber, of Friends of Lower Lake.

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Gardeners invited to participate in Noble market

Brenda H. May

As backyard and community garden growers order seeds and otherwise plan their gardens this winter, Noble Gardeners’ Market (NGM) urges them to consider growing extra to sell at its market this summer.

NGM will assemble on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m. to noon, Aug. 1 through Sept. 19. The market site is a mini-park at the corner of Noble and Roanoke roads in Cleveland Heights, one block north of Monticello Boulevard. Sellers are welcome to participate on any or all of the market days, free of charge.

NGM welcomes folks who sell fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers that they grow in backyards and community gardens. Sellers do not need to be Cleveland Heights residents, but they may not be market farmers. (NGM encourages people to support local farmers at the numerous farmers’ markets in the area, and in grocery stores that source locally.) They also need not commit to coming every Saturday.

Sellers will be asked to sign in, to declare where they grew their fruits, vegetables and flowers. Sellers are not charged for space, but must provide their own chair, and a table or ground cloth for displaying their products. Sellers must also be able to make change for customers. Water and electricity are not available at the



Noble Gardners’ Market buyers and sellers in 2019.

market site.

Only fresh produce, flowers and plants may be sold, as the market is not licensed for selling processed food.

Last year was NGM’s first full August to September season, with 19 sellers participating, though never all on the same Saturday. Buyers learned to talk to the sellers who had the items they most desired, to find out when they next would be available, and arrived early for unique items, such as shiitake mushrooms, heirloom tomatoes or hot peppers, as these often sold out.

Tomatoes, peppers, summer squash and garlic sold well and were the most abundant items at the 2019 market. Buyers were pleasantly surprised to find specialty items and

asked for more. Berries, carrots, beans, corn and potatoes were among the buyers’ requests.

Growers are encouraged to consider planting a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. As this is a community-based gardeners’ market, potential sellers can be assured that no backyard grower will have bushels of produce to sell; last year some had only a half dozen tomatoes or peppers. It isn’t the volume of produce, it’s the community aspect that makes this market so special.

Buyers were also delighted to find cut flowers in bouquets large and small. Perennials and other garden plants were other sought-after items, and buyers were grateful to talk with sellers about planting conditions and

blooming schedules. Some sellers brought photos, which helped buyers imagine blooms that were not in season. Houseplants were also among the products sellers offered.

Perhaps the most delightful feature of NGM is the opportunity to form friendships around mutual interests—growing and cooking with fresh fruits and vegetables, and enjoying flowers and plants. As one participant said, “People came to the market for veggies, but stayed for the conversations.”

For more information visit www.nobleneighbors.com, or e-mail nobleneighbors@gmail.com.

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

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Stephens' campaign distributes reusable bags as ban takes effect

Pam Turos

If you see Cuyahoga County Council Member Cheryl Stephens or her supporters—Team Cheryl Stephens—knocking on doors, it is probably to deliver reusable shopping bags.

Thanks to an initiative from the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District (CCSWD), Stephens has committed to giving out sturdy, reusable plastic tote bags to anyone in her district who makes a request via www.teamcheryl.org/bags.

Each colorful, eco-friendly bag, made of recycled plastic, is estimated to replace 700 disposable bags over its lifespan. They will be distributed as long as the supply lasts.

Cuyahoga County Council passed a single-use plastic bag ban, effective Jan. 1. However, to help ease the transition, the ban won't be enforced until July 1. During the six-month grace period, retailers won't



Stephens and supporters distribute reusable bags as ban takes effect.

be fined. [For complete information on which kind of bags are banned, and which are exempt, visit www.cuyahogarecycles.org.]

CCSWD purchased 25,000 reusable bags, and made them available to members of county

council to distribute to their constituents beginning in mid-January. It also made them available to Cuyahoga County nonprofit organizations.

Stephens considers this home-delivered bag campaign an outreach

of gratitude for all of the residents who called and e-mailed, voicing their support for the Cuyahoga County plastic bag ban.

Stephens admits she understands reservations expressed by some retailers and residents, but believes “we need to make decisions today to take care of the future,” and said she hopes to work with grocers and retailers to support them while also finding other ways to make the community more sustainable.

“This isn't a test,” said Stephens. “It is a way to save our lake and to have less trash and debris on our streets and yards. We have seen that other communities and states have done this successfully. And now Cuyahoga County is a leader in Northeast Ohio.”

Sustainability has always been a core issue for Stephens, who is running for reelection to Cuyahoga County Council, and faces a challenger on the March 17 Democratic primary ballot.

She may be best known, however, for her life-long commitment to housing and economic development. As vice-chair of county council's community development committee, she is working with county staff to negotiate with banks to meet the needs of the communities they serve. This includes requirements for community reinvestment, loans to families in low- to moderate-income census tracts, counseling for small businesses, and specialized loan pools for those businesses.

Reflecting on the year since she first took office, Stephens is eager to continue serving District 10, comprising Bratenahl, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland and University Heights. “When we start initiatives, they are not just for the core city, but also for first-ring suburbs,” said Stephens.

Pam Turos is a member of Team Cheryl Stephens, which comprises supporters who believe in moving Cuyahoga County District 10 forward.

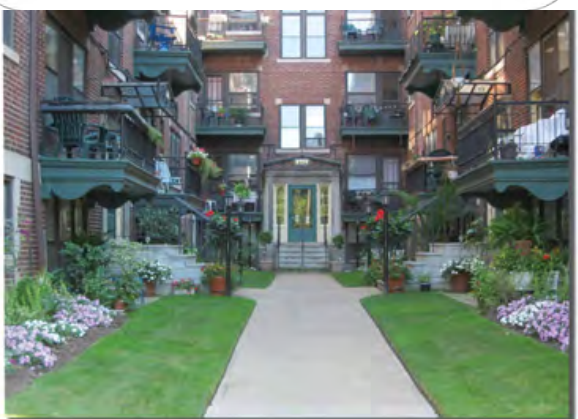
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Church of the Redeemer advocates for inclusion

Mary Ann Kerr

Church of the Redeemer UMC invites the community to a luncheon on inclusion on March 29, 12:30 p.m., in Fellowship Hall. Martha E. Banks, the keynote speaker, will address the topic "Trying Again to Include Everyone: A Preview of the 2020 United Methodist General Conference." After her talk, there will be time for questions and discussion.

In 2019, the United Methodist Church (UMC) voted, by a slim margin, to assert the church's prohibition against same-sex weddings and gay clergy. UMC has been in turmoil since that vote, as its progressive members have rebelled against the decision. As a result of that vote, ministers have been brought to trial and have lost

their credentials—at great expense to them, the church and the community.

The Church of the Redeemer has been especially affected by this decision. Its congregation made a public statement 25 years ago, welcoming and affirming members of the LGBTQ community and all other persons, without exception. Therefore, the church's congregation has been apprehensive about the decisions made by UMC at last year's Special General Conference.

Banks was a delegate at the 2016 and 2019 general conferences, and will be a delegate again this year. Her service to the UMC was recognized with the 2014 Courageous Leadership Laity Award, the 2016 Bishop James S. Thomas Leadership Award, and the 2017

Black Methodists for Church Renewal Chairman's Honoree. She is a retired clinical and research neuropsychologist, and a former professor at The College of Wooster and Kent State University.

For more information about the March 29 luncheon, call the Church of the Redeemer, (216-932-2065). The church is located at 420 South Taylor Road, in Cleveland Heights.

Mary Ann Kerr has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for 46 years. She and her husband, Douglas, have been members of Church of the Redeemer UMC for almost as long.

Noble Road Presbyterian Church presents 'Senior Scams' forum

Judith Beeler

Scams target people by phone, computer, mail and knocks on the door. Becoming informed is the best way to combat scams.

Noble Road Presbyterian Church has invited Danielle Musil, consumer affairs specialist from the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs, to present a community forum, "Senior Scams."

While seniors are identified as one of the most vulnerable groups to be targeted by scammers, the tips presented will be for all ages, and all are invited to attend the forum.

At the event, planned for Saturday, March 14, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Musil will describe some of

the current scams, and identify cues that will help you know when to stop and ask questions to avoid getting scammed. There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion.

The program will take place at Noble Road Presbyterian Church, 2780 Noble Road, and include a light lunch, followed by Musil's presentation. Since "Pi Day" (3.14) is March 14, pie will be served for dessert.

Parking for those with limited mobility will be on Kirkwood Road. Other attendees are asked to park in the lot on Navahoe and Noble roads. For more information about the program, call 216-382-0660.

Judith Beeler has lived in Cleveland Heights since 1991, and is a member of Noble Road Presbyterian Church.

HRRC announces March classes



David Brock

With spring around the corner, Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC) is ramping up its workshop offerings.

Up first is a cabinet-refinishing class on Thursday, March 5. New or renewed cabinets are one of the best ways to spruce up a home, and if you can do it yourself, you'll save a lot of money. This workshop will lead you through the ins and outs of cabinet refinishing, including the necessary prep work, what types of paint products you should use, and how much sanding will be necessary. Participants will get experience using power sanders and painting cabinets.

On Mondays, March 9 and 16, HRRC will offer a two-part woodworking 101 series. The goal is for each participant to build a stepstool

out of two-by-fours. During the process, they will work with tools such as miter saws, routers and nail guns.

On Tuesday, March 31, those looking to create or expand a garden can take a class designed for first-time gardeners. An experienced Ashtabula County gardener will be on hand to lead the discussion and answer questions. He will cover how to establish a garden bed and start seeding, and will also provide tips on organic gardening.

All three workshops will be held at HRRC, 2520 Noble Road. Fees are \$25 for the cabinet-refinishing workshop, \$60 for the woodworking series, and \$10 for the gardening class. All programs begin at 7 p.m. Cleveland Heights residents receive a 25 percent discount, and income-based discounts are available to residents of all cities.

To learn more about HRRC, visit www.hrhc-ch.org, or call 216-381-6100, ext. 22, or e-mail dbrock@hrhc-ch.org.

David Brock is the education and outreach coordinator for HRRC.

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An exploration of conscience as the defining human characteristic of Jesus in his ministry, crucifixion, and in the community of hope that follows his human life.

March 15: Confession and Testimony as the

Per-Formance of Conscience — An examination of the function of confession and testimony in the formation of the identity and behavior of Christian individuals and communities.

March 22: Conscience and Conflict in Christian

Character(s) — An exploration of the ways contrast and conflict encourage conscience to perform its purpose in the ongoing formation and reformation of relevant and just Christian character.

March 29: Christian Story and Public Conscience

An examination of the function of Christian storytelling in relation to the larger context in which Christians engage and apply their consciences through their life choices.

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Nonprofit provides paid youth employees to businesses here

Missy Toms

Does your business need extra help this summer? Heights businesses that partner with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) give young people a chance to gain skills and develop good work habits.

Each summer, YOU, a nonprofit workforce development organization, employs 1,500 youths, ages 14-19, from economically distressed areas in Cuyahoga County. YOU provides the wages; employers in the Greater Cleveland community, including Cleveland Heights and University Heights, provide meaningful work experiences. A job coach, who visits two to three times a week, is assigned to each work site.

YOU works with a wide array of partners—nonprofits, government organizations, and private sector businesses—to provide meaningful work experiences for its young participants. During the summer of 2019, a Cleveland Heights church, Imani Temple Ministries, hosted eight youths. They were assigned duties such as maintenance, light housekeeping, and food-bank setup. Imani's Maintenance Director



Terrance Ogletree said he enjoyed the experience, and would hire them, given the opportunity.

"Overall the experience was a good one. We had the chance to connect with youth and provide guidance and opportunity to a group of young people who needed it," said Ogletree. "I met the youth where they were and shared my personal story, which was relatable to them."

Ogletree's advice to employers looking to partner with YOU is this: Keep an open mind and remember they are just kids. "They're typical teens. They need a little guidance. This is a chance for you, as an employer, to give back to your community," he said.

To learn more, or to register as a YOU summer employer, visit www.youthopportunities.org/employ-youth.

Missy S. Toms is vice president of development and communications for Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

CH Senior Center News

Amy Jenkins

In 2017, the Cleveland Heights Senior Activity Center (SAC) introduced Communities Assisting Residential Elders (CARE)—a membership program for adults, 60 and older, intended to assist with tasks in and around their homes.

This innovative concept was formed through the collaborative efforts of the Community Partnership on Aging, and senior service agencies for the cities of Cleveland Heights, Maple Heights and Solon. As with any start up, there was much work to be done—recruiting volunteers, registering members, and creating program recognition in the communities served.

Today, CARE continues to grow, and has evolved into a popular and successful program that, when they learn about it, most seniors and their families want to join.

For the older adult, CARE helps with tasks that may seem overwhelming, impacting their safety and overall well-being. Like most homeowners, older adults want to maintain their yards and home exteriors; CARE supports them in meeting this goal. Others might request assistance with interior projects, such as replacing light bulbs and smoke-detector batteries. Some CARE members are happy to have the volunteers complete the task, and enjoy the results, while other CARE members participate right alongside the volunteers, enjoying the socializing and activity.

CARE's diverse and dedicated

volunteers include individuals, couples, faith-based groups, co-workers, students, seniors, families and friends, offering a variety of skills. Some volunteer for one-day yard projects, while others have been with CARE since the beginning, and volunteer year-round.

One volunteer provides technical assistance when members have challenges with their cell phones, computers and other devices. A volunteer couple enjoys working together on interior projects, such as organization and window care. Another regularly leads local groups and organizations in tackling yard-care projects.

Thanks to support from the Cuyahoga County Division of Senior Adult Services, the Cleveland Foundation, PNC, the Care Source Foundation, the Legacy Village Fund, local Rotary and AARP chapters, local businesses and private donations, CARE has been able to keep the annual membership fee at \$200. For those who are income-eligible, CARE pays the membership fee.

In January, CARE launched a new website, www.careneo.org. There, seniors and others can find information on membership and volunteering. Those seeking to support elder neighbors can contact CARE online or by phone (216-970-0599).

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.

Rox Middle School presents 'Annie Jr.'



Cast members Henry Dyck, Emily Barr and Jordan Evans in rehearsal.

Nicole Tugeau

Musical theater returns to the newly renovated Roxboro Middle School on March 5 and 6, when "Annie Jr." will have a two-night run, featuring performances by 28 middle school students. An additional 17 students comprise the production's stage crew.

Andrew Susick, Roxboro Middle School's new vocal music teacher, is the show's director. In his 15th year as a music educator, Susick also leads all of Roxboro Middle School's choirs.

Asked why the community

should come out and see this play, Susick responded, "The story of 'Annie' shares an important message about the true nature of family. Annie's cheerful outlook on life and plucky spirit demonstrate how a family is made up of those who you surround yourself with and care for, regardless of where you are born or where you live. Our Roxboro Middle School students, teachers, parents and community have all come together as a family to put on a show that you won't want to miss!"

Actors performing lead roles in "Annie Jr." are Emily Barr (Annie), Henry Dyck (Oliver Warbucks), Helena Duffy (Miss Hannigan), Jordan Evans (Grace), Finn Titas (Rooster), Juliet Duffy (Lily), Gabriel Dodson (Drake), and, as the orphans, Laurel Buescher (Pepper), Ruby Tugeau (Duffy), Gwen Kinsella (July), Sophie Petersal (Tessie), Sofia Pehowic (Kate), and Nora Lubbers (Molly).

Performances will take place on Thursday, March 5, and Friday, March 6, at Roxboro Middle School (2400 Roxboro Road). Doors will open at 6:30 p.m., and performances will start promptly at 7 p.m. Tickets, \$5 per seat, will be sold at the door both nights.

Susick previously assisted in the direction of productions of "Beauty and the Beast," "The Sound of Music," and "The Little Mermaid." Susick is also choir director at St. Luke the Evangelist Antiochian Orthodox Church in Bainbridge, and a member of the University Heights Symphonic Band. He plays the trombone.

Nicole Tugeau is a Heights High graduate ('92) and mother to three children in the CH-UH school district. She is a proud PTA parent and owner of a boutique literary agency representing children's book authors and illustrators.

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Kirby to deliver State of our Schools address on March 4

Cathan Cavanaugh



Superintendent Kirby

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby will deliver the 2020 State of our Schools Address on March 4, at Cleveland Heights High School.

At the event, which will run from 6 to 8 p.m., each CH-UH public school and several clubs will display their accomplishments and strengths in a walk-through showcase. In addition, sections of the

high school building will be open for self-guided tours.

"I'm looking forward to sharing the district's accomplishments over the past year, as well as the major new initiatives taking shape," said Kirby. "This event will also be a great chance for our community to meet our wonderful students and staff, and learn all about what makes their neighborhood schools so strong."

Kirby's speech will be broadcast live, at 7 p.m., via the district's YouTube channel.

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

Public Art: Enhancing Community Life

What does public art add to our communities culturally, economically and socially? Join us for coffee and conversation. All are welcome.

Moderator: Stephen Litt, Art & Architecture Critic; *Plain Dealer*. **Panelists:** Joyce Braverman, Shaker Hts. Director of Development • Erin Guido, LAND Studio Project Manager • Dawn Arrington, activist, artist and poet.

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Heights students delve into history of slavery and the Holocaust



Susan Stein talks to Nate Williams’s ninth-grade honors class in world history.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

Students at Heights High can take a wide range of elective classes. They can focus on their passions, such as music or art; or on their future careers, such as engineering or Web design. Or, they can expand their worldview by taking African American history or a course on the Holocaust. Mark Sack, who teaches the Holocaust course, wanted to share what his students learn with the rest of the school. He recently had an opportunity to do so, thanks to a grant from the @akiva program of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland.

The @akiva scholars-in-residence program brings authors, actors, artists, and thinkers from across the country to meet with Cleveland-area teens. The program sponsored a mid-January visit to Heights High from Susan Stein, acclaimed educator, actress, playwright, and teaching artist. She met with Donna Feldman’s College Credit Plus creative writing and college composition courses, Nate Williams’ honors world history class, and the Minority Student Achievement Network.

Stein introduced students to firsthand accounts of both the Holocaust and slavery, opening the door to numerous questions, comments and observations. Many of the teens were excited to read diary entries from people other than Anne Frank, in what Stein refers to as “history that has previously been hidden from us.”

Xavier, an upperclassman, said he was impressed with how Jewish people took the Star of David, a symbol that was intended to shame them, and turned it into a symbol of pride. The students discussed how other cultures have managed to take back terms or images designed to insult or belittle them, and claim them as their own.

Stein emphasized that the diaries students were reading were written in the moment, at a time when the extent of the horrors of the Holocaust were not yet fully known. This sense of suspense and growing dread struck a chord with another student, Michael, who said, “It felt like there was a bomb under the table waiting to go off, but only I knew it was there.”

Stein told Williams’ freshmen about Holocaust deniers, explaining that, as students, they needed to learn and share the truth. “I never say ‘Jews died’ in the Holocaust, because people die every day for all sorts of reasons. I only say ‘Jews were killed.’”

Feldman considered the experience invaluable for her students, especially because, this semester, her college composition curriculum revolves around issues of social justice. “This really got the ball rolling and gave them something to think about,” she said.

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



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What happens if the school tax levy fails on March 17?

Maureen Lynn

[If the tax levy fails on March 17,] for all of us who do support public education, the CH-UH school board will still have \$100 million-plus high school building debt, and a budget in excess of \$110 million to educate the roughly 5,000 students who come to school. (We have 20-percent chronic absenteeism.)

After adjustments in state formula funding (including EdChoice scholarships), the school board will still spend \$20,000 per pupil, compared to \$15,000 at “similar districts,” and to the \$12,000 state-wide average. District salaries for teachers, administrators and staff will still be at the top of the range in almost all categories, and fringe benefits will still add 49 percent on top of salaries.

The CH-UH City School District will still rank in the top 1 percent of the highest tax rates in Ohio, and [have] the highest tax burden among similar districts, as measured by the Ohio Department of Education.

I asked a levy supporter, “Is there a limit to what the union/

school board will spend?” The reply was, “the voters decide that.” Indeed, it is our responsibility to consider the impact on the Heights and the wider community.

Here is a sampling of what concerned residents are saying:

- “I have never voted against a levy in the 30 years, but the school district seems to see the residents as a limitless supply of tax dollars.”
- “Many people that will vote No are not against the school or specifically against the increase but more what people can afford.”
- “I’m a liberal Democrat . . . age 71 . . . working a very physical, nearly full-time, job . . . to pay my CH property tax.”
- “My wife and I are both teachers but were specifically warned by a real estate agent not to buy in CH because of the taxes.”

We are a middle-income community and an inner-ring suburb. In the last decade, we have experienced lower population, fewer homeowners and families, declining student enrollment, more short-term renters, and stagnant home values. When the next economic rainy day comes, the tapped-out

Heights taxpayer may come up short of funds to support vital services and needed improvements.

What message does a “No” vote on Issue 26 send to the community?

The proposed tax levy would increase the annual property tax on a \$150,000 house to \$6,114. For our fixed-income seniors, for families who want to stay here, for newcomers who want to live here, for longtime homeowners who need money for house repairs, and for local businesses that survive on local

dollars, a “No” vote is a welcome message of hope.

We continue to be very generous with our public schools, but it is time to re-balance our priorities to the wider community and “Keep the Heights Affordable.”

Maureen Lynn and her family moved from Pennsylvania to Cleveland Heights in 2011. She is treasurer of Tiger Nation 4 Lower Taxes (www.tigernation4lowertaxes.com), a PAC whose goal is to keep the Heights affordable.

School levy threatens Tiger Nation

Lois Lichtenstein

Voting for Issue 26, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights 7.9 mill school levy, will put our Tiger Nation on the list of endangered species.

In years past, it was unthinkable for anyone in my family to vote against a school levy. My husband spent his career as a Cleveland Heights elementary school principal. I was the Beachwood Schools communications coordinator for two decades. My sister taught at Shaker High. Our four children are Heights High graduates, and one became a school psychologist. We believed, and still do, in public education.

But this levy, if passed, would make our tax rate Ohio’s highest. The community can’t afford it. Here’s why:

- Our actual dollars spent per pupil, \$21,222, is already fifth highest among 611 school districts in Ohio. We’re in the top 1 percent.
- School enrollment of 5,029 declined 14 percent since 2011, yet the school board is seeking \$8.8 million with this levy, to educate 841 fewer students. That would be an 11.5 percent increase in taxpayer funds, the highest in Ohio. Based on the district’s five-year budget forecast, it would spend \$615 million; the highest compared to other districts, and \$80 million more than Shaker.
- The levy would cost the owner of a home valued at \$100,000 an added \$277 in property taxes yearly. Can you afford to pay \$72,000 in property taxes over the next 12 years on your \$130,000 home? Some owners could find their property tax higher than their mortgage.
- While our taxes are among the highest in Cuyahoga County, the state report card has given our schools an overall grade of D.

High taxes and poor grades don’t lead prospective buyers to our community. This levy is a threat to vulnerable citizens who may be forced to sell because they can’t afford to remain in their homes. I’m referring to the elderly, retired, those on fixed incomes, and those living in poverty. Nearly 19 percent of Cleveland Heights residents are below the poverty level.

Geoff Johnson, an attorney and longtime Cleveland Heights resident,

wrote in a recent *Heights Observer*, “. . . we lack the income base to support our property taxes at current tax levels. Raising them further will destroy the Heights.” Citing the median Cleveland Heights household income of \$36,397, he warns that, with a 2.5 percent annual budget growth, our property tax increases over the next 3–12 years would be astronomical. With tax delinquency rates rising, Johnson stated, “It means we are destroying our taxpayer base.”

While the board complains that vouchers are a financial drain, levy opponents like Johnson state that even [if one removes] vouchers from the picture, the district is still spending \$52 million more than Shaker Heights, \$171 million more than Solon, \$193 million more than Strongsville, and \$188 million more than Euclid.

The school board has placed seven operating levies and a \$135-million school improvement bond issue on the ballot since 2000. Jodi Sourini, school board president, said on *Cleveland.com* that the levy is a “big ask” of district voters, but “we have to for the sake of our children.”

What about the seniors in our community without the excellent health care benefits the board affords its administrators and teachers? What about the anxiety and stress many residents are likely to suffer not knowing where the money will come from to pay their taxes and mortgages, and keep their homes?

No one wants to deny children a good education, but the costs have become so extreme that the only way to be fair to everyone calls for compromise. This community has supported the school system beyond the point it can afford. The school board needs to face reality: this district must get its spending in line with other districts of similar size and comparable problems. Otherwise, our schools and community are heading for disaster.

Lois Lichtenstein spent the first half of her 40-year career as a Sun Press reporter, and the latter half as Beachwood Schools communications coordinator. After retiring she returned to the Sun Press as a freelance reporter, covering the CH-UH school board during summers, from 2002 to 2008.

We support CH-UH schools and the levy

Jeffrey and Susan Quill

We wanted to share our thoughts on the CH-UH school district, having lived in the Heights for over 25 years. I [Jeff] grew up in Shaker Heights and Susan traces her Heights’ roots back to the class of ’36 when her grandfather, Eric Knudson, graduated from Heights High.

We could have sent our children to one of the local private schools. We chose public.

Our children have flourished in the CH-UH school district; the opportunities have been boundless. The diversity of the environment has been wonderful in providing our children a window into other cultures, religions and social groups. The educational experiences have been even greater than the social ones.

The dedicated administrators, teachers and staff numerous times left us humbled: from music teachers, with small children of their own, who routinely stay well into the evening to help students prepare and rehearse; to U.S. history teachers that challenge our students to think critically and understand the events that made our country. Let’s not forget biology and environmental science teachers who organize trips into the rainforests of Central America—trips where the students fundraise all the expenses for the trip and teachers pay their own way. If this doesn’t demonstrate the commitment our educators have to our children, we don’t know what does.

You may question how we com-

pare to other schools, public and private, in the area. We challenge you to look at the universities our graduating students attend, examine the number of National Merit Scholars, and study the amount of educational scholarships that are awarded. Our schools do a wonderful job preparing our children to become productive members of society.

Are our schools perfect? No, they have room to improve. With a diverse student body comes a diverse set of challenges. There is always room for improvement. It is our job as residents of this fine community to support our schools and our children.

We support them by volunteering, I can’t tell you the number of adults I see, with no children in the schools, who give their time, energy and knowledge to aid in our students’ success. We also support our schools through funding. The method by which the state of Ohio funds education is broken—the Supreme Court of Ohio has said so on numerous occasions. The fact that its broken doesn’t alter the fact that the schools need our help.

Strong schools help a community thrive and prosper. Our continued support of our local public schools is one of the surest ways to ensure we have a strong vibrant community so that my grandchildren can someday brag that their great-great-grandfather graduated from the CH-UH school district.

Jeffrey and Susan Quill are Cleveland Heights residents.

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Heights Libraries' spring series embraces the arts

Create and Connect 
Heights Has
heART

Isabelle Rew

This spring, Heights Libraries invites people of all ages to engage with the arts through its new program series, "Create and Connect: Heights Has HeART." Inspired by art and artists in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights community, the library will host a wide range of programs where participants can come together to experience visual art, drama, film, literature, music and dance.

"Our community is very arts-oriented. We have our own art galleries, arts organizations and theater companies, and we're located close to some of the greatest cultural institutions in the country, like Cain Park, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Art and MOCA," said Maggie Kinney, special projects manager.

"On top of that," she continued, "many of our residents work for these organizations, so we have artists and creative people all around us, including our own staff. It just seemed to me it was about time to pull all of these things together and give them the spotlight they deserve."

Several programs have been curated specifically for those interested in creating art themselves. On Tuesday, March 24, at 2 p.m., at the University Heights branch, children ages 8 and older can learn to make their own movies using the magic of stop-motion animation. Teens will be

invited to draw models and compete in fun mini challenges in Teen Figure Drawing, on Tuesday, March 31, at 6 p.m., at the Lee Road branch. On Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m., adults can create one-of-a-kind art pieces from exotic plant prints in DIY Botanical Print, at the Noble Neighborhood branch.

Other programs will feature artistic takes on the library's typical offerings, such as a jazz-themed storytime for children, on Wednesday, April 29, at 11 a.m., at the Lee Road branch; a Power of the Arts-inspired trivia night on Tuesday, March 10, at 7 p.m., at Christopher's Pub; and a special Create and Connect edition of the Art Study Group, to be held Wednesday, April 22, at 7 p.m., at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

"While this series will encourage people at any level to create art, we acknowledge that the hands-on experience isn't for everyone," Kinney said. "That's why we made sure to offer plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy the arts from a safe, yet enjoyable, distance."

The series will culminate in a performance of "Caliban Ascendant," a ballet interpretation of Shakespeare's "The Tempest," performed by the Cleveland Chamber Collective and Inlet Dance at Ensemble Theatre in June.

"Art and creativity are crucial parts of the human experience," Kinney noted. "They help us understand one another in a very basic, profound way that creates empathy through the direct experience of emotion and beauty. And the library can offer that experience to anyone who walks through our doors."

Isabelle Rew is the community engagement associate 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, March 19, 7 p.m.

An Evening with Lisa Koops. Join Koops in a discussion of her book *Parenting Musically*, which portrays the "musicking" of eight diverse local families and how they use music in their everyday lives. A book signing will follow the talk.

Noble Neighborhood Library

2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Fridays, March 20, April 3, and April 17, 3:30 p.m.

Diversity Through the Arts. The Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio is offering this series for students in grades K-5. Hands-on art projects will focus on inclusion, identity and diversity, and explore collaboration and creativity. Registration begins March 6.

Lee Road Library

2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Tuesday, March 24, 6 p.m.

Create and Connect: Funny Figure Drawing. School-aged children and their families are invited to try out various art supplies and practice drawing models in silly costumes. Supplies will be provided. Registration begins March 10.

University Heights Library

13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Monday, March 2, 6:30 p.m.

Cleveland Goes to the Movies. This series features movies set in, filmed in, and about Cleveland. The March 2 screening will be "American Splendor" (2003, 101 mins., R), a biographical comedy-drama film about Harvey Pekar, the author of the *American Splendor* comic book series.



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Burning River Baroque series debuts at Blank Canvas CLE

Shari Nacson

Burning River Baroque continues its eighth season with a series of thought-provoking performances, beginning Wednesday, March 18. *Witches: Revered & Reviled* has been crafted to connect baroque music to present day issues of othering, bullying and stigmatization.

According to musical program's description, the wish for an ordered society "frequently led to the persecution of individuals who were accused of straying outside the established conventional boundaries of 'acceptable' behavior." The program focuses particularly on the criminalization of women who were labeled as not fitting into social norms.

Ironically, while women "ascribed with supernatural abilities" were severely outcasted and punished, they also were viewed as a resource to help those who suffered from mental and spiritual maladies. Thus, the program looks closely at reverence, as well as repulsion, through the stories of Circe, the Witch of Endor, and the Furies in



Cleveland Heights resident Malina Rauschenfels, soprano, is co-artistic director of Burning River Baroque.



Witches: Revered & Reviled includes the premiere of a newly commissioned piece by composer Alexis Bacon.



Paula Maust, harpsichordist, is co-artistic director of Cleveland Heights's Burning River Baroque.

a broad range of national styles and traditions of the 17th century.

Audience members will also be treated to the premiere of a newly-commissioned work by Alexis Bacon. Guest artists include Kristine Caswelch, soprano; William Marshall, baritone; Sarah Elizabeth Cranor, violinist; Stephanie Zimmerman, violinist; and Jamie Gallupe, cellist.

The week starts with outreach workshops and performances at the Renee Jones Empowerment Center and Bard High School Early College, both in Cleveland. Musical perfor-

mances, open to the public, will take place on Wednesday, March 18, at 7 p.m., at Blank Canvas CLE (2174 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights); Saturday, March 21, at 8 p.m., at Buckland Museum of Magic and Witchcraft (2155 Broadview Road, Cleveland); and Sunday, March 22, at 1 p.m., at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland (21600 Shaker Boulevard, Shaker Heights). All public performances have a \$10 to \$20 suggested donation.

Founded in 2012, Burning River Baroque has been praised by a *Boston Musical Intelligencer* critic as "a group

that left an indelible print on my psyche." Audience members report that they appreciate the opportunity to experience the marriage of critical thought and musical performance in a welcoming and engaging atmosphere. One attendee described the experience as "not classical music as a privileged escape from reality, but classical music as a way to engage with and reframe current reality."

Visit www.burning-river-baroque.org to learn more.

Mostly a mom, Shari Nacson is a freelance editor, social worker, and nonprofit consultant who makes her home in Cleveland Heights. More than anything, Nacson is inspired by kids and adults who build connection through kindness.

Spring show opens at White Gallery



Backyard Spring, by Andrea Dawson.

Robin Outcalt

The White Gallery in St. Paul's Church announces the opening of its Spring Show, which runs through May 31, and features the work of five Cleveland-area artists.

In her photographs, Andrea Dawson focuses on subjects from nature, and imbues her images with a sense of serenity.

Two painters, while both utilizing brushes and paints, will display very different types of finished work in the exhibition. Sam Roth will show his soft, abstract, acrylic paintings on canvas, while Emmalyn Tringali, employing oil on canvas, will bring to St. Paul's her new series of vivid landscapes.

Rounding out this group show are two artists who create unique sculptural and decorative objects. Mona Kolesar manipulates acrylic and bent wood to make free-standing sculptures, and wall art. Blown-glass pieces in a range of exquisite colors, created by Shayna Roth Pentecost, will further adorn the gallery.

The nonprofit White Gallery is located inside of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, at the intersection of Coventry Road and Fairmount Boulevard. The gallery is open on weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Saturdays and Sundays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For information, call 216-932-5815.

Robin M. Outcalt is the co-chair of the White Gallery at St. Paul's Episcopal church in Cleveland Heights.



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Heights Arts announces March exhibitions and concert

Lauren Freeman

Heights Arts, the multi-disciplinary arts organization in Cleveland Heights, will celebrate the creativity of its musical and visual artist members throughout the month of March.

On Friday, March 6, Heights Arts will host the opening of its second *Members Show*, in which about 40 Heights Arts artist members will exhibit their work.

Most Heights Arts exhibitions are curated by guest curators or its Exhibition Community Team, which comprises community volunteers with connections and expertise in the visual arts community. This team has been responsible for 20 years of the highest quality exhibitions featuring the region's emerging and well-established artists.

Greg Donley, Heights Arts' Exhibition Community Team leader, describes how the *Members Show* is different: "One of the



Artwork by Stephen Calhoun

founding goals of Heights Arts was to provide an exhibition venue where artists who live in the Heights could display their art and encounter the work of others. Our members show exemplifies that mission in the most open way—no curators, no jury, just works of art created by our members and presented in our public gallery setting. Come see what your neighbors have been up to!"

On Friday, March 20, self-taught artist member Stephen



Red Campion

Calhoun opens his show in the Spotlight gallery, using mixed-process photography and generative art in his most recent work, centering on geometric symmetry.

Red Campion will perform the third Heights Arts gallery concert of the season, on March 14, at 7 p.m. The gallery concert series features musical artist members in free performances, connecting confirmed or new classical music enthusiasts to local ensembles, and

making the programs accessible to everyone.

Established in 2009, Red Campion is an ensemble comprising four singers and one pianist, highlighting the glories of the voice and vocal literature. The ensemble's artists are Lara Troyer, soprano; Denise Milner-Howell, mezzo-soprano; Timothy Culver, tenor; Brian Keith Johnson, baritone; and Judith Ryder, pianist.

"Red Campion has never performed in Cleveland Heights," said Troyer, "but two of our members live in Cleveland Heights, and we are very excited about performing in our own backyard! Clearly the arts are a huge part of life in Cleveland Heights, and we want to be a part of the arts scene and bring live vocal music to our community."

For more information on Heights Arts' programs and events, visit www.heightsarts.org.

Lauren Freeman is a marketing intern at Heights Arts.

WRC sings Mozart's 'Great' Mass at Gesu

David Gilson

The Western Reserve Chorale (WRC), a chorus of more than 100 voices from across Northeast Ohio, will share the incomparable mastery of Mozart in concert on March 22.

It is a vexing truth that both of Mozart's two towering choral works were both left unfinished. While the *Requiem* was not completed due to the composer's untimely death, less is known as to why the *Mass in C minor* was not completed.

With its magnificent and mighty choruses, sensuous and ornate solos, and large orchestral and solo instrumental segments, the *Mass in C minor* is considered Mozart's "Great" Mass. It was unlike any church music of its time, and stood apart from the restrictions of its era's "enlightened" commissioners of church music. It represents an example of Mozart creating, in his own voice, a work of substantial grandeur in the nature of Bach's *Mass in B minor* or the larger works of Handel.

WRC will be joined by sopranos Marian Vogel and Lara Troyer, tenor Brian Skoog and baritone Dylan Glenn in presenting this glorious work for chorus and orchestra. The concert is at 3 p.m., Sunday, March 22, at Church of the Gesu, 2470 Mirimar Blvd., in University Heights.

David Gilson is the artistic director of the Western Reserve Chorale, director of music at Church of the Saviour, and associate dean for student affairs at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

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Pulitzer finalist gets Cleveland premiere at Dobama Theatre



Colin Anderson

Dobama Theatre will present the Cleveland premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-finalist “Dance Nation,” March 6–29.

In the play, by Clare Barron, an army of preteen competitive dancers from Liverpool, Ohio, are plotting to take over the world. If their new routine is good enough, they’ll claw their way to the top at the Boogie Down Grand Prix in Tampa Bay.

Partly inspired by the reality-TV show “Dance Moms,” the play is about ambition, growing up, and how to be oneself in the heat of it all. It explores the exhilaration and terror of being a kid through the story of a group of 13-year-old dance troupe members, as portrayed by adult actors.

“I don’t remember exactly how I came to [the decision to cast adults,] only that it was always part of the play,” said playwright Barron in an interview with Broadway Blog. “I think in part I was tired of the casting convention of hiring petite 25-year-olds to play 13, 15, etc. Thirteen-year-olds are very different than 15-year-olds. . . I was more interested in people of all ages who had the creature spirit of a 13-year-old than people in their 20s. And I was interested in how those people and their bodies moved regardless of any virtuosic talent.”

The theme of “creature spirit” carries through “Dance Nation,” which focuses on the animal side of adolescent girlhood. With adults embodying each dancer, the audience is able to see both the adults these teens will become, and how their teen selves carry over into adulthood. The dancers are confronted with their own changing bodies, budding sexuality, competition, and violence. Through it all, they are a community of women figuring out what it means to raise their

voices—an overarching theme in all of Barron’s work.

“I’d say that for me writing is all about fighting repression and

saying things out loud that you feel in private but are too ashamed to admit,” explained Barron. The playwright’s own sense of imposter syndrome, which followed the success of her first play, “You Got Older,” inspired her to write “Dance Nation.” “In a way this play and all my plays are about letting something out,” Barron said. “As a writer, the tricky part is knowing when that purge is life-affirming and when it’s destructive.”

Barron is a playwright and performer from Wenatchee, Wa. In addition to being a Pulitzer Prize finalist, “Dance Nation” received the 2017 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and The Relentless Award, established in honor of Philip Seymour Hoffman. Barron is the recipient of a Whiting Award for Drama, the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award at The Vineyard, and the Page 73 Fellowship.

Dobama’s production of “Dance Nation” is directed by Shannon Sindelar, and features Wes Allen, DeLee Cooper, Carolyn Demanelis, Sidney Edwards, Avani Hamilton, Anne McEvoy, Mariama Whyte, Tom Woodward and Calista Zajac.

Performances are Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$32 to \$38; senior, student and military discounts are available.

In an effort to remove economic barriers and make Dobama’s performances accessible to everyone, the first Sunday of every production is a 7:30 p.m. pay-as-you-can performance. For “Dance Nation,” that performance is March 8.

For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit www.dobama.org, or call the box office at 216-932-3396.

Colin Anderson is the general manager of Dobama Theatre and a graduate of Oberlin College. His training is in directing and dramatic literature.

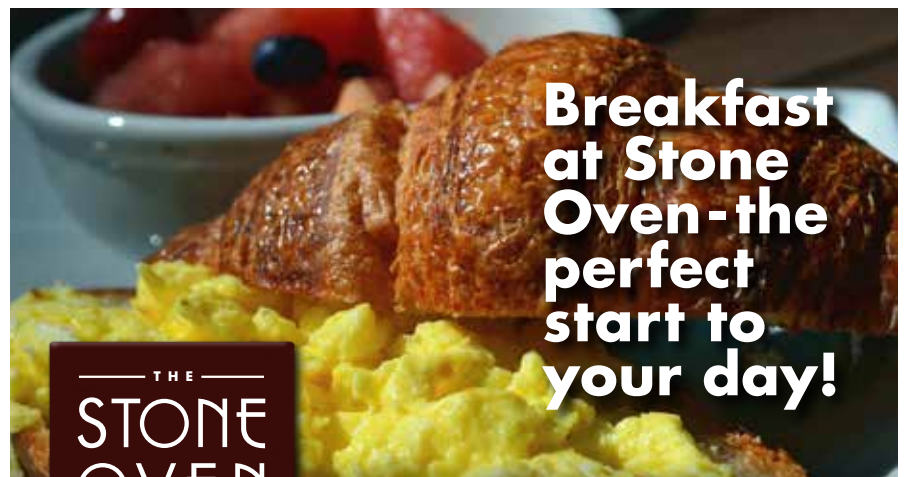
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Soprano Angela Zawada in recital at First Baptist



Angela Zawada

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G. Michael Skerritt

Angela Zawada, the Chancel Choir soprano soloist of the First Baptist

Church of Greater Cleveland, will present a recital of classical works at 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 8, in the Gothic sanctuary of the church at 3630 Fairmount Blvd.

The program will feature works by Handel, Mozart, Schumann, Fauré and Samuel Barber, spanning several musical periods and languages. Visions of night and dreams trace a path through the program from “O Sleep” from Handel’s oratorio *Semele*, to Fauré’s “Après un rêve” (“After A Dream”) to Barber’s “Sure on this Shining Night.” The program also features fiery pieces, such as Fauré’s “Fleur jetée,” with its virtuosic piano score, performed by Adam Whiting, a Cleveland School of the Arts faculty member.

As a soprano soloist at the

church, Zawada has performed solos from works by Handel, Mendelssohn and Saint-Saens, and participated in theater productions of “Les Misérables” and “Evita,” presented by the Happy Ending Lyric Players, the church’s resident performing arts company, now in its 44th season.

Zawada holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Notre Dame and a Master of Music degree from Roosevelt University. A recent addition to the music scene in Cleveland, she was active in the opera scene in the Chicago area, with such companies as Chicago’s Folks Operetta, Sinfonietta Bel

Canto, Katydid Productions, Main Street Opera and Lingerie Lyrique. Zawada was a founding member of, and a performer with, Chicago’s VOX 3 Collective, which specializes in performances of art song literature. She is currently studying with Richard Anderson in Cleveland.

The recital is free and open to the public. Voluntary donations will support the music and fine arts program at First Baptist.

G. Michael Skerritt is a retired engineer and a member of the First Baptist Church. Music and theater are his avocations.

Choral Arts presents world premiere Mass

Marge Geiger

So, just who is George Bristow? Choral Arts Cleveland and its director, Brian Bailey, invite you to find out as it brings to life the *Mass in C* by 19th-century American composer George Bristow in a world premiere of the composition. Supported in part by the citizens of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, the evening begins at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 13, with a talk on Bristow and American classical music, followed by the choral performance. The venue is Fairmount Presbyterian Church, 2757 Fairmount Blvd., in Cleveland Heights.

The *Mass in C* (1884–85) is filled with lush romantic phrasings that segue into joyously spirited, energetic and robust movements. Its expressive text setting infuses movements, such as the Kyrie, with an evocative imploring quality, and the Credo with moods of triumph. Other artistic assets of the Mass include its varied use of vocal solos alternated with long choral sections and short instrumental interludes, and the use of bold homophonic styles. In it, said Bailey, “Bristow shows a command of compositional craft and an understanding of the voice. It is the work of a mature, confident composer who had found his unique voice.”

Bristow’s Mass is especially significant to Choral Arts because of Bailey’s work in resurrecting music that has been too long neglected. Intrigued by the musical and emotional strengths of this work, Bailey completed the first modern printed edition of Bristow’s *Mass in C* and presented it as part of his doctoral thesis at the University of Iowa. Prior to Bailey’s work, except for the Kyrie, which had been typeset, the Mass existed only in manuscript form. During Bristow’s lifetime, only two movements of his Mass were performed. Because there is no

evidence that the work was ever performed in its entirety, this project will almost certainly be the world premiere of the complete work.

Now in its 45th year of bringing both well-known classics and premieres to its audiences, Choral Arts feels privileged to be sharing this forgotten work. The project continues the chorus’s commitment to showcasing forgotten and contemporary works alongside more familiar choral repertoire. The commitment is, in part, a result of listening to audiences who have frequently told Choral Arts singers that they enjoy being introduced to new pieces and new ways of seeing and hearing choral music. Concert audiences have fully supported Choral Arts in exploring these paths, and have asked the membership and its director to do more of that kind of work.

Bailey is in his second year with Choral Arts, having filled the director position upon the retirement of former director Martin Kessler.

Bailey has been director of choirs at Cleveland State University since 2009, where he conducts the CSU Chorale and University Chorus, coordinates the voice area, and teaches aural skills and conducting.

The Bristow Mass will be performed with the organ accompaniment fleshed out by Bailey in his 2016 thesis. Soloists for the performance are Anna White, soprano; Kimberly Lauridsen, mezzo; Tyler Young, tenor; and Jelani Watkins, bass. The concert is a free-will-donation event, open to the public. For more details, visit www.choralartscleveland.org.

Marge Geiger is a board member and singer for Choral Arts Society of Cleveland, an English professor at Tri-C East Campus, a Cleveland Heights resident for 30 years, and a patron of many Cleveland Heights businesses. She is married to Joe Geiger, a retired Cleveland Heights High School English teacher.

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SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

When my daughter was in the eighth grade at Roxboro Middle School, about 18 years ago, she came home one day and said to me, “You have to come in and talk to my social studies class.”

I said, “Really? You want me to come and talk to your class?”

She said, “No. But Mr. Swaggard said we have to bring in a relic from the Sixties.”

I said, “Uh . . . Do you know what ‘relic’ means?”

She said, “Uh . . . yeah.”

I said, “[sigh] Okay. As long as you know . . .”

So I arranged with Mr. Swaggard to come in to talk about the ‘60s. I asked him what period my daughter’s class was. He told me it was first period. I thought: Good. I’ll get it done early and get out of there.

I went in on the appointed day, talked to my daughter’s first-period class, and started packing up my materials, semi-exhausted. Mr. Swaggard came up to me and said, “That went really well. Now we have second and third periods. Then fourth period we’ll have lunch, then there’s fifth and seventh periods.”

I said, “Wait. I have to do this five times? In one day?”

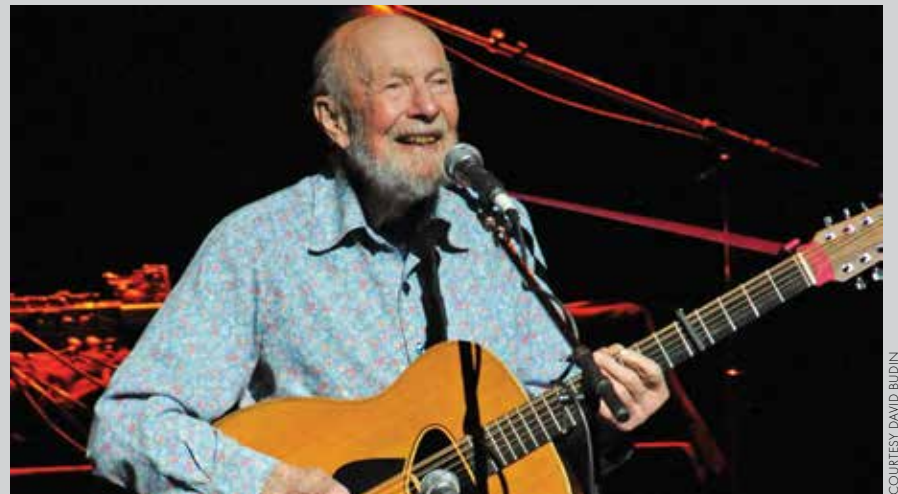
I did it four more times. Then I went home and immediately fell asleep.

It’s not as if I didn’t have respect for what teachers do before that day, but I really understood it after that.

A popular teacher, Robert Swaggard taught for many years at Roxboro and then at Heights High. And he has served as Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the CH-UH Board of Education since 2013. The Heights system has many such dedicated teachers and administrators.

Even when I hated school and skipped school and didn’t do much school work, I still had respect for (most of) my teachers. I didn’t blame them for my not wanting to be there. I just didn’t want to be there. And I really liked many of them and often engaged them in conversation, outside of class. And one teacher in particular, Clair McElfresh, my choir director at Heights High, inspired me to the point that I believe he actually saved my life. I told him that, too, about 10 years ago.

Here’s the thing: I went to hear Pete Seeger speak at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in the 1990s. Pete was a hero of mine (and millions of others), an outspoken and tireless activist for justice and equality for more than 70 years. After being interviewed for a while at the Rock Hall, he opened the session up to questions from the audience. A woman asked, “With so much



Pete Seeger, in the early 2000s, still spreading the word.

going on in the world, where do we start? What can we do?”

Pete said, “You start right in your own community. And you do whatever you can do to help someone or some organization. And it will spread out from there.”

I took that to heart and started volunteering all over the place, including in the Heights schools, in a variety of ways—doing, as Pete said, what I could do.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, I thought that I was going to make a difference in the world as a musician, a singer-songwriter—become famous and disseminate ideas to the world that would help people, somehow. That didn’t happen, exactly.

My son, I think, has never tried or wanted to become world-famous, like I did. But I believe he’s the one in

the family who is accomplishing what I set out to do—both he and his wife, my daughter-in-law. He’s the coach of the Heights High Swimming Team and she’s a teacher at Heights. They’re the ones who are guiding and inspiring kids—they along with their fellow teachers and coaches at Heights. And at every good school in the country. They are helping to plant the seeds for the future—doing what they can do, and letting it spread out from there.

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.



COURTESY DAVID BUDIN

Our Heights Schools are **UNDER ATTACK**



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—ELIZABETH KIRBY
Superintendent, CH-UH Schools

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Defend Our Schools and Communities