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

Heights Arts showcases images of activism

Greg Donley

Heights-area artists can always be relied upon to respond to current events, and the recent activism around Black Lives Matter and related social-justice issues has energized a number of artists to begin creating new work. Some of the most immediate responses have come in the form of digital photography shared by way of social media.

Heights Arts staff were immediately struck by images that not only told powerful stories, but also could stand alone as visual art. Images have the power to pose questions and eloquently express things that can be hard to express in few words.

This idea has been explored previously at Heights Arts through two past exhibitions of photojournalism, where photographs that had initially been used editorially to support

A photo by Bryan Clark, from downtown Cleveland.

journalistic articles were gathered, framed, and presented at Heights Arts' gallery. Heights Arts exhibition planners referred to these images as "stealth art"—works of art that

sneak into one's consciousness under camouflage.

As people began to post images representing their experiences of the protests and responses to racism, Heights Arts asked some of these artists if the nonprofit arts center could share their images through its own social media outlets.

The first two artists that were asked, Bryan Clark and Aj Almy, had posted photos from the May 30 protest in downtown Cleveland; both agreed to let Heights Arts share their images. Since then, the list of artists has grown, and includes former Heights Arts intern and Cleveland Institute of Art graduate Davon Brantley.

Heights Arts plans to continue sharing images that tell the story of how artists are responding to this moment and to the Black Lives Matter

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Coventry P.E.A.C.E. tenants again face uncertain future

ARTFUL Executive Director Shannon Morris installed this message on the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park fence.

Frank W. Lewis

March 29 marked the second anniversary of Heights Libraries taking control of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. property, which comprises the beloved playground, adjacent green-space and the former Coventry School building. At the time, the future for the building's tenants—arts and community-service nonprofits—looked bright. Today, however, they face eviction. Again.

Amid recent negotiations for a

long-term lease, Heights Libraries issued a July 9 press release that casts the tenants as disorganized, and raised the possibility of tearing the building down in order to . . . well, that's not clear. The situation is eerily reminiscent of the handling of the property in 2017.

A full history is available at the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus website.

After Heights Libraries purchased the property in 2018 for \$1 from the CH-UH school district,

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CH City Manager takes new position

Kim Sergio Inglis

At the July 20 Cleveland Heights City Council meeting, City Manager Tanisha Briley announced her resignation, effective

Tanisha Briley

Sept. 1. She will become the city manager for the city of Gaithersburg, Md., located outside of Washington, D.C.

Mary Trupo, the city's director of communications and public engagement, sent out a news release after the meeting. In a subsequent e-mail, and updated release, Trupo announced that the current vice city manager, Susanna Niermann O'Neil, will become the acting city manager after Briley's departure, stating that council members selected Niermann O'Neil "to lead the city through the next 16 months and the final transition to a strong mayor form of government."

The city's full announcement can be viewed on the city's website, at www.clevelandheights.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=295.

Briley has been Cleveland Heights' city manager since August 2013.

In its news release, the city listed the following accomplishments: "Briley successfully led Cleveland Heights through the lingering effects of the Great Recession and brought financial stability to the city through the development of responsible budget processes, improved financial management practices and creative cost-saving strategies. She facilitated

continued on page 6

Gardeners' market to open with Covid guidelines in place

Brenda H. May

The second season of Noble Gardeners' Market launches Aug. 1. The market will operate at the corner of Noble and Roanoke roads, from 10 a.m. to noon, on Saturdays through Sept. 19.

Gardeners who grow fruit, vegetables and flowers in their yards or community gardens are welcome to sell. Each seller should bring a table or ground cloth on which to display items, and must be able to make change for customers. Sellers must sign in but are not charged for space, and sellers who

Shoppers and sellers at the Noble market in 2019.

live and grow outside of Cleveland Heights are welcome to participate.

Some growers planted their gardens this spring to make sure they have something to sell at the market. One Richmond Heights

man expanded his already-extensive backyard beds to grow a variety of tomatoes and peppers. A woman in Cleveland Heights planted her entire community garden plot in garlic, and

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Heights Observer August 1, 2020

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www.heightsobserver.org

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

CH City Council must choose new member

To the Editor:

This is an open letter to Cleveland Heights City Council Members:

It’s often said “politics is the art of compromise,” but that sentiment appears lost on CH City Council members. On July 6, they decided NOT to decide which of four vetted candidates would fill the vacant seat created more than four months ago, when Melissa Yasinow resigned on March 3.

CH City Charter mandates council to choose a new member when a member resigns. By April 6, council [had] received 22 applications for the open seat. On June 22, it interviewed four finalists via Zoom meetings. Three weeks later, council members met, ostensibly to vote on the vacant-seat replacement, but, instead of fulfilling their mandated responsibility, they were unable to make a decision.

This lack of leadership could not have come at a more critical time for Cleveland Heights residents. Changes need to be made to ordinances and our city charter to prepare for the transition to a directly elected mayor form of government that voters overwhelmingly chose last November. This is a large and pressing task. It is

compounded by the fact that we are living in unusually challenging times that create extraordinary demands on government.

A seventh vote could prevent 3-3 council vote stalemates. Given the various wide-ranging and unprecedented demands that council is required to fulfill, and especially the relatively short timeline to accomplish the tasks of charter change, we strongly encourage council to make its decision regarding a new council member as soon as possible.

We hope that council [will] choose that candidate based on her/his statements, application, background and interviews. We hope that council deliberations have answered the question, “Who has the most familiarity with the tasks at hand and would be ready on day one to put his/her energy and expertise to work for our greater good?”

Time is of the essence and there is much to do. Please choose the new council member now.

Signed by David Krauss, Joy Roller, Kermit Lind, Rhonda Davis Lovejoy, Helen Hertz, Jo Fox, Tracey Lind, Paul Greenberg, Bob Brown, Paul Volpe, Sue Berger, Sue Dean Dyke, Karen Smith and Amy Jacobs.

Why I marched with Safer Heights

Chris Patterson

On June 14, 2020, I marched in my first protest march.

Like most of us, I was horrified to witness the slow, public execution of a man who, by all accounts, had done nothing to warrant his death sentence.

Nonetheless, at first, when people started protesting and calls for reform were being made, I did nothing. Not because I didn’t care. But because I knew nothing would change. This was just another remake of a tired old story.

But then I read an article (which I’ve since lost track of). The writer argued that this time might be different. This time he was seeing large crowds of white people coming out in support. White people have always been involved in the civil rights movement, he admitted, but this time it wasn’t just hippies and students and clergy. This time was different—comfortably middle-class white suburbanites were marching, too.

And so, the writer said, maybe—just maybe—this time things might actually change.

Still, I hesitated.

It’s a complicated problem. I don’t completely agree with all of any group’s proposed reforms. The police aren’t all bad. Many are heroes who became cops because being Spiderman was not a viable career choice.

But the status quo is unacceptable. I’m tired of the endless “war on crime” being waged in my country. The police need to demilitarize. Something must change.

Still, I did nothing.

I’m too busy, too old, too tired. Then I remembered that video

of that man dying. And then the one of his daughter, gleefully proclaiming that her daddy’s going to change the world.

The biggest barrier, however, remained: Is it really my place to fight this fight? Who am I to be interjecting my comfortable white self into this Black people’s movement? Would it be—or at least seem like—I was under the delusion they needed to be saved by the great white hope? Shouldn’t this story feature Black heroes in the lead roles, not yet more white actors stealing the limelight?

I’m not sure I could have overcome this last barrier, even with those hopeful words: things might change this time because middle-class white people are getting involved.

But then there was that Wanda Sykes video. Funny, smart, mellow, always-keeping-it-real Wanda Sykes. I’ve always loved her. And here she was, correcting me, educating me. She reminded me that this is a white people problem. And that white people need to be the ones to fix it. White people need to be the ones to step up and stop it. We need to be the ones out marching for reform. Otherwise it just won’t happen.

She was right.

And so, with the hopeful words of that unknown writer bouncing around in my head, spurred on by that gentle kick in the pants from Wanda Sykes, I got my face mask out and walked to Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park.

And then, I marched.

Chris Patterson is a new Heights resident who wants to help, but sometimes has to get out of his own way to do so.

Hart states council has duty to select a new member

To the Editor:

I have received a letter from 14 respected citizens regarding council having a duty to appoint a seventh council member. I agree with them.

I know the mayor said publicly that he thought we did not have to appoint someone, and at least one other council person has posted on Facebook that we might not appoint someone, but, in my view, making this decision is our duty.

Because the city manager resigned at our last meeting, we had to deal with her replacement and the transition to another executive leader. So we did not meet on the appointment, which we had intended to do, but will debate it in an August meeting. I only agreed to vote for an August recess when council agreed to have an August meeting to debate the appointment.

That said—there are four great candidates for the seat and only six current council members. We have to get the agreement of four of us to appoint one of those candidates. The odds here are tough and if we reach impasse we will need to have a public vote so all can see where each of us stands. I have suggested to council a process whereby our voting could first narrow the candidates to two, which would make an end resolution more likely. It should not be difficult to collaborate. If any one of us doesn’t get our preferred candidate, the outcome would still be good given the excellent candidates.

I believe it is our job to overcome an impasse. We need to come to a resolution and should not end the meeting until we have fulfilled our duty. None of us will able to publicly address what goes on in executive sessions. But the end result will be an open vote in council. Rest assured I have already made my selection and am willing to do my duty to debate and collaborate to come to a resolution. I am urging council as a body to do so as well.

Melody Hart
Cleveland Heights City Council member

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HEIGHTS OBSERVER

Another curve to flatten

Nikki Newman

Thanks to Covid-19, the term “flatten the curve” rests at the forefront of our minds. As we head toward the November election, where we undoubtedly will find ourselves casting votes in the midst of a pandemic, there’s another curve that we need to flatten: the absentee ballot curve.

I’m encouraging all *Heights Observer* readers not only to print out your absentee ballot request form, but also to print out a few extra copies for your family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Start having conversations now about the November election.

In a video conference with Ohio’s Ready for November Task Force, Ned Foley, director of the election law program at The Ohio State University’s Mortiz College of Law, said:

“We cannot procrastinate with respect to voting this year. This is not the year to wait. This is the year to be upfront about this. . . . meaning not everybody should apply for an absentee ballot at the last minute, because if you do, you’re going to swamp the capacity of your local election workers who are trying their best to meet the demand of what’s going to be a high turnout elec-

tion. They can’t handle that demand just the way the hospitals couldn’t handle it if everyone turned up for a bed at the same time. So the Secretary [of State] said you’ll get a card around Labor Day to remind you if you haven’t done it already, but, as he said, you can do it now.”

Foley urges Ohioans to spread out ballot applications over a longer period of time by sending in absentee ballot request forms now.

Heights Libraries has ballot request forms available at all four of its branches, where they are located by the tax forms.

Alternatively, registered voters can go to the Ohio Secretary of State’s website (sos.state.oh.us) and print out an absentee ballot request form.

Voters then mail the request forms to the county board of elections, then wait to receive the ballot. The website provides a Voter Toolkit where voters can track the status of their ballot requests, as well as their returned absentee ballots.

A Cleveland Heights resident since 2015, Nikki Newman is a graduate of the Future-Heights Leadership Workshop series and is a member of the FutureHeights Marketing Committee. She is a mom, wife, gardener, crafter, organizer, and local enthusiast.

School district should repay misspent funds

Jim and Mary Hurley

In October 2019, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District commissioned a survey of “500 likely March 2020 primary voters” in the district from R Strategy Group (RSG) and Lake Research Partners (LRP), costing taxpayers \$34,675.

An investigation by the Ohio Auditor of State found the survey work performed was in support of the levy campaign. The levy, Issue 26 on the March 2020 primary ballot, asked voters to approve an \$8.9 million annual property tax levy increase.

In January 2020, Cleveland Heights resident Garry Kanter submitted a complaint to the State Auditor of Ohio alleging public tax dollars were being spent on a survey that violated Ohio Revised Code prohibiting local school districts from spending public money to influence elections.

Kanter provided evidence from the survey itself, as well as e-mail correspondence between the district and its consultants, to support the allegation that the intent of the survey was to help the district position the levy for passage.

In February 2020, the state’s Special Audit Task Force “determined to open a preliminary audit and investigation into the allegations.”

The Ohio Auditor of State Special Investigations Unit issued its findings in a Case Closing Memo (Case # 2020-CA11101) on April 21, 2020. The State Auditor found:

- “The polling was performed in an effort to support the passage of the levy.”
- “The District’s response states that the District agrees with our position that the work ultimately performed by RSG and LRP was in support of

the levy campaign. However, the District maintains that their purpose was to communicate with the residents of the District and that the work performed by RSG and LRP was contrary to the work for which the District had contracted. The District’s position is undermined by the facts which indicate the District was aware of the scope of the work intended to be performed by RSG and LRP prior to the work being performed.”

• “Even if we accept the District’s position that it did not intend to have work performed in support of the levy campaign, this does not excuse the payment of \$34,675 in public funds for such a result. The District should be actively pursuing repayment of these misspent funds.”

The memo also stated that “the facts clearly support the issuance of a Finding For Recovery (FFR).”

In a July 13 e-mail, the Northeast Region Auditor’s office confirmed that the Special Investigation Unit’s findings are part of the CH-UH district’s 2020 financial audit. A public report will be issued when the audit is complete.

We believe all citizens and taxpayers in the district should want to see the district recover the misused public funds and spend the funds on the children attending the schools, rather than on illegal efforts to influence elections. We hope that in the future the school district, its board and employees, will more closely follow state law and not try to “game” the citizens who are funding the district.

Jim and Mary Hurley have been residents of Cleveland Heights for the past 15 years.



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Local control shouldn't mean going it alone



THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

The 2020-21 school year in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights district is expected to begin Sept. 2. The year will be unlike any other, with back-to-school excitement being tempered by health-related worries. We know children learn best when they are with their teachers in person, and families need teachers to take over instruction, but will the benefits outweigh the risks?

Covid-19 will dominate daily life for now, but Superintendent Liz Kirby hopes this will be the only year the virus factors into when children are in school, how they get there, what they do each day, and how much contact they have with others. She is determined to keep students on track. They cannot afford to lose more learning time, but how do you operate when so much is unknown?

Education is a shared responsibility of the state legislature and local school districts. Sadly, when it comes to planning for education in a pandemic, the legislature punted.

Under the soft-peddled label of local control, the state has abdicated its responsibility to provide funds or guidance that would help districts educate children safely. The Ohio Department of Health issued guidelines, but otherwise state leaders washed their hands of support or responsibility. "There isn't even a requirement that districts have a plan for opening," noted an incredulous Kirby.

Districts have been asked to accomplish something nearly impossible: Quickly, amidst threatening uncertainty, and without guidance or funding, transform a traditional institution into a health-driven learning environment. A sound plan is not enough. Parents, school employees and students must feel confident that their safety will not be sacrificed.

While state leaders are ducking their responsibility, our local leaders

are not.

They looked to other states for planning models and took advantage of resources from the American Federation of Teachers and the Northeast Ohio Education Service Center.

Weekly meetings with superintendents from other first-ring suburbs have been helpful, and school district personnel have used their experience and perspective to link plans to reality. A listening campaign reached two-thirds of district parents.

Kirby plans another outreach to every family to discuss their choices, worries and needs, and she will continue to consult with teachers. This active outreach is unlike anything I have seen in my 40 years in the district.

For Kirby, the interaction with parents has been the silver lining of this disaster. She said the district is learning how to connect better with families and learn from their experiences. This change will have lasting benefits.

To maximize the benefits of local control, Kirby said she will listen, keep trying to identify issues that might have been missed, and consider the positions of everyone involved. But the buck stops with her. In the end, she and the board of education must decide how to proceed.

Making school safe is expensive. Revenue shortfalls left the district and state without resources, and, so far, the federal government has been unwilling to invest. Nonetheless, the pressure is on to educate kids at school.

Kirby is a realist. She knows whatever plan is finally adopted will not be perfect or accepted by all, funding might be limited and new, unpredicted issues will emerge. When the cracks appear, our job is to press for solutions without trashing the people who make the hard decisions. We all have a stake in helping to make this unusual year successful. Recognizing that it is a nearly impossible task is the place to start.

Kirby carries a heavy load. She also supplied the reassuring tone we need when she stated, "We will come out the other side."

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.

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Provided by *Funny Times*, a Cleveland Heights-based business.

The consulting racket



HEIGHTS OF
DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

Since the 1980s, municipal budgets across the country have been decimated by state and federal funding cuts. In 2015, Cleveland Heights voters passed their first income tax increase in more than 30 years. During that campaign, at a resident’s request, City Manager Tanisha Briley documented over 100 staff positions eliminated during the previous 15 to 20 years. Now, with tax revenue diminished due to Covid-19, the city faces further cuts and layoffs.

Reduced staffing is just one reason why a municipal executive—a city manager or mayor—may bring in outside contractors. Another justification is the need for specialized skills and knowledge not required for regular operations. Or, it can simply be an ideological predilection.

When should cities hire outside consultants? When do the results justify the expenditure? When are they a waste of tax dollars? And when does outsourcing amount to privatizing essential government functions?

In recent years we have seen instances of all of the above. Responsibility for these decisions and their outcomes rests with Briley and the city councils that have overseen her tenure. Here are a few examples:

In 2016, with no public justification, the entire building department was replaced by outsourcing its functions to the national for-profit corporation, SAFEbuilt Inc.

Last year, under the city’s director of communications and public engagement, the development of a “brand” for Cleveland Heights was farmed out to Columbus consulting firm Align2Market. The disastrous result (“Cleveland Heights: We Choose This”) was never implemented, but nevertheless lightened the city’s coffers by some \$80,000. Align2Market also produced a marketing video for the city that was so insipid and off-the-mark residents shouted it down; we still don’t know the cost of that fiasco.

We do not expect the city to employ in-house branding specialists and

video producers; but surely there are local professionals who understand and can represent the community better than these hapless out-of-towners.

Also last year, our housing department—which rightly or wrongly was once the envy of other inner-ring suburbs—imploded, and two inspectors were fired for corruption. Briley lost no time outsourcing those two positions to SAFEbuilt. Next, she engaged the Novak Consulting Group (the Cincinnati firm that originally recruited her for Cleveland Heights) to study the problem-plagued department and recommend solutions.

Thanks to a colleague’s public-records request, we have seen a draft of Novak’s in-depth report. We like some of its recommendations, and disagree with others. For example, on the subject of “stakeholder engagement,” it states, “While this effort can be assigned to in-house staff, it is also appropriate for the City to engage a third-party provider to provide additional capacity and an external perspective on the community’s housing approach.” Why are we not surprised that a consulting firm would recommend the use of more consultants?

Municipal governments exist to provide essential services to residents and local businesses—not to have their budgets plundered by consultants who, let’s face it, often get paid to say what the client wants to hear. City employees are public servants; consultants and contractors employed by profit-making companies are not.

One final example: Transitioning to mayor/council government requires a detailed review of the codified ordinances to see if and where wording must be revised. Sometimes it is as simple as changing “city manager” to “mayor.” Although the law department employs a director, four part-time attorneys, a paralegal and two legal secretaries, Briley and council propose to outsource that work. Instead of having our legal staff become more familiar with Cleveland Heights ordinances, they apparently prefer to pay an outside legal firm to start at square one. It beggars belief.

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



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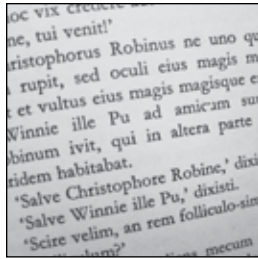
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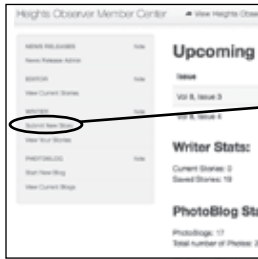
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CITY MANAGER continued from page 1

the Top of the Hill project, the largest private investment development project in the city's history, that had five false starts over the past three decades. She also was responsible for modernizing the internal processes and practices of city operations, and initiated energy-efficiency projects that resulted in a 25-percent reduction in energy usage."

Mayor Jason Stein, on behalf of the Cleveland Heights City Council, stated in the news release, "Tanisha has been a strong leader that has seen the city through a number of tough times including the current Covid-19 pandemic. She brought professionalism, experience and creativity to the city and committed herself to the betterment of


Cleveland Heights residents and businesses. We wish her all the best in her new position and we thank her for her service."

The news release states that Briley was not actively looking to leave Cleveland Heights at this time, but with the city transitioning to a mayor-led form of government in January 2022, she had to entertain the opportunity.

"It has been my honor and privilege to serve this great community for the last seven years as city manager," said Briley in the release. "Cleveland is my home and I had hoped to continue on here for years to come. I leave with mixed emotions, but also with great optimism for the future of Cleveland Heights.

"Serving as the city manager of Cleveland Heights has truly been my dream job, bringing me home and giving me the opportunity to spend every single day working alongside dedicated and talented professionals, each committed to making this community better than it was the day before. I am truly proud of all that we've accomplished together. I will miss this special and unique place and all the people that have made my service to this city so meaningful and rewarding over the years."

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and is a Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer. She adapted this article from the city's news release.



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Returning to school during the pandemic



A TEACHER'S VOICE

Karen Rego

The beginning of any school year is stressful, exciting, and full of unknowns. Teachers and staff look forward to seeing new faces and feeling the energy of a new year. As teachers, we'll have new supplies and our classrooms will be ready for the new students. There is elation in returning to doing what we love. This is true for every teacher, regardless of the number of years they've been in the classroom.

Now, have you wondered about the anticipation of a teacher waiting for the start of the school year in the middle of a global pandemic? Let's consider the following: Parents need to work; students need to resume their studies, and they need person-to-person interaction that facilitates learning. While I agree that these are all valid reasons to return to in-person classes, there are many reasons to approach the reopening of our schools with caution.

Even if kids don't spread the coronavirus or become as sick with Covid-19 as adults, schools don't house only kids. The fear that even one of our students could become gravely ill, or worse, causes great anxiety among our [teachers union] members.

What happens if a teacher gets the virus? Is that teacher quarantined, and for how long? What about the students that teacher had contact with? Will the district be able to hire substitutes? Too many unanswered questions remain.

We have heard that an entire building wouldn't be quarantined—only those who had been in contact with an infected person. That's only after it is known that someone is infected. There is currently no way to guarantee that we can prevent this virus from entering a school building.

The cleanliness of a school building is essential to reduce the spread of any virus. During this pandemic, cleanliness and hygiene are constantly brought to the fore-

front. Our school buildings have only limited hand-washing stations, space, and ventilation. Because of the funds lost to EdChoice vouchers, the district is unable to hire more cleaners.

Think about what it's like at commercial gyms, salons, restaurants and stores, where constant cleaning and sanitizing occur. Who is going to perform those tasks in our schools? We don't have adequate cleaning personnel. Will we need to take our students to the few bathrooms we have to wash their hands several times a day? Lots of questions about cleaning and hygiene, but zero answers.

I have used the word debacle to describe what wearing masks will be like when we return. We've heard that masks will be required for staff, but it's not yet known if students will have to wear them. Furthermore, I have mixed feelings about small children wearing masks.

I know about the research on masks and that they are our best line of defense (along with keeping students six feet apart), but wearing a mask in one of our five elementary buildings, without air conditioning, isn't something I can even comprehend.

Will teachers need to supply masks like we do pencils, crayons, notebooks and snacks? How many masks per day will students need? If they can lose the pencil you gave them in just a few minutes, I'm assuming they will lose their masks, too.

There are many reasons to return to in-person teaching, but also compelling reasons to continue remote learning. Much can change between my writing of this column (in early July) and the start of the school year. Our administration needs a sound and sensible plan that staff can actually follow, and that guarantees the safety of students and staff. Until we have that plan, teaching and learning should be remote for all. We miss our students and want to be back in person, but at what risk?

Karen Rego has taught multiple grades, K-8, and currently teaches at Monticello Middle School. She is the new president of Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

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CH resident receives state award

Danilo Powell-Lima

Cleveland Heights resident Alexandria Ruden, a senior attorney at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland (Legal Aid), is the 2020 recipient of the Ohio Attorney General's Office's Robert Denton Special Achievement Award. The award honors an individual "selflessly dedicated to increasing victim's rights."

Ruden has personally helped more than 5,000 survivors of domestic violence in her 40 years of practicing law. She began her legal career at the Free Clinic of Greater Cleveland in 1980. In 1984, she joined Legal Aid, where she began its domestic violence practice. At Legal Aid, Ruden helps survivors of domestic violence obtain and improve their safety through representation in Civil Protection Orders (CPO), divorces, and child custody cases.

Ruden's career achievements have influenced laws, policies, procedures and entire systems, impacting countless lives. She envisioned, helped design, and implemented the Domestic Violence Department at Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court. Through this department, survivors have the support of domestic violence advocates who help them prepare the CPO petition, guide them through the court process, and assist them in safety planning. Ruden's service on statewide boards and committees has also resulted in increased and improved



Alexandria Ruden, of Cleveland Heights, is the 2020 recipient of the state's Robert Denton Special Achievement Award.

services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Ruden also mentors attorneys, law students, and advocates in the community, and is a resource to legislators who request insight into the statutory schema on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Law students have been motivated to practice in the area of domestic violence after having spent one semester working with Ruden. She has co-authored editions of *Ohio Domestic Violence Law* since 1998, and continues to expand her knowledge by monitoring trends and developments in case law.

Danilo Powell-Lima is the development and communications associate at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Cleveland Heights' Covid response

Hannah Morgan

As communities continue adapting to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, several organizations in Cleveland Heights are providing resources to the city's residents. To increase their impact, the city of Cleveland Heights has granted CARES Act funding to the following organizations for Covid-19-related initiatives:

The Office on Aging is conducting free wellness checks for elderly and homebound Heights residents, and continues to connect them with essential services, such as meal programs and medical care.

CHN Housing Partners launched a rental assistance program on July 15 to help households pay or defer bills, as much of the workforce remains unemployed or furloughed as a direct result of the pandemic.

Home Repair Resource Center has expanded its Housing Counseling Program to meet increased demand, while also offering home-repair and home-improvement programs.

Gesher is helping residents who seek financial stability and

professional development by providing benefits assistance, expanding access to insurance, education, food, housing, and utility programs.

The Bhutanese Community of Greater Cleveland is expanding its Refugee Assistance Program.

Heights Emergency Food Center, located at Disciples Christian Church, has seen increased demand from residents seeking meal assistance, and is allocating funding to maintain and expand operations, as heightened need persists.

Start Right Food Pantry, a partner of Greater Cleveland Food Bank, located at Start Right Church on Caledonia Avenue, has expanded its food bank program to serve a greater need.

Beyond these services, residents experiencing health concerns during the pandemic can rely on the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, the city's police and fire departments, and area hospital systems to answer questions and respond to medical emergencies.

Hannah Morgan recently served FutureHeights as an AmeriCorps VISTA from July 2019 until July 2020.

Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights



JUNE 15, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kahlil Seren, Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell and Michael Ungar. Also present were City Manager Tanisha Briley, Clerk of Council Amy Himmelein, and Law Director William Hanna. The meeting lasted a little over one hour.

City manager's report

City Manager Briley's complete report can be found in the meeting packet on the city's website on the city council agenda and minutes page.

Briley gave a Covid-19 update. She said Cleveland Heights is still a hot spot. The city will be receiving \$1.76 million from Ohio's share of the CARES Act funds that Congress approved for Covid-related expenses. Outdoor dining criteria are under review.

Police report

Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg read a statement asserting her goal to provide best policing practices to the community. To that purpose, she is engaging with organizers of the June 14 demonstration, Safer Heights, youth, and other concerned citizens to make her department one that supports the entire community. She is working with the Ohio Collaborative Law Enforcement Agency to continue to be certified as a department that meets the uniform minimum state standards in developing policies, hiring and recruitment, community engagement, and body camera usage. She also wants her department to be certified by the collaborative as a city police department with bias-free policing and written policies in place for handling employee misconduct.

5G wireless

The ordinance regarding the use of public ways for 5G wireless facilities had a second reading. It will have a third reading, as council, after extensive discussion in the committee of the whole meeting, decided to give time for more comments on this legislation.

CDBG

In a consent agenda, council approved resolutions for agreements with agencies that applied for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The complete list can be found on the city's website on the city council agenda and minutes page under legislation for June 15.

Council member comments

Council Member Russell reported that playgrounds in the city opened on June 10, but reminded us that social distancing is still recommended. Cleveland Heights Census responses are up 6 percent, while University Heights responses are up 4 percent. Coventry is the area needing the most increase in completion.

LWV Observers: Gail Larson and Blanche Valancy.

JULY 6, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kahlil Seren, Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell and Michael Ungar. Also present were City Manager Tanisha Briley, Clerk of Council Amy Himmelein,

and Law Director William Hanna.

Racism as a public health crisis

Council approved an amended resolution (78) condemning the murder of George Floyd and declaring racism a public health crisis.

Council member recusal

On third reading, council approved an ordinance allowing members to recuse themselves from voting due to a conflict of interest.

Nonconsensual dissemination of private images

On third reading, council approved amending Chapter 749, "Fair Practices," to include prohibition of discrimination based on non-consensual dissemination of a person's private sexual images.

5G wireless

On third reading, council approved the use of public ways for 5G wireless facilities. Council Member Dunbar wanted citizens to know that federal and state legislation is already in place to regulate 5G installations. This ordinance adds updated, defensible liability language to protect the city and its residents.

Consent agenda

Council approved a consent agenda including the following:

- An ordinance for issuing \$1,105,000 in bonds for expenses incurred by the city's departments in performing their functions.
- Authorization to establish a temporary permit program for outdoor dining facilities.
- Authorization of an agreement with Cleveland Housing Network Housing Partners to use CDBG funds for rental assistance for residents needing help due to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Council member comments

Council Member Ungar expressed concern about the transition to an elected mayor and reiterated that he wants it to be on the agenda for every council meeting.

City manager report

City Manager Briley's report is available on pages 3-7 of the council meeting packet on the city's website, at Government/2020 Agendas and Minutes.

She declared the Covid-19 testing of 200 people on June 25 a success. The city will offer more testing in the future. Briley said there will be a special council meeting to discuss mandating the wearing of masks in public. She said Cuyahoga County will decide on its position soon.

Chief of police report

Chief Mecklenburg has amended current policy to include a chokehold ban, de-escalation techniques, intervention by officers when they observe other officers using excessive force, and complete reporting of incidents when an officer pulls his/her gun.

LWV Observer: Gail Larson.

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

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UH impanels advisory committee on policing policies

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan and Council Member Sandra Berry have appointed the following residents to the city's Citizen Advisory Committee on Policing Policies: O'Dasha Blue, Patti Carlyle, Ronald Collier, Indira Gatlin, C.P. "Neil" Gould III, Adrian Hardin, Kate Holzheimer, Joanna Homann, Sheila Hubman, Joshua Hunt, Constance Jefferson, Tyler "Aliah" Lawson, Thekla Long, Paul Miller, Roger Osgood, Crystal Pickus, Sheri Sax, Mike Sears, Vincent Stokes, Priscilla Tate and Sean Weiss.

Brennan, Berry, UH Police Department Chief Dustin Rogers, UHPD Lt. Mark McArtor, City Prosecutor Step-

nie Scalise, and all UH City Council members will serve as ex officio members.

The committee will collect public input and review the UHPD's Use of Force policies. The committee will meet this summer, make a report of its findings, and suggest reforms.

"Council Member Berry and I thank the committee members for stepping forward to volunteer to serve," Brennan said. "We value resident involvement in our city, and it speaks to the strength of our community that we have a diverse cross section of people representing our community willing to serve."

Last month, Brennan signed the My Brother's Keeper Alliance mayor's pledge, committing to review use of force, engage the community, report findings, and make needed reforms.

Berry chairs city council's Safety Committee. In June, she signed a letter, with 24 other African-American council members from across Northeast Ohio, calling for reforms.

"I have discussed this with our police chief, Chief Dustin Rogers, who is understanding of the appropriateness of this review," Brennan said. "We need not wait for a tragic incident to occur to review our

policies and make improvements."

The committee's organizational meeting took place via Zoom on July 22. At the meeting, the committee discussed:

- How the committee should go about reviewing the UHPD's Use of Force policy;
- How the committee should go about collecting additional public input;
- How the committee wants future meetings to be run (chaired by mayor/council member, chaired by a citizen, etc.);
- What kind of schedule should be created that results in written recommendations by early September;
- What other matters might this committee (or another citizens' committee like it) consider after it reviews the Use of Force policy.

"Our goal is to spend the summer working on this, and report back at the end of summer, presumably at one of the two regular council meetings [in] September," Brennan said.

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

MARKET continued from page 1

expanded her home flower beds to make cut-flower bouquets to sell.

The market's setting has been enhanced by new landscaping provided by Barb Sosnowski and Laura Marks. New plantings, a curving rock wall, a redesigned pathway, and art installations are described in a June *Observer* article.

The market enjoyed its first full season last year. Nineteen sellers participated, in total. Sellers are not required to participate every week. For their part, buyers learned to arrive early and figured out where to look for their favorite items. Flowers arranged in bouquets and divided perennials were popular in 2019. Other sellers sold bundles of freshly cut herbs. Along with peppers, garlic, tomatoes and squash, buyers took home ingredients for the freshest meals one could prepare on a summer evening.

Noble Gardeners' Market is registered with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, which has provided the market with guidelines for operating in the Covid era. Tables will be set at proper distances from each other, and all participants must wear masks and practice social distancing. There are additional market-specific requirements; guidelines can be downloaded from www.nobleneighbors.com.

The Noble Gardeners' Market is not registered to sell processed food, so the salsas, jams and baked goods found in other markets may not be sold at this one. Flea market or arts and craft items also cannot be sold. Free parking is available in a city lot behind the CVS store across the street.

Although it is produce and flowers that bring people to the market, the bigger draw is the friendships that grow between people interested in gardening and garden bounty. As one observer said, "People come for the vegetables but stay for the conversation."

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

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Census updates in the Heights

Hannah Morgan

Census outreach efforts are still underway in the Heights and across the country, with the final count deadline officially extended to Oct. 31, 2020.

The U.S. Census Bureau has temporarily suspended field efforts and door knocking in light of public health concerns, though they are scheduled to slowly resume. This extension means there are still jobs available for those interested in a temporary position as a census taker. Rates for census takers in Cuyahoga County are set at \$20.50 to \$22.50 per hour, and training will take place from mid-July to early August. For more information on employment with the Census Bureau, visit www.2020census.gov/en/jobs.

Cleveland Heights and University Heights leaders have strengthened local initiatives to increase response rates. Cleveland Heights Council Member Davida Russell launched the "Count Me In" campaign earlier this

year, with an emphasis on reaching the often-undercounted, predominantly Black neighborhoods around Noble, North Coventry, and Taylor Road; and immigrant and refugee populations throughout the city.

Russell partnered with University Heights Council Member Barbara Blankfield in leading the "Battle of the Census." Both council members set a goal of increasing their city's response rates 20 percent by the end of June.

According to a July 22 Cleveland Heights city news update, while neither city reached the 20 percent benchmark in one month, Cleveland Heights had the larger turnout. For winning, "Cleveland Heights – will receive a 'tree of growth' from University Heights as a prize for outpacing the other City." The planting date is yet to be determined.

To complete your survey and be counted in the 2020 Census, visit www.my2020census.gov.

Hannah Morgan serves as an AmeriCorps VISTA to FutureHeights.

Emergency food center remains open

Harriet Tramer

As the pandemic rages through the world, confusion about virtually everything—including what businesses and services are open—has become the new normal. Some people who would benefit from visiting the Heights Emergency Food Center (HEFC) may not be aware that it is open for business. And visiting the center does not represent an undue risk, as stringent safety precautions are being enforced.

Located at 3663 Mayfield Road (at Disciples Christian Church), the center (216-381-0707) is currently open Mondays, 4-6 p.m.; Tuesdays, 9-11:30 a.m.; Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; Fridays, 9-11:30 a.m. On the last two Thursdays of each month, it also is open 5:30-7:30 p.m.

A new client intake area has been established; the chairs in this expanded space are located at least six feet apart. Clients are separated from the intake volunteer by a Plexiglas shield. Only volunteers touch the computer, as clients no longer need to enter their initials to certify that the information they provide is correct.

Hand sanitizer is available at the intake table. To minimize handling, food is prepackaged. Clients are asked not to

unpack and return any food, and food is picked up from a table at a separate door to maintain social distance. The center is cleaned at the end of each shift, and three additional times each week.

During normal times, HEFC serves only clients who live in Cleveland Heights, University Heights, South Euclid and Lyndhurst, but during the pandemic these boundaries are not being strictly enforced.

The center does not offer delivery or drive-through service, but volunteers can assist clients as they take food to their cars.

Income limits that determine eligibility to receive food assistance have been raised: the cutoff point for a family of four is set at \$59,225 annually. Clients do not have to provide documentation that verifies their income. Clients must show an ID, such as a driver's license, each time they visit the center. They must also provide the names and birthdates of every person in their household, as this information is required for government-mandated records.

Harriet Tramer is a longtime Heights resident who has worked as a journalist. She is a volunteer at the Heights Emergency Food Center.


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Baseball team and community help house fire victims

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

On June 24, Cleveland Heights High School's 18U summer baseball team was supposed to play an away game in Perry. The Perry field was soaked from an overnight rainstorm, so the game was moved to Heights High's home field.

Partway through the game, a loud bang surprised players and fans alike. As they looked around, they heard children screaming and saw them running away from a house on Washington Boulevard. With the sight and smell of smoke in the air, parents, players and fans from both teams rushed to help.

A recently renovated duplex had caught fire due to faulty wiring in the garage, leaving two families—12 people and a dog—without a home.

Chalea Smith and her five children had recently moved to Cleveland Heights. For the first time, each of her kids had their own space with their own bedroom furniture—all of which burned in the fire.

On the other side of the duplex,



Baseball team members Eli Weisblatt, Andy Heintz and Ethan Swain, and coach John Petre, maintain social distancing on the field.

Latia Brown and her five children lost everything, too, due to the fire, smoke, and subsequent water damage. Brown, herself a graduate of Heights High, had recently moved back to Cleveland Heights, specifically for the schools.

"I wanted my kids to have the same education I got growing up," she said. Her son, a rising junior, is a football player, and member of Heights High's National Honor Society.

Parents from the Heights Baseball Boosters immediately stepped up to help the two families, promoting separate GoFundMe accounts for each, and coordinating donations of clothing and household goods.

"In what has been a terrible year," said Vikki Nowak, a Heights parent, "this is a story of community. Even the players found ways to help."

Smith has since found a home in Shaker Heights and is overwhelmed

by the encouragement, support and donations she has received. Clothing for her children was especially helpful in the days immediately after the fire.

Brown is living with her mother until a home in Cleveland Heights is ready for her family. "This is really hard," she said. "But I'm so grateful."

While there have been many offers of donations of clothing and household goods for the Brown family, they will not be ready to accept any material items until they move into their own home, which they hope will happen in October.

Meanwhile, donations can be made to either family's GoFundMe campaign. Latia Brown's GoFundMe link is www.gofundme.com/f/u5us4q-massive-fire; Chalea Smith's GoFundMe link is www.gofundme.com/f/w8k8bg-tragic-house-fire.

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

COVENTRY cont. from page 1

501(c)3 nonprofit Coventry P.E.A.C.E., Inc. board, then a playground association, transferred its nonprofit status to the newly formed Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus (CPC) group. CPC's mission states, "Coventry PEACE, Inc. provides a sustainable, supportive and collaborative facility for organizations that offer artistic and educational opportunities and community services for residents of the Heights and Greater Cleveland."

In the two years since the property transfer, one of the members of CPC, ARTFUL, has expanded from 16 artist studios to 25. Cleveland Arts Prize-winner, and co-founder of Parade the Circle, Robin VanLear, has moved into the building, as has the Cleveland Heights Teachers' Union.

CPC, which also includes Ensemble Theatre, Lake Erie Ink, Family Connections, FutureHeights, Reaching Heights, and therapist Sherri Skedel, has made several improvements to the interior of the building, and has paid nearly \$300,000 in rent that has covered operating costs

and begun to address deferred maintenance.

While CPC has worked to bring down operating costs and has seen monthly costs consistently decrease over the last four quarters, further improvements can be made, such as converting the lights to LED, and enabling the group to control the HVAC system settings to adjust for the fact that the building has been closed to the public during the pandemic.

In summer of 2019, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) selected CPC from among 200 applicants to participate in a creative placemaking workshop in Washington, D.C. CPC representative and Ensemble Theatre Director Celeste Cosentino, and Cleveland Heights' then-mayor, Carol Roe, attended the workshop with five other groups from around the country whose projects were selected based on their potential to be a successful candidate for an "Our Town" grant through the NEA. The primary need identified during the workshop was for a stronger partnership between local government and CPC.

In fall 2019, IFF, a mission-driven lender and real estate consultant, selected CPC as one of two pilot projects in the state of Ohio for a Facility Feasibility Analysis. IFF provided a grant from Fifth Third Bank to cover the majority of the study, and FutureHeights secured an additional grant from the Cleveland Foundation to cover the balance. The study provided a detailed list of necessary building improvements to address maintenance issues, as well as renovations to enable the building to operate more efficiently in its new use as a cultural center. The study also included financial analysis, which enabled CPC to create a first draft of an operating

Pro Forma for the building, which it presented to the Heights Libraries Board of Directors in February 2020.

Heights Libraries stated its desire to work out an agreement with CPC for a long-term ground lease of the building no later than July 1, 2020, when the tenants' current leases were due to expire.

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic began and CPC temporarily closed the building, bringing future planning to a halt.

In response to the pandemic, each CPC member nonprofit moved its programs and services to a virtual format to the extent possible, adjusted its operating budgets to account for a reduction in earned revenues, and canceled or postponed fundraising events. By state mandate, Ensemble Theatre has not been able to operate since March, and performance artists have seen their revenues dry up as many community events have been canceled.

On June 2, CPC received a Letter of Intent (LOI) from Heights Libraries outlining a one-year bridge lease with CPC, with the possibility of negotiating a long-term ground lease. The library asked that CPC respond within seven days. CPC requested that, due to the impact of Covid-19 on the tenants and the complexity of a potential agreement, the library extend the current leases for one year.

Heights Libraries rejected that request and asked CPC to respond in writing to the LOI. CPC responded as requested on June 12. Heights Libraries sent a revised LOI on July 1, the major changes being a request for signature on the LOI and a cash payment of \$25,000 by Aug. 1.

On July 9, Chris Mosby, a reporter with Cleveland Heights Patch, contacted CPC tenants to

ask for a response to a press release Heights Libraries had issued. CPC issued a statement in response to the release, stating, "We are shocked and blindsided by the press release the Library sent out today. We've been negotiating in good faith while trying to survive a pandemic that has effectively shut us down for the foreseeable future. We've been frustrated by the negotiations at times, but we kept it to ourselves in the interests of achieving what we thought was a shared goal and viable partnership. As recently as May 25, the Library spokesperson stated, 'We continue to work toward a day when the Board of Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus can execute a lease with us, but we realize it may have to be postponed due to the new financial pressures on the tenants.' But today's statement, which badly mischaracterizes the situation and ends with the possibility of just tearing down the building, is very disappointing. We will continue to do our part to keep the lines of communication open and remain hopeful we can sit down to find a reasonable solution."

On July 13, Heights Libraries extended an invitation to CPC to make a five-minute statement during its July 20 board meeting, which was held virtually. CPC Board President Deanna Bremer Fisher (also the publisher of the *Heights Observer*) gave the statement, in which CPC requested a meeting with the library to discuss continuing negotiations. Talks between the two parties have resumed.

Frank W. Lewis is a writer and editor, and neighbor of Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus.

FutureHeights, one of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. tenants, publishes the Heights Observer.

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HEIGHTS OBSERVER

Taylor named Oxford principal

Cathan Cavanaugh



Jacquelyn Taylor

Jacquelyn Taylor, CH-UH City School District STEM specialist, is the new principal at Oxford Elementary School.

“We are thrilled to welcome Jacquelyn into this school leadership position,” said CH-UH Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby. “Jacquelyn is an accomplished and dedicated instructional leader who is highly respected by her peers across the district.”

Taylor has spent the past eight months in an administrative support role at Oxford. She served as the STEM program specialist for Boulevard and Gearity elementary schools for five years prior to that.

“I am beyond excited for the opportunity,” said Taylor. “This is where I started my career 20 years ago; it feels like home to me. I’m honored to work with such a talented group of teachers, and I look forward to collaborating with the staff to make a difference for all students and families at Oxford.”

Taylor earned her educational certification (grades 1-8), her master’s degree in administration, and her teacher leader endorsement from John Carroll University.

“Jacquelyn has really stepped up to the plate this past year to support Oxford in an administrative role,” said Kirby. “She is a natural fit there, and I’m sure she will be a great leader for the school community.”

Former Oxford principal Teresa Taylor-Ware resigned from the position for personal reasons at

the end of the 2019-20 school year. She will continue to serve district students as an instructional coach. She has spent nearly 30 years in CH-UH.

“Teresa is one of the best instructional coaches we’ve ever had in the district. We are incredibly thankful for her positive, dynamic leadership at Oxford over the last two years and look forward to her continued service,” said Kirby.

“Developing our own leaders and promoting from within is one of our goals in CH-UH,” added Kirby. “We have a number of internal candidates with great experience who are eager to take on leadership roles. In creating a culture of excellence, it is important that we provide the opportunities to develop our staff members who wish to become leaders in our district.”

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

Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights



JULY 7, 2020

Board members present were President Jodi Sourini, Vice President James Posch, Beverly Wright, Dan Heintz (who left early), and Maria Lewis. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer. The meeting lasted about two and a half hours.

Public comments

Two community members urged the board to make additional cuts to the budget to avoid a new levy being put on the November ballot.

The head of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union expressed serious concerns to the board about the practicality of opening the schools without risk of Covid infection for students and staff members.

Recognition

Superintendent Kirby recognized Kahari Hicks and Coach Mac Stephens for their leadership in creating the now-regional Build the Bridge program.

Five-year forecast

The board approved the treasurer’s five-year forecast. (The document is available online at www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx; go to BoardDocs in the left frame, click on the meeting date, then the agenda.)

Lay Finance Committee report

Ryan Routh represented the lay finance com-

mittee and shared its recommendations, which are to place a current expense levy on the November 2020 ballot, rather than waiting until 2021, and for the levy to be between 4.8 and 8.5 mills, based on the considerations stated in the PowerPoint report, which can be found online at BoardDocs.

Board comments on budget

Board Members Heintz and Posch had concerns that the budget for this school year is too tight, and requested that the superintendent look for additional cuts.

School reopening

Kirby presented a draft reopening plan to the board. She stressed that this is a draft and that community input will be solicited. The plan used staff and family survey results to attempt to design a reopening that would create safe and educationally sound programming. It contains both in-person options and remote options for school reopening. Details can be found online at BoardDocs.

LWV Observers: Robin Koslen and Rosemarie Fairman.

NOTE: No LWV observer was able to cover the board of education’s June 24 work session meeting.

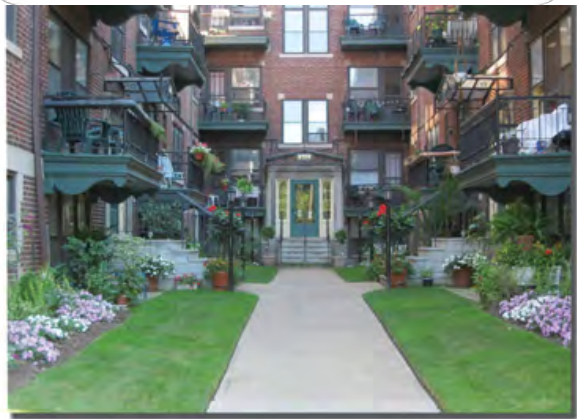
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Heights Libraries seeks focus group participants

Sheryl Banks

Heights Libraries Anti-Racism Task Force has engaged Compass Consulting Services, LLC, to conduct confidential, virtual focus groups as part of a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) audit. Due to Covid-19, the focus groups will be held via Zoom, not in person as had originally been planned.

The library's goal is to gather information from current library customers, as well as those who don't use the library.

"If we really want to ensure we are serving our community fairly and equitably, we first need to understand what people's experience with us has been like," said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. "We want to hear the good, the bad and the ugly."

Each group is limited in size. Participants are asked to register by using one of the links listed below that pertains to the one group they would like to participate in. Representatives from Compass Consulting will then contact participants with further information and instructions.

Specific Populations (www.surveymonkey.com/r/CHUHSpecPop)

- Disabled: Aug. 11, 4-5:30 p.m.
- Refugee Service Community: Aug. 18, 2-3:30 p.m.

- Orthodox Citizens and Community Leaders: Aug. 18, 6:30-8 p.m.
- Homeless: Aug. 19, 2-3:30 p.m.
- LGBTQ+: Aug. 19, 6:30-8 p.m.
- Hearing Impaired: Aug. 21, 1-2:30 p.m.

Retired Senior Citizens/Customers — choose the branch you use the most (www.surveymonkey.com/r/SeniorsRetired)

- Aug. 24, 2-3:30 p.m., Coventry Village
- Aug. 25, 2-3:30 p.m., Lee Road
- Aug. 26, 2-3:30 p.m., Noble Neighborhood
- Aug. 27, 2-3:30 p.m., University Heights

General Seniors, Not Retired — choose the branch you use the most (www.surveymonkey.com/r/CHUHSeniors)

- Aug. 10, 6:30-8 p.m., Coventry Village
- Aug. 11, 6:30-8 p.m., Lee Road
- Aug. 12, 6:30-8 p.m., Noble Neighborhood
- Aug. 13, 6:30-8 p.m., University Heights

Youth Customers — choose the branch you use the most (www.surveymonkey.com/r/CHUHYouth1117)

- Aug. 10, 2-3:30 p.m., Coventry Village
- Aug. 11, 2-3:30 p.m., Lee Road

continued on page 14

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board Meeting highlights



JUNE 15, 2020

Board members present were President James Roosa, Patti Carlyle, Gabe Crenshaw, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto, and Vikas Turakhia. Vice President Dana Fluelen was absent.

Public comments

Face coverings: The library director read a letter from a patron disagreeing with and questioning the library's decision to require patrons to wear face masks. Per the library's usual policy in handling comments from the audience, the board will give careful [consideration] and respond at the next meeting.

Non-salary budget cuts

Since revenue from the state of Ohio to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System will decrease in 2020 due to lower tax collection during the pandemic, the board approved an additional decrease of \$200,061.34 to the materials budget, for a total reduction of approximately 25 percent.

Janitorial contract

The board authorized the fiscal officer to enter into an agreement, effective Aug. 1, with Ajax Commercial Cleaning. The library director welcomed comments about cleanliness so that feedback can be provided to this new contractor.

Safety equipment installation

The board authorized the fiscal officer to pay an additional \$3,900 to Power Alarm for unforeseen problems that occurred during the installation of door controls.

Reduction in force

On June 8, the library opened to the public in a reduced capacity with a reduced staff. Operating hours were cut from 72.5 to 40 per week, with very limited services while practicing strict COVID-19 precautions. With the end of calamity pay on May 29, the library reduced staff by furloughing many employees either fully or partially: 48 employees were furloughed (six voluntarily), 66 employees were retained with hours cut by 50 percent, 26 employees were fully retained, three employees accepted a voluntary-exit incentive, and four employees accepted a voluntary-retirement incentive. One employee is on leave under the Families First Coronavirus Paid Leave Act. Of the employees fully retained, 13 are managers whose salaries have been cut 10 percent. The director's salary has been reduced by 14 percent. The 66 employees whose hours and wages were cut by 50 percent are participating in the SharedWork Ohio program, a state unemployment program in which employees receive unemployment benefits and continue to work for their employers on a reduced-hours basis.

Automated materials handling system

Tech Logic Automated Materials Handling

System is coming to the Lee Road branch in July. Customers will be able to return items through a slot in the wall; items will immediately be discharged and sorted into bins for reshelving.

Lobby services

Libraries opened for lobby services, after two weeks of curbside pickup beginning May 18. During the two weeks of curbside services, there were 636 customers and 3,241 items circulated. All book drops are now open for returning books. Customers, as well as staff, must wear masks when entering library buildings. Phone reference is available for library questions and for assistance in choosing library materials to place on hold. New services will be announced on the website.

Antiracist statement from board

"Dear community members, Heights Libraries grieves with you over the brutal, senseless deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many other Black Americans. We recognize that as a public institution, it is not enough to passively mourn these losses. We must be actively anti-racist and stand up to the anti-Black racism so pervasive in our society.

We want to take this moment to recommit ourselves to service for all. In 2019, our board rewrote our Vision Statement, and it includes the following:

'Ensure that our libraries remain free and accessible. Champion digital and print literacy, intellectual freedom, and privacy. Respond to the needs and wants of our customers by leading with a culture of acceptance, equity, inclusion, and respect for all.'

Do you need information about current events? Do you need resources to help you explain to your children what is happening right now? We can help with those things and more. . . .

Our buildings may be closed due to the pandemic, but we are still here for you. Please call us at 216-932-3600, or reach out to us through our website with your questions and concerns."

[The full statement, which includes links to the 1619 Project and Facebook pages, can be found on the library's website, www.heightslibrary.org, on the 1619 Project page.]

Black Lives Matter (BLM) mural

Under new business, Board Member Gabe Crenshaw suggested that a BLM mural be made and displayed on library property. A few possible [locations] were discussed. The community would be involved. The library director asked for contact information and will look into options.

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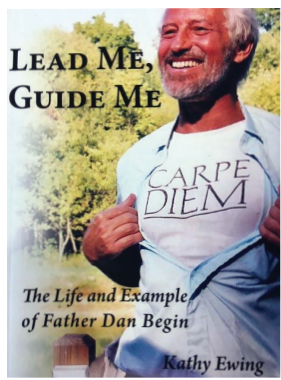
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Ewing describes an exemplary life in new book

Robin Koslen



How does one approach a book about a Catholic priest when one is neither Catholic nor particularly spiritual? For the many people struggling with the extraordinary

times in which we are living—racism, protests, unemployment, a global pandemic and the restrictions that it imposes on our daily lives—there is a book that speaks to humans of all persuasions: *Lead Me, Guide Me: The Life and Example of Father Dan Begin* by Kathy Ewing.

Father Dan Begin was Kathy Ewing's priest and friend. Ewing was Father Dan's congregant and friend. They met when Ewing joined St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Cleveland's Mt. Pleasant neighborhood. There, Ewing found a spiritual home that was unique

in many ways, not the least of which was the racial integration she found, as well as a priest who exemplified the very best that can be found in religion.

Ewing and Begin embarked on a project that lasted for several years. Begin had stories and ideas that he wanted to share, but was too busy ministering to write a book. Ewing, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a writer who was willing and eager to learn more about Begin's devotion to his calling and to his community.

The two began meeting to brainstorm their ideas for a book. The range of topics was vast: race, poverty, church doctrine, individual responsibility, self-doubt, parenthood (Begin raised several troubled kids), and material possessions, to name just a few. Ewing, Begin, and Mary Powell, another congregant, met regularly at Yours Truly at Shaker Square to talk about "big issues." Much of the book came from those informal discussions, and from Ewing's keen observations of a life worth sharing with others.

Ewing had long watched and admired Begin. He led by example, and she provides many of those examples in *Lead Me, Guide Me*. These stories lift the book from a good read into something greater than a tribute.

Like many, Begin sometimes struggled to be his best self. Ewing describes how he dealt with those struggles. She chronicles the subtle ways in which Begin led a life of dignity and goodness, and how he found and

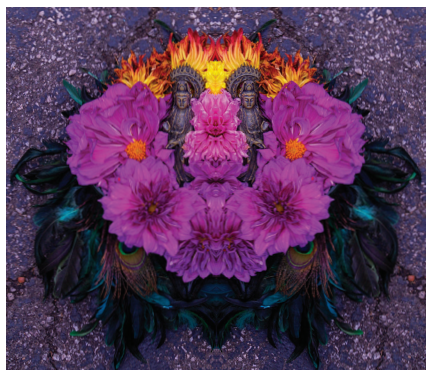
promoted those qualities in others.

Lead Me, Guide Me: The Life and Example of Father Dan Begin, published by Shanti Arts, is Ewing's second book. Her first, *Missing: Coming to Terms with a Borderline Mother*, was published in 2016. Both books are available at local independent bookstores—Mac's Backs, Appletree, and Loganberry—or online.

You can follow Kathy Ewing on her blog: www.kathyewing.com. She also contributes to Raw Data: Living in the Fallout from the Coronavirus at <https://rawdatablogspot.com>.

Robin Koslen, a former teacher and longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is currently hibernating at home.

Heights artist explores order/disorder



Miracle at Savatthi, by Stephen Calhoun.

John Callahan

In a Spotlight exhibition on view through Aug. 23, Heights Arts features the artwork of Heights native Stephen Calhoun, a photographer, designer, painter and musician.

Calhoun describes his approach to making visual art as a "musical process." His work employs found objects, algorithms and fractals to create images that have both organic and mathematical qualities. "Every form of creativity [has] something to do with the vibrations of materials," he said. Calhoun's creative process seeks out elements that vibrate both dissonantly and harmonically, from which he conducts and improvises the generation of his own creative image. "These steps are found in different configurations in every art form," said Calhoun.

There is a strong, intentional reliance on chaotic natural forms and discarded broken objects in Calhoun's art, which finds order and beauty in an otherwise chaotic visual space. Calhoun explained, "I think of it all as being functionally paradoxical. The finished image is orderly, [and its] symmetry is very

hard to disrupt. Innumerable symmetries are hidden in the seemingly chaotic assembly, just as innumerable random (or stochastic) complexities are hidden in the symmetries."

The artist has a keen interest in children's response to his art. "We know how adults can make a simple prospect into something twisted by ego, expectation, and something like test anxiety," said Calhoun. "Other times the adult beholder can easily access their child-like imagination and creativity and leap into the process of discovery without any additional hand holding. Kids? They are developmentally closer to their unfettered imagination, so, they naturally leap into the picture."

As a general approach to looking at his art, the artist suggests viewers look for "nameable things" in the images: faces, doorways, rooms, and so on, then look for relationships between those things. "Collect in your mind what you have uncovered," suggested Calhoun, "and see if there are any stories you can imagine."

Heights Arts is at 2175 Lee Road in Cleveland Heights. Stringent Covid-19 safety protocols are in effect. Appointments to view Calhoun's "immersive psychedelia" in person can be made online at www.heightsarts.org.

Additional information on Stephen Calhoun's art is available at <https://artiststephencalhoun.com>.

John Callahan, co-host of 89.3, WCSB's Friday Night Rock Rotation, is contributing writer to San Francisco-based POW Magazine and has published many interviews with well-known musicians.

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Strongsville company renovates Lee Road storage business



The 1929 exterior of the building that houses Cleveland Heights Storage.

The building at 2037 Lee Road has undergone renovations after being purchased in November 2019 by Petrick Property Group of Strongsville. Cleveland Heights Storage, a mini-storage facility, is the company's first commercial property. Constructed in 1928, the building originally served as Cleveland Heights' first post office. It housed retail businesses after the postal service vacated it in the 1960s. In 1984, Tim and Joan Evans purchased it, and converted it to use for storage. The facility provides a range of storage options for everything from business files to landscaping equipment. For information, contact Petrick Property Group at 440-879-1159, or properties@petrickpropertygroup.com.

HEIGHTS LIBRARIES cont. from page 12

- Aug. 12, 2-3:30 p.m., Noble Neighborhood
- Aug. 13, 2-3:30 p.m., University Heights
- **General Adult Customers** — choose the branch you use the most (www.surveymonkey.com/r/CHUHGeneralAdult)
- Aug. 24, 6:30-8 p.m., Coventry Village
- Aug. 25, 6:30-8 p.m., Lee Road
- Aug. 26, 6:30-8 p.m., Noble Neighborhood
- Aug. 27, 6:30-8 p.m., University Heights

The focus groups are the latest steps Heights Libraries is taking to ensure that its practices, policies, and culture are inclusive of all of its stakeholders—both staff and customers.

Heights Libraries formed its Anti-Racism Taskforce in fall 2018 in response to concerns about equity

and inclusion. One of its first actions was to engage all staff members in meaningful, comprehensive DEI training. Non-management participated in a three-hour training by the national Racial Equity Institute, and managers attended an intensive two-day training retreat by the same organization.

After the trainings, management decided to conduct internal and external DEI audits, and hired Compass Consulting Services, LLC to conduct them. Both the trainings and the work with Compass Consulting took place in 2019 and early 2020, before the Covid-19 outbreak and the library's subsequent budget cuts.

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

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HEIGHTS ARTS cont. from page 1

movement, as long as artists continue to express their perspectives in ways that Heights Arts can note and share.

This project is a way for Heights Arts to keep a focus on these issues, and to feature artists of color, many of whom have connections to the Heights and nearby University Circle. In the longer term, there may be opportunities to translate some of this material into a more formal exhibition or program.

In important ways, this project is a return to one of the founding ideas of Heights Arts: that the Heights is already home to a vibrant artistic community, and one thing an organization like this can do is provide venues for that creativity to bubble to the surface, and then call attention to that creative expression.

In this case, there is no physical

gallery and no performance stage other than social media.

To see these images, follow Heights Arts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

In addition, the year 2020 marks Heights Arts 20th anniversary, and the organization is celebrating with the exhibition *Evolution*. The show features pairs of works by 15 artists; one work from an earlier time when the artist exhibited at Heights Arts, and another from the artist's present-day body of work. Stephen Calhoun, the featured Spotlight Artist, also has work on display in the gallery.

Appointments, for those wanting a private viewing not during normal walk-in hours, can be made online or by calling Heights Arts at 216-371-3457.

Greg Donley is chair of the Heights Arts Exhibition Community Team.

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SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

I didn't live in the Cleveland area from 1968 to 1973, so those were the five years I didn't go to the Feast of the Assumption festivities in Little Italy in mid-August. I've attended that event every year since I was 15, except for those years.

I grew up not far from Little Italy, in the Coventry-Mayfield area, and I used to walk down there as a teenager. I wanted to be a tough guy, like the kids who lived there and hung out in front of the stores on the Mayfield Road part of it. I'm not Italian, though I can cook like one. But I wasn't cooking very much as a teen, and I wanted the Murray Hill guys to think I was Italian.

When they would ask, I would add an "o" to the end of my last name and say it was "Budino." After a while I decided I also needed an Italian first name. I chose Rizzo. Years later, I learned that budino actually means "pudding" in Italian. Oops.

Some more years later, I discovered that rizzo means "rice." So, in other words, my tough-guy name was "Rice Pudding." Oops, again.

The Feast of the Assumption celebrates Mary's assumption into heaven. In Cleveland's Little Italy, that starts with a parade, on the first morning, through the streets of Little Italy. The festival ends, on the fourth night, with a fireworks display. In some countries it's a national holiday. Cleveland's celebration is the biggest commemoration of the event in the U.S.

When I was in high school, some friends and I would walk to the last apartment building on Overlook Road in Cleveland Heights, the one that overlooks Little Italy—it's the one you see the back of, held up by steel girders, like stilts, when you go up Mayfield Hill from Little Italy. We'd walk down to the end of its driveway to get a perfect view of the fireworks over the treetops, and away from the crush of the crowd.

When my wife and I first moved into our current house, near Nighttown, I suggested that we go to this secret place I knew about to see the fireworks. When we reached the end of the driveway, no one else was there. Because trees grow. Those trees, whose tops we used to look over, were now towering over the building. The fireworks were starting, so it was too late to go down the hill. We could see only tiny flashes of colored light in between some of the leaves. We could hear them very clearly, though.

In between the parade that starts the festival and the fireworks that end it, a tremendous amount of eating takes place. Every restaurant sets up tables in front of their establishments to sell some of their specialty items. Outside food vendors park their trucks in between the restaurant's stands to peddle lemonade, funnel cakes, elephant ears and other fair-type fare. There's also a great deal of gambling—made temporarily legal—going on in the church basement. And a lot of Dean Martin/Al Martino/Vic Damone/Frank Sinatra/Perry Como in your ears.

For that short stretch of Mayfield, the street is packed solidly with people every

night, and parts of a couple of days, for the duration of the Feast. That's why, now, when my wife and I walk down there from our house in the Cedar-Fairmount neighborhood, we go only as far as the Murray Hill Market, on Murray Hill Road, a block from Mayfield. The market is practically in Cleveland Heights; it's so close that you can see Cleveland Heights from it. During the Feast, the crowd is much thinner there—though I'm not, by the time I leave—and the food is a lot better and more creative than what you can get on Mayfield.

I cooked at the Murray Hill Market, part time, from 2010 to 2018, while I was working on a couple of books (writing, not reading), so I got to see the Feast from the other side. We prepared for weeks in advance, and then, during the event, we just cranked out tons of food non-stop all day and night. In fact, last year, one year after I'd stopped working there, we dropped in on the Saturday night of the Feast and we ate some great stuff, and then, as we were leaving, Michele, one of the owners, said to me, "Can you come in tomorrow morning? Just come in, put on an apron and start making stuff." So, I did.



I had to go all the way to Italy to find out the truth.

That won't happen this year, though. The Feast has been cancelled (due to the pandemic) for the first time in 120 years. But I'll put on my mask and walk down to the Murray Hill Market, anyway, and sit at one of the tables in its backyard and have my own little feast. At least that's my assumption.

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



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