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Heights Observer named Ohio's best community paper

Bob Rosenbaum

The *Heights Observer* was named "Ohio's Best Community Newspaper" at an online ceremony Aug. 7 for the Press Club of Cleveland's annual All-Ohio Excellence In Journalism program. The award doesn't include daily newspapers, which are judged in a separate category.

Observer columnists Carla Rautenberg and Deborah Van Kleef earned first place for Public Service Coverage among non-daily newspapers for their monthly "Heights of Democracy" column. They won for their explanatory writing surrounding last year's public debate and vote over the city manager v. strong mayor form of government.

Under the rules, five of their columns from 2019 were reviewed. The columns submitted in their entry were those that ran in April, May, August, October and November 2019. (All back issues can be accessed online at heightsobserver.org/download-issues/).

Commenting on their column, the awarding judge wrote: "Oh, that every community would have people this dedicated to making Democracy



work!!! Truly an inspiration."

The awards program, now in its 42nd year, supports and recognizes quality journalism across Ohio. It includes all media—from large daily newspapers and community weeklies to magazines, trade journals, websites, TV and radio. More than 700 entries were submitted in the various categories of the competition, and were judged by journalists from other press clubs outside the state.

This is the first time the *Heights Observer* has won the "Best of Ohio" honors. The two previous years, it placed second behind the *Cleveland Jewish News*. This year, the *Jewish News* placed second.

The judges commented, the *Heights Observer* is "clearly committed to community news and in touch with their audience. A pleasure to review." The award was based on a review of three complete 2019 issues of the paper.

"We are honored to be recognized by the Press Club of Cleveland. It is a testament to this community that so many of our residents care about building a strong community and take the time to send us news articles and opinions," said Deanna Bremer Fisher, who, as executive director of FutureHeights, is also the *Heights Observer's* publisher. "I am grateful for our talented and dedicated staff. They go above and beyond the small amount of financial compensation we are able to give them to produce a high-quality publication each and every month. They are amazing."

Cleveland Heights resident Bob Rosenbaum is co-chair of the Heights Observer Advisory Committee, and is responsible for its advertising sales and market development. He also serves on the board of the Press Club of Cleveland.

Church teens open Little Free Pantry



Amy Kim Kryemes-Parks, director of spiritual formation, joins Jessica MacMillan, interim senior pastor, and Lindsay Haren-Lewis, associate pastor, at the blessing of the Little Free Pantry at Fairmount Presbyterian Church.

Sarah Stone

A Little Free Pantry—an outdoor cabinet stocked with free food and supplies for those in need—opened on Aug. 12 at Fairmount Presbyterian Church, at Scarborough and Coventry roads. A project of the church's middle- and high-school youth group, the 27-by-32-inch cabinet is located at the entrance to the church parking lot.

More than 1,000 Little Free Pantries are now open across the U.S., part of a grassroots project begun in 2016, by Jessica McClard in Arkansas, to respond to community food insecurity. In the Cleveland area, seven Little Free Pantries are have opened.

"Our teens were looking for a way to give back to their community and respond to pressing local needs,"

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LWV provides voting and ballot info

Maryann Barnes

Under pandemic conditions, the safest way to exercise one's right to vote in the Nov. 3 General Election is to register to vote online (deadline Oct. 5), and vote by mail (aka by absentee ballot). Given concerns about U.S. postal service delays and the potential effect on by-mail voting, the League of Women Voters of Great Cleveland (LWVGC) urges all voters to act promptly in registering to vote (or checking their registration status), requesting a ballot, and returning it.

Online voter registration

Check your registration status at the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (BOE) website (boe.cuyahogacounty.us; click on My Voting Info). If you are not registered, or if you are not registered at your current address due to a move, you can register or update your registration online. You will need an Ohio driver's license or Ohio-issued ID card. The online voter registration page on the Ohio Secretary of State (SOS) website (olvr.ohiosos.gov) will guide you through the process.

If you do not have the required BMV-issued documents, print out and complete a registration form (available from the same SOS Web page) and mail it to: Cuyahoga County BOE, 2925 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

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CH-UH BOE places 4.8 mill levy on November ballot

Kim Sergio Inglis

In an Aug. 10 letter to the *Heights Observer*, Ryan Routh, chair of the CH-UH City School District's Lay Finance Committee, announced that the district's board of education (BOE) "has placed a 4.8 mill levy on the November 2020 ballot." In remarks at the July 7 BOE meeting, Routh stated that the "additional, two-year operating levy of 4.8 mills is the minimum amount needed to sufficiently cover the costs to operate the district."

On Aug. 10 and 11, the district's

supervisor of communications, Cathan Cavanaugh, confirmed that the BOE "is moving forward with a November levy." She declined to provide further information until a press release was approved.

That press release, submitted to the *Heights Observer* the evening of Aug. 11, stated in part:

"The CH-UH BOE approved the second reading of the proposed 4.8-mill November 2020 additional operating levy language at its July 28 special meeting. At the direction of the board, the district treasurer filed the necessary paperwork with the Cuyahoga County

Board of Elections and the levy is now slated to be on the November 2020 ballot.

"The decision to ask our community for a levy in November was not an easy one," said CH-UH Board of Education President Jodi Sourini. "We understand that many Heights residents are facing economic instability right now. But after a levy failure earlier this year, a freeze in state funding, and on top of it all a global pandemic, our district is in a dire financial spot. This levy will generate the minimum funds

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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

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About the Observer

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

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

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

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

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

- To make a submission of any kind, go to www.heightsobserver.org 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 October issue must be submitted by Sept. 14. 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.

A little bit of this, a little bit of that



OPENING THE OBSERVER

Bob Rosenbaum

As you probably saw on page 1, the *Heights Observer* was recently named Ohio's best non-daily community newspaper; and our "Heights of Democracy" column, by Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg, won the top award for public service journalism.

The Press Club of Cleveland usually announces these awards at a big banquet in June, preceded by the best cocktail party of the year (if you enjoy shop talk with journalists). This year, for the obvious reason, it was delayed and then held online. I watched it from my patio and drank alone. But that didn't diminish the moment.

Our volunteer-based business model makes the *Heights Observer* an outlier in the awards program. The judges are other journalists from across the country, and they haven't always been hospitable to publications that operate without paid reporters.

The goal has always been that the *Heights Observer* would tell the

community's story as it unfolds over time. To me, this award is recognition from within the industry that we're doing it pretty well—even with our unusual approach.

Being No. 1 in the state does not make us immune to the pandemic. With so many bars and restaurants operating on life support, and big gatherings canceled, our advertising revenue is down by about 50 percent since April. Even at that, we're doing better than many other community publications.

I'm thankful to the advertisers who have stuck with us throughout; we'll recognize them by name before the year ends. Meanwhile, we aren't seeing any meaningful financial rebound yet, and once it begins I expect it to be a long, slow climb back.

The *Heights Observer* is hovering right around break-even, so we can keep on going if things don't get markedly worse. But the number of pages in each issue is determined in large part by ad revenue. As a result, we've been printing thinner papers and have less room for the many contributions we receive each month. Please keep the articles, columns and letters coming. But also know that we continue to publish under difficult circumstances. Your patience and kindness is always appreciated.

In good times, for-profit publications typically fill 50-60 percent of their pages with advertising. As a nonprofit, we try to dedicate 60 percent of the space to editorial content, with ads filling the other 40 percent.

Based on that ratio, this issue should have had 16 pages. We decided to publish 20 pages to allow room for the many letters to the editor and opinions we've received on various topics. It's one of the benefits of being mission-based rather than profit-focused.

If you're not out and about as much these days to pick up the latest issue, did you know that you can have it mailed to you as a benefit of joining FutureHeights? In May and June we mailed it to all our members, but are now back to the regular practice of sending it to those who join at the Good Neighbor level (\$60/year) or higher. If you're interested, visit www.futureheights.org. You can also view every issue we've ever published PDF format. You'll find the link in the left-side menu at www.heightsobserver.org.

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

Help 'Save Our Stages' now

To the Editor:

Ensemble Theatre, Greater Cleveland's home for modern American classics, culturally relevant plays, and significant new works, has been producing great theater with local talent for 40 great years. But, our doors have been closed to the public since March 1, and may continue to be for some time.

Like other arts, event, and theater organizations, Ensemble has faced, and continues to face, tens of thousands of dollars in losses due to the pandemic. There must be some type of industry-specific relief!

Please help us #SaveOurStages by contacting Ohio Sens. Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman at www.saveourstages.com. The site provides additional information, and offers pre-written text that you can use in place of, or in addition to, a personal message to let them know why it is essential to save Cleveland's and Ohio's stages. You will also find information on the bill being proposed to Congress.

We need your voices to be heard. Take action now. #SaveOurStages.

Celeste Cosentino

Executive Artistic Director, Ensemble Theatre

Why is Heights Libraries a landlord?

To the Editor:

I am a taxpayer of the district and always support local library tax requests,

for two simple reasons:

- I am an ardent believer in the power of education and learning, and
- Heights Libraries does an excellent job of fulfilling its mission.

It has recently come to my attention the CH-UH libraries are being asked to continue being a landlord for a group of nonprofit entities that are currently renting space in the former Coventry School building.

Being a landlord and renting of-fice space to nonprofits has nothing to do with the mission of the library and acts to defocus the library from its core mission.

There is plenty of unused office space in the Heights available to the current tenants.

If the Board of Directors of Heights Libraries cannot find a programming use for the former Coventry School building that is in the wheelhouse of its mission, then I urge the board to demolish the building and convert the space to parking and a park.

James Hurley

Cleveland Heights

Appointments don't reflect the voice of the people

To the Editor:

In last fall's election, Cleveland Heights voters were clear that appointments don't reflect the voice of the people. Residents rejected the

most recent city council appointment by a large margin, with the challenger, Davida Russell, winning against the appointed council member, with more than 57 percent of the vote.

Just one year later, the council member rejected by the voters has somehow made it to city council's top four applicants [for another open council seat], narrowed from a pool of 22. Hmmm, really? How did this happen?

Our city may have some important issues on its plate, but there's nothing that would inhibit the current council from fully functioning. It would serve the residents of Cleveland Heights more to wait until a seventh member can be democratically elected to council.

Felicia Jeffries, Thyra Davis, Asia Johnson, Markita Stevenson, Lonnie Davis, Florine Alford and William Jeffries.

School levy would keep pace with inflation

To the Editor:

The CH-UH school board has placed a 4.8 mill levy on the November 2020 ballot. Voting for the levy makes financial sense for our community.

CH-UH has placed a levy on the ballot simply to keep up with inflation. Due to Ohio law, even when the value of district homes rises, the amount of property tax collected is kept constant (estimated at around

continued on page 3

Developing Millikin land would be a tragic loss

Michael Morse

Imagine a mile-long wooded corridor giving life to an urban landscape.

Imagine destroying that natural area in order to build a few more houses in a city where vacant lots and vacant houses abound. Once destroyed it will never come back. Then, where will the children go to learn to love nature?

Imagine saving this small piece of nature for yourselves, your children, your community.

Around the perimeter of Severance Town Center, there is a mile-

long wooded buffer stretching east from South Taylor Road to Severance Millikin school, and then north to Mayfield Road. The core of this buffer is the 11-acre school campus, with acres of wooded land. I call this wooded land the Severance Woods.

This is not vacant land. This is a gem we should cherish and preserve. If this were a public park, no one would dare suggest destroying a thousand trees to make room for more housing. No matter your age, many of these trees were old when you were young.

The city of Cleveland Heights

wants to buy this land from the Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District, and then sell it to a private developer so that these woods can be destroyed so that a few more houses can be built.

In a world threatened by global warming, where people are desperately trying to restore nature, why would we allow this wooded area to be destroyed?

There is no shortage of vacant land in need of redevelopment. Severance Town Center is a vast opportunity for redevelopment. All over Cleveland Heights there are vacant lots and houses in need of redevelopment. There is no need to destroy the Severance Woods to find room for more housing.

Some people say the schools need more revenue from this land. But seriously, it is not reasonable to think that taxing a few houses in this small area would make any significant contribution to the vast financial problems our city and schools face.

We, the people of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district, are the real owners of this land. It belongs to us. It belongs to our children. It belongs to the future of our community.

Cleveland Heights is at risk of losing this gem. Please speak up and let people know what a tragic loss this would be.

Michael Morse is a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.

How is Millikin development a good idea?

Robin Koslen

At its meeting on July 20, Cleveland Heights City Council approved sending a letter of intent to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education (BOE), offering to take the Millikin Elementary School building off the BOE's hands for \$1, and market the property for redevelopment.

We citizens need to write the city thank you letters immediately. So kind of council members to ask the school district to unload the 11 acres of 200-year-old trees, stables from the Severance/Millikin estate, animal habitat, playground, all-round-beautiful natural area, and the school district's maintenance department's home for \$1 and a tax deferment. Why wouldn't we neighbors [consider development] a terrific asset to the neighborhood? And, how would anyone in city government know that we Millikin neighbors might not like the idea?

How? Well, we had a Zoom meet-

LETTERS continued from page 2

\$72.25 million). With annual inflation of 2 percent, a levy is necessary to keep pace with inflation.

Another reason a levy is required is because our district has been uniquely harmed by how Ohio's EdChoice voucher program is funded. Even though the state paid our district only \$1,927 for each student, our district was required to send out \$6,000 to private, charter and religious schools for each EdChoice voucher high school student—a loss of \$4,073 per student. And more than 1,500 students used vouchers in our district! A staggering \$13 million—roughly 10 percent of the budget—was lost to voucher programs during the 2019-20 year. If EdChoice were directly funded by the state, no levy would be necessary.

While no one is happy with increased taxes, the millage of the [proposed] levy is the smallest [in] at least 25 years, and will cost homeowners only \$14 per month per \$100,000 in property market value.

Passing the levy is necessary to keep our public schools strong and protect our property values. Please vote for the school levy!

Ryan Routh, chair of the CH-UH City School District's Lay Finance Committee

ing back in March that Mayor Jason Stein attended. Stein promised us that we neighbors would be apprised of all activities associated with this potential hostile takeover. I did not think that meant that we should watch all council meetings, or be very careful to read all Cleveland.com articles to see if something comes up. But it turns out, I was wrong.

I have so many problems with this proposal that it is hard for me to know where to start. Clearly, the destruction of the neighborhood that I have lived in for 35 years is of importance to me. There will be neighbors who, instead of having trees in their backyards, will have the post office loading dock. I am sure that a developer will promise to plant more trees to replace the ones cut down, and in another 200 years that replacement will be complete. The walking paths we enjoy will be gone, but we neighbors can always walk to a different playground. Too bad the next closest one is two miles away. The old historic stables, who needs old stuff anyway? The gardens that we have lovingly tended? Too bad.

But when I look at why this piece of property would be so coveted, I think of EdChoice vouchers and those who would like to use them. The CH-UH City School District will be shelling out \$9.5 million in vouchers this coming school year and, if there were more homes available to the families who live in the neighborhood using those vouchers, the school district could then spend more public education dollars on private education. Not exactly a good proposition for the community, public schools or taxpayers. Possibly, a really bad one.

There are other pieces of vacant land in the area. The old Center Mayfield land is for sale. It might cost more than a dollar, but it would not destroy a neighborhood. This is clearly a developer wanting land on the cheap and a council and mayor looking out for the interests of a small portion of the community.

I am angry. Can you tell?

I reached out to Mayor Stein for comment, but he did not return my phone calls.

Robin Koslen is a 67, almost 68-year-old, who finds herself continually shaking her head and wondering how all this happened. She is a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.

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LETTERS continued from page 3

Performance audit would make school district accountable

To the Editor:

What is wrong with accountability? What is wrong with asking how and why your tax dollars were spent in a particular fashion? Our school board has shown a complete lack of accountability toward how it spends our \$130 million in taxes to run the school district.

We have asked [board members] for over seven months to have a performance audit done in the district. A performance audit is done by a neutral third party from the state auditor's office to see if there are any cuts or savings to our

budget that can be made, to allow our tax money to be spent in the best way, and to get the most for our tax dollars.

Based solely on how hard the school board is fighting this, it seems [its members] don't want to spend our tax dollars properly. They just want to continue wasting our tax dollars and then ask for more this November with another levy.

Other school districts have found millions of dollars in cost savings following their performance audits. I am certain that, following a performance audit here, we would have enough in savings to not require the levy they placed on the ballot.

John Vitale
Cleveland Heights

LETTERS continue on page 5

BOE explains sale of Delisle Center land

Jodi Sourini

Several residents have asked about the property transaction involving four parcels of land at the Delisle Center that the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education (BOE) recently sold to the city of University Heights. Since the community is interested, I'd like to explain the factors which led the BOE to this decision—many of which may not be readily apparent.

First, Ohio Revised Code (ORC) has specific rules regarding the disposition of public school properties, which are considered public assets. We must follow the law even though the law may not enable a school district to maximize potential revenue the way a city can.

Second, the Ohio Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) program permits municipalities and counties to designate CRAs which provide a direct incentive tax exemption for up to 15 years, depending on the construction project. Under this program, municipalities are empowered to grant these tax abatements.

Third, the four parcels the

school district owned at the Delisle Center were not usable for educational purposes. This meant, in addition to being responsible for their upkeep, the district was required to pay taxes on them. The city of University Heights owned an additional three parcels. Because of the shape and location of the parcels, and the fact they were owned by two separate entities, they were unlikely to be usable or to be developed unless they were combined. Back to my first point: Under ORC, a city has more latitude to deal directly with individual developers. The school district paid the taxes on the four properties that we owned to settle our tax obligation before transferring the property. The city of University Heights picked up legal fees and other costs required to complete the transaction.

Fourth, the school board ensured the legal agreement includes a "claw back provision." This ensures that if the development does not proceed as planned, the land reverts back to the school district.

Fifth, if the school district had continued to own [this] land that we deemed unusable for our needs, we would not gain any tax revenue from it (and we would have to continue to pay the upkeep and taxes). If the land were developed, even under a CRA, in the first 15 years, we'd receive modest tax revenue from the developer based on the parcel divisions and the initial improvements required to develop the land. Due to the CRA, the buildings themselves will be tax-abated for 15 years, which the school district has no authority to contest or approve. After 15 years, the district will receive taxes on both the land as well as the buildings, which should increase significantly based on the project's [anticipated] value in 15 years.

Sixth, a new development, as is planned for this property, typically increases the value of its surrounding neighborhood, and often spurs additional economic growth. Revitalizing the Taylor corridor would bring positive benefits to the cities of University Heights and Cleveland Heights, as well as the school district.

After considering these factors, the BOE decided it was in the public's best interest in the long term to proceed with selling the parcels so this project could move forward. If we didn't, we were unlikely to ever receive revenue from this land, and it would continue to cost the district money.

As with all construction projects, the district will include the projected tax revenue for this project in its Five-Year Forecast, once ground is broken on the project. Many proposed real estate developments are delayed, or never built, for a variety of reasons. It would be inappropriate to forecast tax receipts before we have evidence they are likely to materialize.

Jodi Sourini is president of the Board of Education for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District. She's been a resident of University Heights for more than 25 years.

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School levy will ensure student mental health services

To the Editor:

As a board-certified psychoanalyst, and a licensed clinical counselor, respectively, we have both worked with children, teens and adults experiencing mental health crises. Sometimes these crises arise from an acute trauma, such as a sudden death or unexpected divorce, and sometimes they come about over time from the ceaseless burden of daily living.

The CDC estimates that approximately 4.4 million children ages 3-17 suffer from anxiety, and approximately 1.9 million suffer from depression. We know, without question, that these and other mental conditions are being amplified by the COVID pandemic. These issues often remain invisible to the untrained eye, and can easily go undiagnosed and untreated. For many young people in our community, their crises are first spotted by concerned teachers, coaches, school counselors and social workers.

We both are also parents of students in CH-UH schools, and we are grateful that our district's schools do such a good job providing social and mental health services to students. Unfortunately, we frequently hear people complain that the number of social support staff our district hires is too many. We think those complaints are not only misguided, but dangerous. We firmly believe that school social workers, guidance counselors and psychologists play a critical role in the health and well-being of our community's children—sometimes a life or death role.

At a time when we need to bolster our mental health system across the board, we urge our fellow Heights residents to support the upcoming school levy in order to protect these vital services in our district. Particularly in this moment of unprecedented stress, we want our schools to remain places with trained professionals who are ready to serve children in great need. We feel this is urgent, and we hope you will join us in voting for the school levy in November.

Catherine P. Sullivan and Julie Mokotoff
Cleveland Heights

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Remove Monticello name from CH school and street

Alisa Bray

Equity is a topic that has been a part of critical attempts for change in our CH-UH school district for at least four years now. As a community, we created waves when we brought to the district's attention the injustices at Oxford Elementary School, and the movement has picked up momentum since.

For those of us who can see the clear lines in our cities, due to demographics and long-standing prejudices, issues of equity do not end with our schools.

As recent developments regarding Black lives pick up speed, much has come to light about the history of our country. It has been white-washed, and I cannot ask for forgiveness for these words that make us cringe, but regrettably are true.

It was recently brought to my attention by my son's uncle, Pastor Stanley Manning of Christ Centered Church, that Monticello, a plantation owned by Thomas Jefferson, was nothing short of a slave farm. I had to ask myself, how could someone who considered people property end up glorified, with streets and schools named after him? We know that answer, though it was under the guise of being one of our "founding fathers."

When we look up the history of Jefferson, he is constantly written as a hero and a leader. But can generations who have been greatly impacted by systemic racism, with the root being the slave trade and colonizing of indigenous lands, really hold and honor such a person as a hero? We are at the point where we understand that the plight of the brown person in America is far reaching, affecting us within each institution, ranging from our laws, the lining of our cities and where we can live, our education, and even our health care.

The idea that change must take place is easy as a conversation, but often meets resistance when a call to action requests real change and commitment. Many fold.

I am calling to action a change in our city and our schools: to remove the name of Monticello from our streets and from where our students gather to learn. I will push alone, if necessary—but imagine if, as a collective, we can come together and understand the urgent need to accept the truth of our

history and the impact it has on many today. This is a call to action to respect the lives of those who have not had the right to be born with certain privileges; a call to action to no longer honor those who participated in the legal theft and downfall of a people, of a culture.

When we look at the lines in Cleveland Heights, and see where resources are lacking, is it a coincidence that Monticello, the name of a slave farm, is a main road that defines how we live and how we learn?

My guess is, many will feel overwhelmed by this call to action. Many who have stood with Black lives may say, "This is too much," or "This is going too far." But if our schools and streets were named after Nazi camps, would we not

want to stand up against what many of us can argue has been a slow genocide of a race? In this paradigm there is only one side, and it is my hope that we can all stand together and say, "It is time for a major change."

Change the name of our school. Change the name of our street. We will no longer honor a slave farm as part of our institutions and our community.

[To receive a version of this opinion from the writer, containing editorial resources from Monticello.org and *Smithsonian Magazine*, send an e-mail to the writer at info@bellacpservices.com.]

Alisa Bray is a mother, community and district volunteer, an activist, and local business owner.

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Gifts in the Heights

Black education matters

Sheryl Banks and Eve McPherson

It has been heartening to see so many Black Lives Matter signs in Heights yards, and to see our neighbors and friends show up for justice at rallies, protests and workshops.

It shouldn't surprise anyone. We pride ourselves on being a diverse community that supports social activism. But, are we really doing all we can as a community to support racial justice and combat systemic racism?

Would it surprise you to know that white families opt out of CH-UH schools at a rate of 85 percent—a rate significantly higher than many surrounding suburbs? Would it surprise you to know that EdChoice defunds primarily minority schools, and that CH-UH is defunded by millions of dollars every year? Would it surprise you to know that 89 percent of the vouchers in CH-UH go to white families opting out of public schools? Would it surprise you to know that over 93 percent of the students who use vouchers never attended our public schools?

So, as we decorate our lawns with messages of support for our Black neighbors, are we, as white neighbors, really doing what we can and should be doing to fight for racial justice and equity in our own community? Voters recently defeated a school levy [in spring 2020]. That levy was on the ballot solely because of EdChoice vouchers defunding the schools—

vouchers which primarily support our white residents, not our Black ones.

To address systemic racism, we must support the institutions that support our Black neighbors. The public schools are at the heart of this support. The majority of children who attend CH-UH schools are Black.

As white community members, we should make sure the schools are integrated. We cannot self-segregate and expect to achieve a more equitable and just community. Separate has never been equal. Dr. King wrote about these same exact problems more than 50 years ago, in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Be part of the solution. Send your children to our excellent public schools.

Most importantly, support our public schools, and the children who attend them, by voting for the levy this November. If you believe that Black lives matter, you must also believe that CH-UH students, the majority of whom are Black, deserve to continue to have an excellent, free public education available to them. Don't take it away.

Sheryl Banks is a Cleveland Heights resident, and parent of a Heights High freshman. Eve McPherson is a Cleveland Heights resident, parent of a Heights High freshman and a Roxboro Middle School student, and an alumna of CH-UH schools.

CH City Council must demand access to police policy materials

Josephine Moore

At the July 20 Cleveland Heights City Council meeting, there was a discussion between City Manager Tanisha Briley and Council Member Kahlil Seren that should worry any Cleveland Heights citizen who thinks that our elected officials need to be, at minimum, privy to all decisions about governmental policy in our city.

After Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg's report to council, Seren referenced ongoing work with the firm Lexipol, for the purpose of crafting our police department's policies. Seren asked whether, as the policymaking authority for the city, council would be able to see the materials that Lexipol is providing to our police department. He then made a request that council have access to those materials.

I thought this seemed perfectly reasonable. City council members are, after all (for the time being), our only directly elected and accountable government officials, and they are indeed ultimately responsible for overseeing policy for all city matters.

Furthermore, protests are still happening across our nation. Organizations right here in Cleveland Heights, such as Safer Heights, are demanding greater accountability from our police forces, and demanding that we give community representatives a

seat at the table when deciding how we define and create public safety. To shut down transparency and community dialogue now would invite suspicion and unrest. Surely, we can all agree that we don't want that.

Yet the city manager said giving city council members the opportunity to review the materials Lexipol is providing to our police department, so as to guide us in shaping our policies, would be inappropriate. She said that it is not under city council's authority to have a say in how these policies are shaped.

I—and many others—disagree.

Being able to review materials that may impact the public safety of our city is not reserved for the administration alone. But more than that, now is not the time to prohibit our directly elected officials from ensuring that our police department's policies reflect our city's goals, values, and community needs.

Please call on our city council members to stand united in demanding access to see all materials being used to shape our police department's policies. We elected our city council members to be our leaders, to be responsible, and to put our community's interests over political turf wars.

Josephine Moore is a proud Cleveland Heights resident, mother, wife, and small-business owner.

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Privatizing local government



HEIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

Cleveland Heights Chief of Police Annette Mecklenburg's response to the concerns of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the local group Safer Heights, is laudable and welcome. She announced this summer that her department would revise and update its policies, with particular attention to use-of-force, and bias-free policing.

We are concerned, however, that City Manager Tanisha Briley has outsourced this admittedly time-consuming job to Lexipol, a California-based company serving 460 Ohio municipalities and 3,400 agencies nationally. Lexipol provides "model policies" and assistance in customizing them. Clients can also subscribe to daily two-minute training modules on the practical application of those policies.

Lexipol's pitch to prospective clients (mainly smaller police and sheriffs' departments) is protection from liability. This approach might theoretically lead to more temperate behavior on the part of individual officers: if you don't kill someone, their family won't sue you and your department over their death. But it does nothing to address the culture of policing, let alone questions about the role of police in a community that is truly safe for all.

We spoke with Mecklenburg, who assured us, "We will be looking for citizen input and nothing will be done without it." However, it may be difficult to achieve effective public oversight in this case. Lexipol executives are fiercely proprietary; they keep no records of the processes and sources used in developing their content. Academic researchers have been unable to learn the names or areas of expertise of the employees who create these materials, according to an article in the *Texas Law Review* (Vol. 96, Issue 5, "Lexipol: The Privatization of Police Policymaking," by Ingrid V. Eagly and Joanna C. Schwartz).

Lexipol is owned by Riverside, a global private equity firm that also owns SafeBuilt, the company to which Cleveland Heights outsourced its building department and several housing inspector positions. According to Riverside's website, Cleveland is

"[h]ome to more Riversiders than any other city." What's a Riversider? We don't know (though the firm's Co-CEO Stewart Kohl lives in Shaker Heights). Clearly, however, Riverside and its subsidiaries are sucking up a lot of tax dollars and influencing, if not controlling, the delivery of some of our most essential government services.

Privatization is creeping into the lives of Heights children as well. The city recently engaged an outside company to hire and manage crossing guards. In addition, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, which some years ago privatized after-school care, has outsourced its human resources department to Renhill, a for-profit company that recently merged with California-based HR On Demand. They are now in charge of recruiting our children's teachers.

As we have said before, sometimes it is practical, necessary and wise to bring in consultants. Two excellent examples are available on the Cleveland Heights YouTube channel. The July 13 meeting of city council's Municipal Services Committee features detailed, informative presentations on a pair of vital issues. Council members and city staff heard first from an engineer from Wade Trim and an attorney from McMahon DeGulis about compliance with the consent decree regarding our sewers. Their technical expertise and long experience with the EPA are indispensable to Cleveland Heights. Next came a presentation from GT Environmental on the proposed change to automated trash pickup. It validated the conclusions of the resident Refuse and Recycling Task Force, but recommended higher fees as more realistic.

Well-qualified experts with narrowly defined specialties and local knowledge can provide invaluable assistance to cities and schools. This is very different from the offerings of corporate behemoths that profit by taking over core municipal or public education functions.

It's important to know the difference. What will we choose to be: Riversiders or citizens?

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



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EdChoice vouchers institutionalize discrimination



Susie Kaeser

John Lewis, the heroic advocate of nonviolence, beseeched us: "When you see something that is not right, you must say something."

If you read this column regularly, you know I have not been silent about EdChoice vouchers, a state program that requires public school

districts to pay for private-school vouchers out of the school district's state funding. They are particularly damaging to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, which transfers more than 30 percent of its state aid to vouchers, the highest proportion in the state. It is this huge expense that led the school board to cut the district budget by \$2 million this year and next, and to put a levy on the ballot in November.

During my stay at home, I documented how other school districts are affected by this program, which, rather than investing in public-school students, uses test scores to rate school quality, makes vouchers available to families served by a school that is rated as failing, and requires the so-called failing district to pay for the vouchers.

A close look at who is harmed most by the loss of public education funds to vouchers shows that EdChoice discriminates by income and race. Public officials built a project

to advance private education on the backs of poor and minority children. If we are serious about dismantling the effects of institutional racism, we must end EdChoice.

Through the 2018-19 school year, only 40, or 6 percent, of Ohio's 612 school districts had any schools eligible for EdChoice. For 2019-20, EdChoice expanded into 100 more districts, but 94 percent of all vouchers awarded that year were in the 40 previously included districts. Twenty-two districts have voucher expenses above \$500,000; in CH-UH, the cost is more than \$7 million.

When I looked at who attends school in the hardest-hit districts, I discovered that most students in 39 of the 40 districts live in poverty, and, in 29, most are racial minorities. The 22 districts that each funded 100 or more EdChoice vouchers account for 90 percent of EdChoice vouchers statewide. All 22 districts have student poverty rates in excess of 54 percent and, in 16, more than 80 percent of students live in poverty. Non-white students are the majority in 20 of those districts, and account for 87 percent of all the students enrolled in these city and first-ring districts. Given the outsized power of rural legislators in a gerrymandered legislature, it's no wonder it's nearly impossible to solve this injustice.

Poor children are carrying the burden because the state uses test scores to define quality. Standardized tests, while convenient, are a more reliable measure of the income, parental education and neighborhood characteristics of test-takers than of what happens in school. By using test scores for this high-stakes decision, the legislators created a system that discriminates against poor children.

It is not surprising that most students in these districts are minorities. Income inequality is an enduring effect of institutional racism. As Nikole Hannah-Jones reported recently in *The New York Times*, the median income of African-American households is about half that of white households. Housing segregation by race and income plays into the lack of diversity in the districts most affected by vouchers. Local taxpayers foot the bill for the legislature's addiction to funding private education at the expense of public schools.

The loss of funds to EdChoice leaves local officials with the unseemly choice of reducing educational opportunities or raising property taxes. Both exacerbate education inequality among public schools in Ohio. It is time to dismantle this source of institutionalized inequality and the injustice it perpetuates.

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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LETTERS continued from page 5

Parent volunteers urge support of school levy

To the Editor:

We would like to introduce ourselves to the public: We are Tiger Nation for Strong Schools, a group of district parents and community volunteers campaigning for the 4.8 mill operating levy on the November ballot.

Formerly known as Citizens for Our Heights Schools, we opted to change our name after the anti-levy campaign co-opted “Tiger Nation,” despite the fact that [its members] do not send their children to public schools, do not volunteer their time within district buildings, and do not identify themselves in any way with Tiger Nation. They were instead trying to intentionally mislead and confuse the public; something they were unfortunately successful in doing.

We are the ones who truly believe in the students, families, teachers and staff that make up our fine public-school district, and who

will work to ensure it has the funding necessary to do the vital work of educating our community’s children.

While our current board of education and administration should be applauded for the difficult budget cuts they’ve enacted, we do not believe that education is a for-profit industry where the bottom line trumps all. Efficiency is not, and cannot and should not be, the guiding principle when creating a school district’s budget.

Instead of only looking at what a district cuts, how about looking at what a district offers—at its wide [range] of valuable programming—from advanced coursework to English as a Second Language, from sports to arts and music, from equitable social supports to Career Technical Education? These are what make a district successful, and these are what CH-UH schools do so well.

As volunteers with Tiger Nation for Strong Schools, these are what we will fight to maintain. We hope you’ll join us by visiting www.chuhyes.com and by voting for the upcoming school levy.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher
Cleveland Heights

LETTERS continue on page 12

LEVY continued from page 1

needed to educate our children in whatever environments we find ourselves in throughout the coming school year.’

“The 4.8-mill levy would cost a homeowner approximately \$168 a year, or \$14 a month, per \$100,000 in home value.”

According to Cuyahoga County data on levy impacts and school funding, the annual tax bill per \$100,000 of assessed value is \$4,248.65 for homeowners in Cleveland Heights, and \$4,275.95 for those in University Heights. County data indicates that about 60 percent of that goes to the schools: for Cleveland Heights, that works out to \$2,548 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation (72.8 mills); for University Heights, it’s \$2,566 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation (73.3 mills).

The press release cited “devastating financial losses,” stating, “Due to new EdChoice voucher legislation signed into law in March of 2020, the district anticipates losing a minimum of an additional \$1.7 million this fiscal year, bringing the total estimated EdChoice-related loss to at least \$9.2 million. The district had previously expected, and budgeted for, a \$7.5 million loss.”

“We cut 20 positions in April 2020 and made significant cuts in each department’s budget—nearly \$2.5 million in

total reductions—in order to make up for this shortfall. Future cuts will run much deeper if this levy does not pass in November,” said CH-UH City School District Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby.

When the pandemic hit, according to the press release, the state of Ohio cut the district’s funds by \$1.4 million annually. The press release noted, “Federal CARES relief has already been utilized to offset those state funding cuts in the 2019–20 school year. An additional \$312,000 in CARES funding is expected for 2020–21.”

In looking to future budget projections, the press release states, “Although the district previously committed to \$750,000 in annual budget cuts over the next several years, it will commit to \$2 million in spending reductions for the 2021–22 school year. The district faces a \$9-million deficit in the 2021–22 school year if the levy doesn’t pass, according to [its] Five-Year Forecast.”

“If it comes to pass that we do not need all of the monies generated by the levy, we will take action to halt tax collection from the community,” said Sourini.

[This article, originally published on Aug. 11, was updated on Aug. 14.]

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

PANTRY continued from page 1

explained Peggy Roberts, who helped spearhead the project. “This was a group effort of students and our Fairmount members and staff, and we hope our neighbors will join in this community-operated caring project.”

The church’s Little Free Pantry was built by Brad Richer, a member of the church; installed by Matt Kashuk, a structural engineer; and painted by youth group members.

The church invites anyone to donate by placing items in the pantry, which is always open. Recommended items are shelf-stable food (peanut

butter, jelly, cereal, soup, pasta, rice, and healthy snacks), toiletries, first-aid items, paper goods, and small toys (Play-Doh and bubbles). If the pantry is full, donated items can be left in the Rubbermaid container near the church, by the entrance of the church’s east parking lot on Scarborough Road.

More information about Little Free Pantries is available at www.littlefreepantry.org.

Sarah Stone is a Cleveland Heights resident and an enthusiastic deacon at Fairmount Presbyterian Church.

The ‘new’ new school year



A TEACHER’S VOICE

Karen Rego

It’s difficult to say what online instruction will look like this school year because remote teaching and learning are still so new to our students and our teachers.

Last March, when Governor DeWine closed our school buildings, we found ourselves in a remote-learning environment overnight.

Our teachers stepped up and provided the best instruction possible so that our students could continue to learn. At the July meeting of the CH-UH Board of Education, members voted unanimously to keep us remote for the beginning of the 2020–21 school year. We are proud of our board for this decision. School is essential, but safety must come first.

Now that the decision has been made, the planning begins. Teachers will be organizing their virtual “classrooms.” They will decide how to present content through live instruction, recorded videos, and classwork. Because it’s not realistic to expect students to sit through live instruction for the entire school day, our teachers will have to be creative.

Keeping students engaged is what we do year-round in our classrooms, and being remote will be no different. With the help of a daily schedule, teachers will create ongoing and engaging activities. These schedules will help our students and their families stay organized, especially when multiple teachers will be assigning work and presenting daily lessons.

So, what does it mean to have engaging activities? When we are in-person, teachers plan a variety of activities, from partner work to hands-on labs. Although remote teaching will look different,

it will provide students with the same activities they would have in a traditional classroom.

There will be time in the daily schedule for workbooks, independent reading, and opportunities to go outdoors to collect items for science classes. Teachers will still have read-alouds, class meetings and small-group instruction.

We want our students to continue to have music, art and physical education. We know these classes are crucial to their development. Our goal is to make this the best experience possible for all of our students.

Remote teaching is challenging, and keeping our students engaged with appropriate material in this new way is still new to many of us. Be assured, however, that our teachers are well into the planning stages [as of the beginning of August] for the start of the school year.

As we work through various aspects of remote learning, what repeatedly comes to my mind is how much we miss our students. They are the reason we became teachers.

Yes, we will see their smiling faces on our computer screens, but it’s not the same. We will miss the high fives, the hugs, and the face-to-face interactions, but we know being physically apart is the only way to keep all of us safe at this time.

When we return to in-person classes, I am confident that those relationships will rebuild quickly and be stronger than ever. We know we have students who will struggle through this, but we will be available to help.

The pandemic will end, eventually, and we will be in the classrooms again, with our students, where we all belong.

Karen Rego has taught grades K–8 in the CH-UH district, and currently provides math and language support at Monticello Middle School. She is president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

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Odd Dog adds Sunday coffee service

Mike Cook

For almost a year, Odd Dog Coffee has set up shop at Walter Stinson Community Park on summer and fall Saturdays. Starting in September, it will be at "The Walt" on Sundays as well.

Mary-Elizabeth Fenn and Michael Hancock will offer their usual menu of products out of their mobile trailer, at the entrance of the park, off Fenwick Road. The couple plans to add espresso to the menu, and also sell hand-thrown ceramic merchandise.

Odd Dog Coffee is a sponsor of University Heights City Hall's "Masks on University Heights" campaign. To promote safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, residents are encouraged to send mask selfies to info@univer



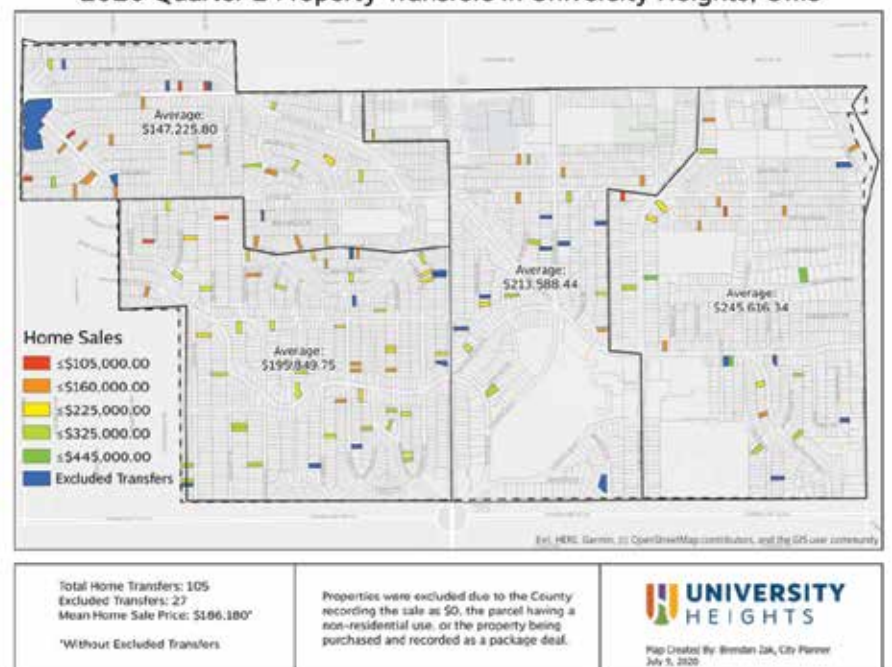
Mary-Elizabeth Fenn, co-owner of Odd Dog Coffee.

sityheights.com. Everyone who sends a photo will be entered into a drawing to win coffee from Odd Dog Coffee. The winning name will be drawn on Sunday, Sept. 6. The contest is open to all University Heights residents.

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

Housing prices are up in UH

2020 Quarter 2 Property Transfers in University Heights, Ohio



Mike Cook

Despite the pandemic, the University Heights housing market remains strong. The median housing price in the city made a significant jump in the second quarter of 2020, compared to both the first quarter of 2020, and the comparable second quarter of 2019.

The overall median sale price in University Heights increased by approximately \$30,000 between the first and second quarter of 2020.

In the city's central census tract, the median price increased by roughly \$50,000 in the second quarter.

While there were fewer sales in

the second quarter of 2020 than in the second quarter of 2019, median prices across University Heights have increased by around \$20,000 citywide. Each of the city's four census tracts have seen increases.

"University Heights is back on the map, and people see our city as an exciting place to live, work, and raise a family," Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said. "Thanks to our Community Reinvestment Area, people are buying and making their homes here."

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

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UH kids lobby Tribe to 'Let Cooper In'



University Heights kids with Cooper, the city's brand ambassador.

Mike Cook

The kids of University Heights are making their voices heard. Will the Cleveland Indians listen?

Cooper the Chicken, the city's brand ambassador (please don't call him a mascot), usually spends his summer at concerts in the park, at parades, at the pool, and even at lemonade stands.

The coronavirus pandemic ended all of the activities Cooper loves so much. So, when the Cleveland Indians announced its cardboard-fan-cutout program, University Heights employees chipped in \$100 so that Cooper could be represented at the baseball games.

Unfortunately, the Tribe responded to the city's request by saying it was "only printing cutouts of the human variety at this time."

Seeing an opening in the "at this time" language, a Change.org peti-

tion was launched on Aug. 5, asking the Indians to reconsider and "Let Cooper In."

The city has created a 60-second campaign commercial, featuring Cooper and kids in University Heights.

"University Heights, the time is now," insists the announcer in the commercial. "Cooper needs to be at the games, representing all of us fans here in University Heights."

The Indians and the city of University Heights have a proud tradition of working together. When Josephine Morhard created the first-ever youth baseball league in 1937, right here in University Heights, the Cleveland Indians provided uniforms and other assistance. Indians pitcher Mel Harder, a University Heights resident, was active with the league.

The commercial depicts Cooper's room, which features a copy of the book *Mrs. Morhard and the Boys*, and a

photo of Harder. Cooper's nightstand displays a photo of him with his friend Gabriella Kreuz, the in-game host for the Indians. Other Indians memorabilia includes a chair from Cleveland Municipal Stadium, a Jim Thome bobblehead, and autographed photos of Rocky Colavito, Sandy Alomar, Tito Francona, Bob Feller and Lou Boudreau.

The commercial is posted on the University Heights Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts.

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

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LWV cont. from page 1

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Step two, complete and return your ballot by mail or in person to the BOE at the address above. Ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 3, or, if mailed, postmarked by Nov. 2. To assure a postmark, a trip to the post office may be necessary. A mailed ballot is best sent to the BOE at least one week prior to the election.

For details on how to avoid mistakes and delays in this process, including how to verify BOE receipt of your application and your ballot, go to the LWVGC website (<https://bit.ly/LWVGCvbm>).

Other voting options

In addition to voting by mail, or voting in person at your polling place on Election Day, in-person early voting at the Cuyahoga County BOE begins Oct. 6. Check voteohio.gov for the schedule.

What's on Heights ballots?

In addition to the presidential candidates, Heights residents will see several additional contested races and issues on the Nov. 3 ballot:

- LaVerne Gore (Republican) is challenging incumbent Marcia Fudge (Democrat) for the 11th Congressional District.

- For the Ohio House of Representatives District 9, Democratic incumbent Janine Boyd is running against Republican challenger Dustin D. Russell.
- For the nonpartisan Ohio State Board of Education District 11 race, incumbent Meryl Johnson has three challengers: Michele Elba, Jedi Hilland and Richard Rocky Neale.
- There are three contested races for Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, two for the Ohio Supreme Court, and two for the Eighth District Court of Appeals.
- Issues include a 4.8 mill continuing school levy for operating expenses for residents in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.
- Cleveland Heights residents will also vote on a city charter amendment clarifying the process for qualifying as a candidate in the election of a mayor in 2021.

Upcoming candidate forums and voter resources

The LWVGC will host virtual candidate forums for the judicial races (Sept. 16 and 17, at noon) and the Ohio House District 9 race (Sept. 24, 7 p.m.). For details visit www.lwvgreatercleveland.org.

Voters interested in more information on candidates and issues can research them at VOTE411.org, Judge4Yourself.com and JudicialVotes-Count.org, as well as candidate and issue campaign websites.

Maryann Barnes is chair of the Heights Chapter of the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland.



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18 residents call on CH-UH school district to fix health care spending

Tony Cudra

Our Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district is currently engaged in its most consequential contract negotiations in decades. The most important issue being debated: health care benefits. The problem: The current health care benefit package for CH-UH teachers is completely out of line with that of other school districts, and is costing CH-UH taxpayers millions of dollars more than other districts. The current contract is unsustainable.

Here are some examples:

- CH-UH teachers pay 6% of their health care premiums with a \$0 deductible.
- Shaker Heights teachers pay 13% of their health care premiums with a \$500/\$1,000 deductible.
- Beachwood teachers pay 15% of their health care premiums with a \$1,500/\$3,000 deductible.

What does that mean for taxpayers in Cleveland Heights and University Heights? The best way to look at this is to compare the average cost of health care plans for the CH-UH and Shaker Heights

school districts:

CH-UH: \$23,573 (\$31,065 for a family plan; \$11,506 for a single plan)

Shaker: \$14,000 (\$21,072 for a family plan; \$7,956 for a single plan)

CH-UH schools have 820 employees on this plan, so for every \$1,000 saved in per person health care costs, there is a potential \$820,000 saved. If the CH-UH school district's health care contract were similar to the Shaker school district's health care contract, it could potentially save our taxpayers more than \$7 million a year.

There is one more provision in the health care plan (at least) that needs to be addressed in the contract negotiations. Shaker schools have a provision that says if your spouse works and has a health care plan provided by their employer, your spouse cannot be on your school's health care plan. CH-UH does not have such a provision. This is why Shaker has so many more single plans, and CH-UH has so many more family plans. Therefore, addressing this provision is also a key component

to lowering costs.

This information is in no way meant to be punitive to teachers. Our teachers do a wonderful job educating our precious and deserving students. Our teachers deserve a competitive salary and benefit package. We simply want to get our spending on health care in line with other school districts so we can keep our property taxes reasonable. We want our current residents to stay here, and we want to attract new residents to our community. One way to do that is to be fiscally responsible with our precious tax dollars.

CH-UH teachers have almost the same salary schedule as Beachwood teachers (\$44.5K to \$105K), but our health care plans are vastly different. Beachwood's would be far more expensive for our teachers. However, even changing our health care plan to something similar to Shaker's would go a long

way toward bringing our school district's health care spending in line with other districts.

Yes, the cost to the district for EdChoice is a problem. But the cost of our health care plan is an issue we actually have some control over. So, to our school district officials we say, please negotiate a deal that is fair and in line with other school districts. And to our teachers we say . . . the same thing.

[This opinion was signed/endorsed by Patrick Akers, Bonnie Bolitho, Bob Brown, Rhonda Davis Lovejoy, Sue Dean Dyke, Susan Efroymson, Jo Fox, Len Friedson, Mike Knoblauch, Sam Kohn, Karin Lash, Susan Miller, Carla Rautenberg, Jack Richard, Joy Roller, Richard Thompson and Paul Volpe, in addition to Tony Cuda.]

Tony Cuda is a longtime Heights resident, as are the other 17 signees.

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS NEWS

FH to unveil Cedar Lee Mini-Park design

Deanna Bremer Fisher

FutureHeights, the community development corporation for Cleveland Heights, is working on a redesign of the Cedar Lee Mini-Park, a 7,500-square-foot, city-owned site located between Boss Dog Brewing Company and Heights Arts in the Cedar Lee Business District. At 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 9, FutureHeights will share the new design at a Virtual Open House. Register to attend the Virtual Open House at <http://bit.ly/CedarLeePark>.

The design is the result of more than two years of civic engagement with community members and stakeholders, to remake this underutilized area into a vibrant public space that is attractive, welcoming, and offers opportunities to gather and host public programs. Through surveying, visioning, design sessions, and in-person interviews, a FutureHeights-led steering committee sought to understand the community's desires and aspirations for the site. In fall 2019, through an RFP process, the group selected landscape design firm MKSK Studios, of Columbus, Ohio, to illustrate the community's vision.

While working on a complete redesign, FutureHeights has led several small-scale improvements to the site. Last summer, artist and botanist Tom Masaveg worked with a group of high school students, who called themselves The Cedarbrook Society, to enliven the space with fresh plantings, artwork and signage. For six weeks, the students served as ambassadors for the space, welcoming visitors and guests, and gathering additional input on the future use of the space.

Masaveg installed a mural of white trees on the side of the Cedar Lee Theatre building, and worked with the students to create augmented-reality artwork to interact with the



This summer, artist Tom Masaveg added a colorful deer motif to the mural.

mural via smart-phone technology. This summer, Masaveg worked with some of the same students to refresh the plantings and maintain the site. In June, he added a colorful deer motif to the mural, and signage to explain how to access the interactive feature.

The site now also features café tables and chairs, funded through donations to the FutureHeights Cedar Lee Mini-Park Fund, and a Little Free Library, funded by Heights Libraries.

The mini-park site was created when the city of Cleveland Heights vacated a portion of Cedarbrook Road in the 1960s, as the parking lot was being constructed, creating a pedestrian walkway from the lot to the businesses on Lee Road. FutureHeights began gathering community input on the future use of the space following a study of the business district it commissioned in 2016.

FutureHeights has raised a portion of the funds that will be needed to implement the new design, including funding from the city's CDBG program and Cuyahoga County. Learn more about the project by visiting www.futureheights.org/programs/cedar-lee-mini-park.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

City council appointments hurt democracy

To the Editor:

Cleveland Heights residents overwhelmingly supported Issue 26 [on the November 2019 ballot] because it was a vote for change—a change that gave residents the ability to vote for mayor. We supported Issue 26 because we wanted more transparency, accountability, and say in who runs our city by democratically electing our representatives instead of relying on city council appointments. After 100 years without having an elected mayor accountable to residents, Issue 26 was a vote for change that residents wanted.

More appointments to Cleveland Heights City Council would be a step in the wrong direction. Appointments undermine democracy and allow people to appoint their friends and allies, opening the door for potential corruption, bribery and favoritism.

City council should heed the residents' vote for a more democratic city by leaving the current council appointment decision to a vote by residents. With 22 [original] applicants for the open council seat, we clearly have a lot of residents interested in serving. City council has already narrowed its selection down to four candidates—who's to say whether qualified applicants haven't already been ruled out or overlooked? All applicants interested in the position should get to know the residents, and let residents pick the best candidate in

a fair and democratic election.

AnnDenise Lewis Nash
Cleveland Heights

Another epidemic: elected officials interfering with free elections

To the Editor:

[In the] November 2019 election: Some CH City Council members create, fund and campaign with a ballot issue PAC against the citizens' Elected Mayor charter change referendum. The city manager's trade union donates \$30,000 to defeat the ballot issue.

March 2020 election: CH-UH school district illegally spends \$34,675 of taxpayer funds as an in-kind donation for the campaign committee's voter survey, then lies about it to the state auditor. The school board president and vice president are on the campaign's steering committee, with their school board titles prominently displayed. The vice president held the campaign kick-off fundraiser at his home before the issue was even on the ballot. A school board member takes part in the planned sabotage of the Vote No campaign kick-off fundraiser at the New Heights Grille.

2019: Columbus legislators wet their beaks as they run First Energy's \$60-million campaign to defeat a petition campaign to repeal HB 6. They bribed petitioners to quit.

2017-20: Washington, D.C. . . .

Garry Kanter
Cleveland Heights

FutureHeights mini-grants deadline approaches



Mark Rodney, one of the leaders of the Boulevard Learning Garden, a 2019 FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grant recipient.

Sruti Basu

Tuesday, Sept. 15, is the deadline for applicants to the FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program. The program, which began in the fall of 2015, provides funding of up to \$1,000 to grassroots or neighborhood groups in Cleveland Heights who have creative solutions, projects, and programs that build on and enhance existing assets in their neighborhoods.

To date, the Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program has provided a total of \$27,461 to 42 projects in Cleveland Heights.

Residents who have ideas for improving their Cleveland Heights neighborhood are invited to apply for a grant. The program is guided by a grant-making committee comprising seven Cleveland Heights residents with a history of community involvement. The committee reviews and makes all grant decisions.

For more information, e-mail FutureHeights at sbasu@futureheights.org. Learn about the projects funded to date, and download an application at www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-programs. Applications are due by 5 p.m. on Sept. 15.

FutureHeights also offers a Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series. Since 2015, 77 Cleveland

Heights residents have completed the program. Some participate because they are interested in learning more about the city, or want to meet their neighbors and other civically minded people. Others have a specific neighborhood project they want to complete. Many program graduates go on to join nonprofit boards, or city committees or commissions. Some apply to receive funding for a project through the FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program, which has biannual deadlines.

"I found the workshops to be extremely helpful in giving me a space to work out ideas I had, and shape them with the help of other people with similar interest in working for Cleveland Heights," said Michael Hagesfeld, a 2018 participant. "The speakers were interesting, and helped give different perspectives I could apply to my particular situation. Working with other people who also had a drive and love for Cleveland Heights inspired me, in addition to giving me ideas I could apply to my concept, and be able to help them with theirs."

Donna Johnson, a 2019 participant, said that participating in the program "was the perfect impetus to help me rally and engage my neighbors!"

The program takes an assets-based community-development approach, which means that it seeks to build upon a neighborhood's strengths. It is funded by the city of Cleveland Heights through a Community Development Block Grant, and by individual contributions to FutureHeights.

Topics are: Individual Leadership; Asset Based Community Development; Planning Your Project; Policy & Advocacy, Learning the History of Cleveland Heights and Your Neighborhood; Leveraging Community Resources; and Building Community. All Cleveland Heights residents are encouraged to apply to participate. Free childcare is available during sessions.

Traditionally, this program is held at the beginning of the year, starting in January and concluding in March.

However, with continued uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, FutureHeights plans to hold its 2021 series in the fall, beginning in September and concluding in November.

"The cohort's relationship-building experience is a key highlight reported by participants every year. By postponing the program's start in 2021, we hope that we will be able to have in-person meetings," said Deanna Bremer

Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. "In 2022, we hope to get back to our regular spring schedule."

For more information and a program application, email sbasu@futureheights.org. Program dates will be posted on the FutureHeights website and social media.

Sruti Basu is the director of community-building programs at FutureHeights.

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CH Office on Aging news

Amy Jenkins

The staff of the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging is continuing its work, providing services while the Cleveland Heights Community Center and Senior Activity Center (SAC) remain closed.

This summer, the community center's parking lot has been a site for yoga, line dance and tai chi classes, as well as lunches and concerts. Online, the office has offered exercise classes through Facebook Live, and some groups have found ways to meet safely using a variety of platforms, with and without the help of technology.

Meanwhile, social work outreach and nutrition support remain a focus. If you are a Cleveland Heights senior who needs help preparing and obtaining food, we have options available. Affordable home-delivered meals can be arranged, and boxes of shelf-stable

food and food pantry items can be delivered to your door. We also have masks, and household and cleaning products available by request.

What's next? Staff hopes to safely bring back some of our transportation services, add a few more classes and events, and find opportunities and new ways to help until the office can safely reopen.

All of the programming developed during the time of coronavirus is designed to support seniors who may feel isolated, and to maintain a connection to the SAC community.

If you are a Cleveland Heights resident, age 60 and older, who needs services or has questions, contact the Office on Aging by phone (216-691-7377) or e-mail (ajenkins@clvhts.com).

Amy Jenkins is the supervisor of the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging and the CH Senior Activity Center.

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CH council member hosts listening session

Sruti Basu

CH Council Member Davida Russell continues to learn from the community through her series of listening sessions, "You Talk - I Listen."

Russell has scheduled the next community conversation for Sept. 19, 10-11:30 a.m., at the Front Stage Multiplex, (formerly the Regal Movie Theatre) at Severance Town Center, 3492 Mayfield Road.

The program will be facilitated by former news reporter Obie Shelton, and Barbara Danforth Shelton.

This will be an in-person event with plenty of room for social distancing; masks are required. The theater holds 250 people, but only 75 will be admitted.

Sruti Basu is the director of community-building programs at FutureHeights.

Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights



JULY 20, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kahlil Seren, Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart and Michael Ungar. Davida Russell was absent. Also present were City Manager Tanisha Briley, Clerk of Council Amy Himmelein, and Law Director William Hanna. The meeting lasted one hour and 11 minutes. It can be viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp2jCaNCQhc.

Public comments

Six individuals sent messages with concerns about the 5G cell equipment, requesting more discussion and protection of health and safety.

Actions requested by city manager

Council granted approval to 1) issue a request for proposals for an affordability analysis for the Integrated Overflow Control Master Plan and, 2) enter into a letter of intent with the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District regarding the Millikin School property.

Objection to liquor permits

Council passed a resolution objecting to the renewal of current liquor permits issued by the Ohio Department of Commerce, Division of Liquor Control to Zooz Limited, doing business as City & East Hookah Bar, 2781 Euclid Heights Blvd. The resolution requests a hearing in a Cuyahoga County court. The objection is based on an overwhelming number of calls for criminal incidents, including a shooting, at this establishment.

Charter amendment

On first reading council approved placing an amendment to the city charter on the November ballot relevant to the passage of Issue 26 last November, establishing an elected mayor. The amendment establishes the timeline for candidate qualifications. Also, the words "A mayoral election" will replace "The mayoral election," referring to a primary election for mayor to be held on the second Tuesday following the first Monday in September.

Police report

Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg presented highlights of police activities. Full reports and news can be accessed on the city's website.

Progressive discipline, sexual-assault, and domestic-violence policies have been updated. Community feedback and questions are welcome. Through the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and by Aug. 1, officers will complete online training on de-escalation and dealing with the mentally ill. Police are beginning to collaborate with other city departments to handle some calls, and exploring regional resource sharing. Crime statistics have declined 21 percent for violent crime, and 22 percent for property crime.

City manager resigns

City Manager Briley announced her resignation, effective Sept. 1. After seven years in her current position, she will become city manager of Gaithersburg, Md. She thanked

council and residents for the opportunity to serve, and said that working in Cleveland Heights has been an honor and a privilege. She is working with staff on the transition, calling them a "most capable and excellent staff."

She praised Susanna Niermann O'Neil's unmatched spirit, grit, and commitment and thanked her for stepping up to serve again after giving so much, continuing the great work of managing the city. [Council approved Niermann O'Neil as acting city manager.]

City manager's report

The full report may be accessed on the city's website.

Some items include:

- Cleveland Heights zip codes are a coronavirus "hot spot" for spread. There is a mask mandate, and a hotline to report mask-wearing issues.
- The city is working with merchants, and all parking meters and garages are free.
- Shredding day was a hit and will be done again on Saturday, Oct. 17, 9 a.m. to noon.
- The First Suburbs Housing Committee is working on an eviction-help program and rent help is available through CHN Housing Partners (<https://chnhousing-partners.org/rentalassistance/>).
- The Parks and Recreation Department is working on virtual and in-person programming, including drive-in movies and parking-lot concerts.
- A second COVID testing event is being planned with MetroHealth, with the date to be announced.

Council member comments

Mayor Stein announced, and council approved, the choice of Susanna Niermann O'Neil to fill the position of acting city manager effective Sept. 2. He praised Briley's exceptional leadership for seven years through ups and downs, saying it had been an honor to work with her.

He proposed, and council approved, suspension of regular council meetings for August, as no legislation is pending. Other committee meetings will take place, as will at least one committee of the whole meeting, to discuss the vacant council seat. A special meeting can be called if needed.

Vice Mayor Seren congratulated Briley and wished her good luck. Responding to public comments, he noted that while regular council meetings are suspended, committee meetings will be held, including at least one for administrative services.

Council Member Dunbar, who was on council when Tanisha Briley was hired, said she first noted her qualifications in the areas of budgeting and finance, followed by how much she learned in the job and her professionalism.

Council Member Ungar congratulated Briley, saying it had been a privilege and an honor to work with her.

LWV Observers: Blanche Valancy and Gail Larson.

Cleveland Heights students earn Tri-C fellowships

John Horton

Maya Serna and Talia Weeks of Cleveland Heights have been selected for Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) Honors Program Fellowships, which offer high-achieving students scholarships to

CH Church hosts online forum on immigration

Stephen Sedam

The Immigration Task Force of Forest Hill Church Presbyterian is offering a live educational webinar, "Immigration: History and Current Issues," on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 7-8:30 p.m.

This forum is intended for those who are seeking a basic understanding of the root causes of immigration problems, and the legal difficulties immigrants currently face. The forum is free, but requires advance registration.

Attorney Brian J. Hoffman, executive director of The Center for Strategic Immigration Litigation and Outreach, will speak on current immigration issues.

John Flores, immigration historian and author of *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), will speak on the history of immigration in the U.S.

The forum will also highlight the journeys of grief and hope faced by immigrants from Burkina Faso and the Congo, who now reside in Cleveland Heights.

Register at <https://bit.ly/ForestHillForum> by Sunday, Sept. 27. After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the forum.

For more information about the speakers, and for additional information on immigration issues, go to <https://bit.ly/ForestHillImmigration>.

Stephen Sedam is a member of the Forest Hill Church Immigration Task Force.

cover tuition, fees and books as they work toward an associate degree.

Serna and Weeks signed commitment letters with Tri-C in a virtual ceremony. Each scholarship—funded by donors to the Cuyahoga Community College Foundation—is valued at up to \$5,120 per academic year.

The college's seventh fellowship class comprises 54 students with GPAs of at least 3.5, and outstanding ACT/SAT scores. By entering the scholarship program, they commit to being full-time students, maintaining a high GPA, and earning a degree from Tri-C within two years.

"These gifted students chose to come here because they understand the power of a Tri-C education," said Karen Miller, the college's provost and chief academic officer. "I look forward to celebrating their

success at spring commencement in 2022."

The fellowship places special emphasis on academic planning, mentoring, and portfolio building to reflect student work. Smaller honors class sizes also ensure specialized attention for students.

For information on the fellowship, including eligibility requirements, contact Rebecca Stolzman at 216-987-4713, or rebecca.stolzman@tri-c.edu.

John Horton is the media relations manager at Cuyahoga Community College.

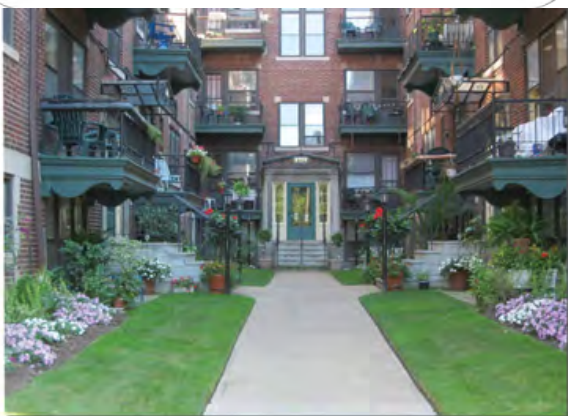


Maya Serna



Talia Weeks

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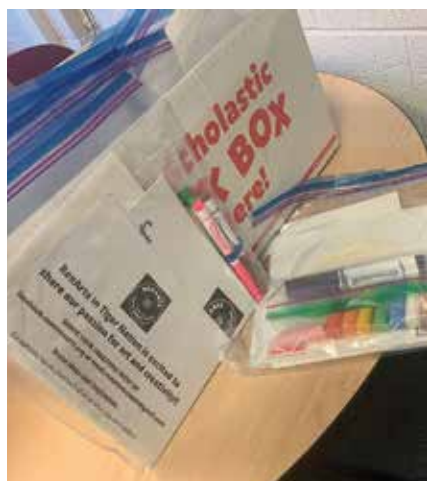
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RoxArts funds art kits for kindergartners



COURTESY ROXARTS

RoxArts in Tiger Nation assembled art kits that will be distributed to every kindergarten student in the district by the start of the school year.

Andrea C. Turner

Back-to-school season just became a little more joyful, thanks in part to RoxArts in Tiger Nation, the nonprofit organization whose mission is to supplement arts and science education for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has interfered with students participating in hands-on art and science projects, RoxArts board members decided to help children keep art “front and center” during these challenging times.

The organization has funded the purchase of 800 new art kits, to be distributed to every kindergarten student in the district by the start of school. Every kit includes a book, paper, stationery, markers, chalk

pastels, and stickers. The kits were made possible with support from Alexander Hanna, Faber Castell, Scholastic, and JakPrints.

With the help of local teen volunteers, more than 400 kits were distributed this past spring and summer, at meal pickups at Noble, Boulevard, Oxford and Fairfax elementary schools, as well as at Zagara’s Marketplace. The remaining 400 will be distributed, with Tiger Nation kindergarten yard signs, to eligible families.

As students and families navigate the online learning experience this September, these kits will enable kids to have an outlet for artistic expression. No online sessions are needed for children to draw a picture, or practice writing numbers, letters and words.

RoxArts also is working collaboratively with the district’s music and art teachers to reach elementary school students at home, throughout the district. This fall, the group plans to purchase sketchbooks for all students in grades K–5, music kits with rhythm instruments for those in grades K–2, and recorders for students in grades 3–5.

“When children are given the resources, space, and free time to dabble in arts and sciences, they grow as learners,” said Rosemary Pierce, president of RoxArts’ governing board.

This parent-led group has funded artists-in-residence programs,

assemblies, field trips, and projects involving the arts. Funds raised at its annual spring benefit are used to award grants to teachers, to keep these programs viable. The organization continues to grow and evolve, most recently by responding to the community’s desire for a more unified and inclusive approach to equitable access to the funds raised. Now all elementary- and middle-school teachers, grades K–8, are eligible for program funding.

To learn more about RoxArts, watch the video at www.roxarts.org. A complete listing of the RoxArts-sponsored artist residencies, art activities, science enrichment, and capital improvements can be found on the website’s About Us page.

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

Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights



JULY 21, 2020

Board President Jodi Sourini and members James Posch, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis and Beverly Wright were present, as were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer. [Virtual meetings are streamed on the district’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools) and recorded for later viewing.]

Proposed levy and finances

Board President Sourini said she was conflicted about pursuing a levy for the November election—a move the Lay Finance Committee (LFC) has strongly urged. Each school board member also expressed conflicting thoughts and reluctance to propose a levy. The Lay Finance Committee had warned it was unwise to delay another levy, and the board took the warning seriously.

After discussing previous cuts, state funding cuts, and additional expenses for pandemic regulations, the board voted to place a 4.8 mill levy, the lowest suggested by the LFC, on the November ballot to pay the district’s current expenses. This amount currently projects the district to have positive year-end balances through fiscal year 2022, provided that current expenses are reduced by at least \$2 million.

Updated school calendar

Superintendent Kirby requested a change in the 2020–21 calendar, with school beginning Sept. 2. The board approved the updated school calendar, subject to revision as future developments occur.

Updated school reopening plan

Kirby said “safety first is the foundation of the plan,” which will be posted on the district website the week of July 27, and includes answers to questions from the community.

Health and safety items (sanitizers, masks, etc.) have been purchased, and more will be needed. The schools must follow board of health protocol. In the event of a positive coronavirus case, the CDC recommends a two- to five-day shutdown.

Superintendent Kirby will present the final plan for a vote by mid-August.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

JULY 28, 2020

All board members, as well as the superintendent and treasurer, were present.

Levy for the November ballot

The board passed a resolution to place a 4.8 mill continuing levy for current expenses on the Nov. 3 ballot. Board members expressed their discomfort with placing a levy on the ballot during the COVID pandemic; however, given the financial challenges facing the district and the LFC’s strong recommendation, they concluded it was not advisable to wait until 2021 to ask for a levy at higher millage. Should financial considerations change, the levy could be pulled from the ballot as late as early September.

Performance audit and fringe benefits

Responding to community residents’ suggestions

for a performance audit and cuts in fringe benefits, Board Member Malia Lewis discussed reasons not to proceed with a performance audit, as these predictably recommend cuts to sports, arts and transportation, and other cuts that do not save much, and are inconsistent with the district’s culture. Regarding fringe benefits, she explained that in collective bargaining negotiations each party is legally required to bargain in good faith, i.e., board members cannot commit beforehand to outcomes.

School reopening during COVID pandemic

Superintendent Kirby pointed out that Cuyahoga County is currently at level three on the Ohio Public Health Advisory System, the next-to-highest ranking of COVID infection. Within the county, zip codes 44118 and 44121 are in the highest category, and 44106 is in the second-highest category. Following her presentation, board members discussed educational, social, and safety considerations, ultimately reaching consensus and voting to open the 2020–21 school year remotely.

CARES Act funds

Treasurer Scott Gainer reported that an additional \$312,000 in CARES Act funds were available to the district to help with opening costs. Additional CARES funds will be available to both public and private schools through a competitive grant application process, with a required 50 percent match. These funds must be spent on improving on-line connectivity for students.

LWV Observer: Kathy Petrey.

AUGUST 4, 2020

All board members, as well as the superintendent and treasurer, were present.

School reopening update

Superintendent Kirby updated school reopening plans, including the timeline, programs for family engagement during remote learning, and recommendations on athletics. All decisions [take into account] the Ohio Public Health Advisory System’s risk guidelines. She emphasized that decisions aligning policy with the equity program and the family engagement component will start next week. She will post a weekly update on the district website.

Athletics

The district will follow the Cuyahoga County Board of Health recommendations for athletes’ safe return to play. Decisions on continued training and a return-to-play plan will be made after regularly assessing the board of health’s analysis of COVID-19 spread in the county. Currently, games are suspended until districts meet [to determine] how to proceed with non-contact competitions.

Mask requirements

Superintendent Kirby said work is continuing on a mask policy that is in agreement with NEOLA guidelines.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

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Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board

Meeting highlights



JULY 20, 2020

Board members present were President James Roosa, Vice President Dana Fluellen, Patti Carlyle, Gabe Crenshaw, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto and Vikas Turakhia. [During the pandemic, with restrictions imposed on public gatherings, board meetings are live streamed for the public and posted the next day on the library's Facebook page www.facebook.com/heightslibrary.]

Public comments

Coventry PEACE Campus: Ten citizens, some of whom are volunteers or artists-in-residence with Coventry PEACE Campus, spoke in favor of maintaining the campus as an arts and nonprofit organization. In addition, five statements submitted via e-mail were read to the board; only one was in support of the library's position. Representatives from several organizations urged the library to reconsider its position with respect to the Coventry building and its tenants: Ari Klein of Cleveland Heights Teacher Union; Shannon Morris of ARTFUL; Deanna Bremer Fisher of FutureHeights and the Coventry PEACE Campus board; Rachel Williams of the ARTFUL board; Neil Martin of ARTFUL; and Robin Van Lear, an artist tenant. Per the library's policy in handling comments from the audience, the board will give careful [consideration] and respond at a later date.

Advance return

The board approved the return of the advance of \$50,000 to its General Fund, which had been used to pay utility bills prior to receiving revenue from tenants at the Washington Boulevard (Coventry PEACE Campus) property.

Amend 2020 appropriations

The board approved an increase of \$27,965 for the electric bill, through Sept. 30, for the Washington Boulevard property.

Coventry PEACE Campus financials

Nancy Levin, library director, reviewed the financial analysis and facility assessment report prepared by Jeff Henze, program manager, IFF. The report states that current lease rates project a deficit of \$151,025 in year one of any new tenancy in 2020. A capital investment budget of \$1,197,733 over five years is anticipated. A Letter of Intent requiring additional revenue and one governing entity was sent to the tenants on June 2, but was rejected. Another Letter of Intent, sent June 30, also requires additional revenue and one governing entity, plus a debt payment of \$25,000 to start repayment of debt. Levin stated that the tenants have not shown the capability to provide the necessary revenue to pay for their continued occupation of the building. She further stated that the library must deal with COVID-19-related budget cuts as well as its

own community strategic interests for the benefit of the entire community.

Automated book sorter

The board approved an additional expense of \$20,000 for installation of the automated book sorter at the Lee Road Library.

Bi-polar ionization units

The board authorized a contract with Gardiner for HVAC ionization units compatible with existing HVAC systems at the Lee Road branch (\$41,191), at the HKIC (\$21,436), and at the University Heights branch (\$20,272), for a total cost of \$82,899. This will improve air quality and lessen the spread of viruses such as COVID-19 and the seasonal flu.

Library closure Sept. 5

Because Heights Libraries is now closed on Sundays and Mondays, the board designated Saturday, Sept. 5, 2020, as a paid holiday for all employees. Library buildings will be closed that day.

Coventry PEACE Park

This year, Heights Libraries will plan for improvements to the park and playground in the areas of safety, accessibility and green-space development, while preserving the integrity of the original vision [of the park as a place] for community gathering, inclusion, and play in a natural environment. Grant funding is being investigated.

One Community reads

Heights Libraries will once again participate in a countywide reading program. This year the theme is social justice. The program will feature a lineup of nationally known as well as local authors. Monthly virtual author events will be held.

DEI focus groups

Heights Libraries' Anti-Racism Task Force has engaged the services of Compass Consulting Services, LLC, to conduct confidential virtual focus groups as part of a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) audit for the organization. Due to COVID-19, the confidential focus groups will be held via Zoom. The library's goal is to gather information from not just current library customers who feel positively about the organization, but also from those who don't use the library, or who use the library but may have had frustrating experiences with the institution. Links to register for focus groups can be found online at <https://heightslibrary.org/join-our-focus-groups-on-diversity-and-equity>.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy.

Library adapts to pandemic

Sheryl Banks

When libraries and schools across Northeast Ohio started closing on March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Heights Libraries made the difficult decision to close its four branches. Over the weeks that followed, staff worked together remotely to figure out how to serve the Cleveland Heights-University Heights community safely.

"It was a strange and frustrating time," said Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director. "Our mission, our entire purpose, is to help people, to provide them with free services and materials to improve their lives. How do you do that from a distance, with closed buildings? Well, never underestimate determined library staff."

Online services were immediately beefed up, with daily storytimes on the library's Facebook page starting in early April, a new online reference form created in mid-April, and curated lists of resources for families and others created and posted on the library's website, www.heightslibrary.org, by the end of April. Digital resources and services were promoted through social media, e-mails and a mailing.

May brought the addition of curbside and lobby pickup of materials, and access to faxing and copying. Customers are required to wear masks if they enter a library building, but those who cannot, due to medical or religious reasons, are served curbside.

"There are more items and services available than many customers may realize," said Levin, "especially for those customers who may not feel comfortable coming in to the buildings."

While the library does not currently have print newspapers available, customers can access free online versions of daily and weekly papers,

including *The New York Times*, the *Call and Post*, the *Plain Dealer* and the *Cleveland Jewish News* on its website.

Print magazines are available, and issues can be put on hold by calling the main number of any branch. Digital copies are also available through the website, as are movies, eBooks and audiobooks.

If customers don't have Internet access at home, they can check out a wireless mobile hotspot, available at every branch. Heights Libraries recently obtained 80 more hotspots, to help customers who have previously depended on the library for high-speed Internet.

Customers can also ask staff to print materials for them, which they can then pick up in the lobby, just like a hold. Each branch handles this service a little differently, so customers are asked to call their favorite branch for instructions: Coventry, 216-321-3400; Lee Road, 216-932-3600; Noble, 216-291-5665; and University Heights, 216-321-4700.

Library staff hope that limited in-person browsing and computer use can start in mid-September, as long as Cuyahoga County does not progress from red to purple on the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) color-coded COVID-19 public health advisory system. The library will follow ODH guidelines when it opens, including limiting the number of people allowed in each building at one time, requiring all visitors over the age of 2 to wear masks, and maintaining social distancing of at least six feet.

"We are truly looking forward to offering as many services as possible, as long as we can do so safely," said Levin.

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

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Dobama offers alternatives to live theater

Colin Anderson

Dobama Theatre's 2020-21 season will take a different shape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Dobama will not be able to welcome patrons into its physical space anytime soon, the theater is planning alternative programming to stay engaged with the community. Most or all of Dobama's artistic programming this year will be available online.

Like theaters across the globe, Dobama has faced pandemic-related challenges, leading to suspended and canceled performances, as well as cuts to staff and salaries. Thanks to the generosity of Dobama's members and donors, the theater is hopeful for another live season, to be programmed after an effective treatment or vaccine emerges.

Dobama's intimate performance space makes social distancing impossible, and health and safety remain its top priorities. Staff continue to work primarily from home, curating artistic and educational programming for the upcoming season.

A year without Mainstage pro-

ductions gives Dobama the opportunity to make its educational programming even more robust. For the first time, Dobama has received grant funding to perform free playwriting literacy workshops in public schools throughout Northeast Ohio. Playwriting literacy programs have been proven to raise students' confidence, critical-thinking skills, and standardized test scores. Educators are encouraged to contact the Dobama office for more information.

Education Director Carrie Williams is creating a series of documents and tutorial videos to ensure that this program can be conducted virtually or in person, as Dobama strives to serve local educators in this dangerous and uncertain moment. Dobama seeks to provide assistance and accessibility to school systems that are underfunded and may lack the resources for this type of programming.

"Educators and parents are doing their best to adapt to changing community needs," said Williams, "and we are proud to do whatever we can to support them. That requires major planning, and the Dobama team is

ready to meet them where they are."

Dobama's partnership with Heights Libraries has been a stronghold. The two organizations are working to produce joint programming that serves both of their constituencies. These programs might include a "book club" of plays, and social justice conversations with Artistic Director Nathan Motta and local performers.

Artistic programs for Dobama will include master classes in directing and acting; interviews with local professionals, on topics such as LGBTQ+ and BIPOC representation in theater; and a series of professionally filmed monologues from past productions.

Dobama will use this time to continue developing and deepening its longstanding partnership with Karamu House.

Through these innovative programs, a continued focus on social justice, and plans for volunteer work throughout the community, Dobama remains committed to serving Cleveland Heights and Northeast Ohio.

In the absence of an in-person season, many members have chosen

to "belong" to Dobama in the same way that one might belong to NPR, or the Cleveland Museum of Art. Season memberships for 2020-21 are available for \$168, with Young Professional memberships available for \$132.

Educational materials and programs are being produced through the generosity of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the David and Inez Myers Foundation, the Harry K. and Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation, and the Music and Drama Club.

Dobama is also sustained through the generous support of the Shubert Foundation, the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, the Milton and Tamar Maltz Family Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, and the citizens of Cuyahoga County through Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

For more information on programs and memberships, e-mail boxoffice@dobama.org, or visit www.dobama.org.

Colin Anderson is general manager at Dobama Theatre.

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Independent Together at Heights Arts



Lunar Phases by Patti Fields and Ray Juare, mixed media, 2020.

Amanda Bohn

Single isn't always better—or is it? Viewers can make that decision when they view Heights Arts' newest exhibition, *Independent Together: 30 Years of Collaboration*, featuring Ray Juare, senior exhibitions manager at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, and his longtime collaborator Patti Fields, head of visual art at the Ratner Montessori School. Fields and Juare began their personal and professional relationship 30 years ago, while students at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Fields is known primarily for her jewelry designs, and she brings a jeweler's detail-oriented aesthetic to her larger pieces in *Independent Together*. Juare brings his expertise in sculpting and painting.

The exhibition aims to explore and symbolize the duo's personal and professional lives, both independent and collaborative. The show taps memories from their long, shared history, and marks the first time these artists will exhibit solo works alongside one another. The combination generates a push-and-pull physicality between the figurative and the literal, which creates an intriguing narrative.

Juare and Fields have a long history of separately showing works of art as individual artists, as well as

jointly exhibiting pieces created during joint collaborations. Their work is included in the public collections of The Progressive Corporation, MetroHealth Cleveland, and Case Western Reserve University, among others.

Independent Together: 30 Years of Collaboration will be on display through Oct. 11.

Running concurrently, in Heights Art's Spotlight Gallery, is an exhibition of work by artist Joseph Van Kerkhove. A Toledo native, Van Kerkhove is the director of the Diane Kidd Gallery and assistant professor of art at Tiffin University. His exhibition showcases his prints and printmaking techniques, representing his personal experiences. He is also the founder of the EVAC Project, Experiencing Veterans & Artists Collaboration, which has exhibited at Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Va.; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.; and the Rutherford B. Hayes Library and Museum in Fremont, Ohio.

For more information, or to reserve a time to visit the Heights Arts gallery, at 2175 Lee Road, call 216-371-2457 or visit www.heightsarts.org.

Amanda Bohn handles marketing and communications at Heights Arts.

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SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

I'm not ready to let go of summer. I would have been last September, and for the previous 40 Septembers. But that's because I stopped caring about summer. I no longer embraced it as I used to when I was younger—and as I did again this year.

One positive thing that has come from this pandemic—for me, and, I think, many others—has been walking. For a while, everything was closed; there was nowhere to go and nothing to do. We'd been in our homes for weeks. And gyms were closed. Then the weather got nice, and we needed to move, and walking was something to do, with something different to look at.

Walking is not a big deal to many people. It is to me, because I haven't done it for about 40 years. In that time I tried to stay inside as much as possible. I wasn't an introvert—I got together with people (inside), I performed for audiences (usually inside), I went to restaurants (almost always sitting inside). But my day-to-day jobs have been writing books and articles (sitting inside), practicing or arranging music (sitting inside), and, sometimes, cooking (standing inside).

Growing up, I walked from my house at Belmar and Mayfield roads to Roosevelt Junior High, at Lee Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard, and, later, to Heights High. In my early teens, every summer day, I walked to Cumberland Park to play softball and hang out all day, and, a little older, I walked all over the city to practice with my rock groups at various band members' houses.

As a young adult, wherever I lived in Cleveland Heights, I would walk to Coventry Village every day, sometimes twice a day, which could be a distance of two or three miles each way. I was about 40 pounds lighter then (and eating at Tommy's three times a day). But I stopped walking. For 40 years. Until early May, when I suddenly began again. I've walked every day since then. I'm up to two miles at a time. And—yeah, yeah—I feel a little better (number-one question). But better than that, I have rediscovered how things look and, more interestingly (to me), how things smell.

In June, the privet hedges' little flowers were in bloom, and the scent, when I walked past them, took me right back to my childhood. It was not something I thought about when I was a kid, but, rather, it was simply the smell of summer. All these years later, that aroma is kind of intoxicating.

And mulberry trees. When I was 10, I substituted for a kid on his *Plain Dealer* route for the two weeks that encompassed July 4. It was a seemingly short route—just the south side of Mayfield Road, between Coventry and Middlehurst—one block. But it included six or seven apartment buildings, flanking six houses. And in each apartment building were 15 or 20 customers. So that was, maybe, 150 papers to deliver. But it was early morning, before it got too hot. And in the first three buildings after Coventry, I got to ride up and down in elevators, which I spent quite a bit of time doing. And I got to walk the un-air-conditioned halls and smell the odors. The hallways of those buildings, which were occupied mostly by older European Jews, always smelled like fried foods—liver, cheap cuts of beef, lots of onions.

The kid for whom I was subbing tipped me off that behind the last building on the route, going from west to east, was a mulberry tree. After my final paper was placed carefully at its corresponding door, I would rush around to the back of the building and stand under the tree's

lowest branches eating mulberries. Lots of them.

Walking all around Cleveland Heights this past July, I passed many mulberry trees, and, for the first time since childhood, stopped and ate the berries off the trees. And smelled the ripening fruit, that I had forgotten even had a fragrance.

August has its own outside odors: growing things are already beginning to decay. And September brings more of the same—there's that fragrance of fallen leaves drying in the sunshine. These are not bad smells. But they're kind of sad smells. They say, clearly, that this is all going away soon. And then what? In a few weeks, it will be cold. There will be snow. No more long walks outside. No more flowers and trees, for a while. And no more smells—at least not the fresh and natural outdoor kind—for a while.

But I waited 40 years. I can wait six months this time.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications, the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author,



If you change the name of the paper from *Cleveland Press* to *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and switch the year from 1965 to 1959, and multiply this card by about 200, that's what I carried around on a big metal ring every morning for those two weeks in July, and again on Saturday nights when I attempted to collect the money ... and ate some more mulberries.

and a professional musician and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop-music history.

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