MetroHealth plans expansion at Severance

Kim Sergio Ingalls

MetroHealth has proposed an expansion of its Cleveland Heights medical center with the addition of a 110-bed behavioral health hospital. The new hospital is designed to be a short-term stay facility for patients in need of evaluation and stabilization for mental health and addiction.

Dr. Julia Bruner is leading the design and development of the new hospital, and will serve as president of the behavioral health initiative at MetroHealth’s Cleveland Heights medical center.

In a Dec. 15 presentation to the FutureHeights Planning and Development Committee, Joe Frolik, MetroHealth’s senior vice president for communications and community relations, and Bruner described plans for the new facility, which has a target opening date of October 2022. The MetroHealth Cleveland Heights Behavioral Health Hospital would be built on a section of parking lot at the east of the health system’s Severance facility, and connect to it.

Best of the Heights 2021 kicks off Jan. 1

Sally Kramer

Beginning Jan. 1, Heights residents can show their appreciation for locally owned, independent businesses by voting for their favorites in the FutureHeights 2021 Best of the Heights Awards contest.

New this year: each “vote” will be entered for a chance to win a prize package of gift certificates from Heights businesses.

“Our independent businesses are so important to the vitality of our community,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. “Their individual personalities and unique products and services are one of the things that makes the Heights such an awesome place to live! This year, more than ever, it is important to show our support so that they will still be here when we come through this pandemic.”

Since 2005, FutureHeights—a nonprofit community development corporation—has conducted the Best of the Heights Awards to recognize the unique attributes of Heights businesses, and their contributions to the local economy.

Each year, residents cast their votes for their favorite businesses by nominating them for an award in a variety of categories.

This year’s ballot includes popular categories from previous years, as well as new categories that recognize the innovation and perseverance of local entrepreneurs, such as Best Online Ordering and Best Socially Distanced Dining.

Residents are encouraged to show their appreciation for local businesses by nominating them for an award in a variety of categories.

New teachers’ contract averts strike

Cathan Cavanaugh

The CH-UH City School District Board of Education (BOE) has approved a new contract for the teachers’ union, averting a strike by teachers. To view the contract, go to https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_9s3n1qUxJCDwF_fjSvD-yiVPsLzgby/view

Following an all-night negotiation session that began Dec. 1, a tentative agreement was reached between the BOE and the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union early in the morning of Dec. 2—the date the union had intended to begin its strike. The union voted on Dec. 3 to ratify the agreement, with 94 percent approval.

As the final step [in the agreement], BOE members unanimously approved the contract during its regular meeting on Dec. 8. (BOE Member Malia Lewis was not present, due to an excused absence.)

“T’was glad we were able to reach an agreement that’s more sustainable for the long term. Both sides worked hard and were able to ultimately agree on important compromises and meet in the middle,” said BOE President Jodi Sourini. “We are thrilled to be able to move forward united for our students.”

The ratified agreement covers the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. Teachers will receive their steps (salary increases for years of service to the district, and for additional education) this year and next, with a 5 percent increase in base salary next year.

Effective March 1, 2021, employee health care premium contributions will be tiered at 9%, 10%, or 11 percent of the monthly premium cost, with those employees at the lower pay range contributing slightly less (9 percent) than those at the higher pay ranges (who will contribute 10 or 11 percent).

Other key points of the agreement continued on page 9
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 include, then submit them for publication. Anyone in University Heights or Cleveland Heights is welcome to contribute regularly, occasionally or even 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 questions that aren’t answered there, call the Heights Observer office at 216-320-1423 or e-mail info@heightsobserver.org.

Articles to be considered for the Heights Observer must be submitted by Jan. 11. 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.

JOIN OUR SEMINAR, HOW TO WRITE FOR THE OBSERVER

OPENING THE OBSERVER

Bob Rosenbaum

Somewhere around 800 people have contributed to the Heights Observer since its first issue in April 2008.

It sounds like an impressive number to me.

On the other hand, it represents just 1.2 percent of the 66,000 people who live in the Heights Observer’s service area of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

So we have room to grow.

If you’ve ever considered contributing an article to the Heights Observer, you may want to sign up for our upcoming online seminar, which we have cleverly titled “How to Write for the Observer.”

The seminar is free, on Thursday, Jan. 21, 7-8:15 p.m. A registration link is at the bottom of this column.

It will cover four main topics:

- What the Heights Observer publishes
- How community organizations can leverage it
- How to submit contributions
- A simple process to make writing easier

As a warm-up to the seminar, here’s some information to help you understand the Heights Observer.

- It’s published by nonprofit Future Heights with a goal of helping to keep Heights residents engaged and the Heights community connected.
- Everything we publish is contributed by members of the community. And anybody in the community is welcome to contribute.
- We don’t pay for editorial contributions.
- We limit our content to information that’s directly relevant to the communities we serve. If it’s not about someone or something in Cleveland Heights or University Heights, it’s probably not for us.
- We seek to provide news and information about the Heights communities that’s not available elsewhere, and to support dialogue about things that matter to our readers.

We don’t have a policy against publishing poetry, for example, but if we’re not about content that has a direct impact on the communities we serve, it’s probably not for us.

Seconding the call for an ‘excellent’ Cleveland Heights mayor

Bruce Hennes

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg, new Ch-UH mayoral candidates in the Heights Observer. “Wanted: An Excellent Mayor for Cleveland Heights,” listing the qualities we should seek in a new mayor, was attractive and on point.

Having worked in and around Cleveland Heights City Hall for 45 years, and serving a quarter-century on the faculty of the leadership Academy at Cleveland State University, I can say from experience that the job of mayor of a large, diverse community, with a budget of $145 million per year, should not be held by anyone with a thin résumé.

I voted against the charter change to eliminate the current mayor’s form of government because of my belief that the deficiencies of that form of government could be mitigated with a strong city council led by a strong council president. But nature abhors a vacuum.

When you have a city council that is divided on a number of key issues, the city manager’s hand is strengthened. Because the city manager is focused narrowly on keeping at least four members of city council satisfied—rather than the entire city community—you end up with a disconnect—one that Citizens for an Elected Mayor took to victory with the recent charter change.

The other reason I voted to keep the city manager form of government intact was based on my belief that in Cleveland Heights we do not have a ‘civic infrastructure’ in place that has a number of residents prepared to become mayor. Decades ago, we had something like that in place, but Coventry Neighbors, Oxford Neighbors, the Heights Community Congress and similar community organizations are either gone or are no longer incubating the kind of civic leader that is important to the Heights community enumerated in Van Kleef and Rautenberg’s column.

Keep this in mind, too: While the amended charter says that the new city administrator will oversee daily operations, I doubt the search for that person will begin in earnest until the next mayor takes office—and it could indeed be many, many months before that person is hired—so the new mayor will have to be hands-on as administrator. And if the person who becomes mayor has few of the desired qualities mentioned in the November column (one with a “vision for the city,” “financial acumen,” “good listening skills,” “political acumen,” “strong legislative skills,” etc.), what’s the likelihood that we will have an administrator who is truly outstanding?

Bruce Hennes, a 47-year resident of Cleveland Heights, is a past president of Coventry Neighbors, past chairman of the 1980-era Coventry Street Fair, and founder of the Coventry Village Special Improvement District.
Outsourced Safebuilt inspection ‘a joke’

Dean Sieck

As an opponent of privatizing city services, I had an interesting experience in mid-October, when I had a new driveway installed. I watched the crew pretty closely, and at one point I noticed a man approach them from my neighbor’s yard and hand one of them a piece of paper. He then turned and walked away. Curious about who he was, I watched him leave and saw that he got into a car with a Safebuilt logo on the door.

Safebuilt is the private, for-profit company that now handles all the duties of the former building department of the city of Cleveland Heights.

Later, when I talked to the foreman of the crew about how the job was coming along, he asked me, “Did you see the inspector?”

He relayed that his entire crew was gobsmacked by the so-called “inspection” that Safebuilt had performed on my driveway. He also mentioned that the crew had delayed part of its process, waiting for the inspection of the gravel base before applying the first layer of asphalt. But the inspector showed up two hours early.

The foreman further stated that if this job had been in Shaker Heights, the inspector would have walked the entire driveway, stomping on the stones to make certain they were well packed before the asphalt was applied. When I talked to him later, he did acknowledge that another Safebuilt “inspector” had come to the jobsite, but that one didn’t look at the job either—just talked to the crew a bit and left.

I was pretty certain that I had hired a reliable company, and thus was not worried about the quality of work for my new driveway. But what if I hadn’t? And what if the other driveways that were done that day in Cleveland Heights were subjected to a similar “joke inspection,” as described by the foreman of my crew?

Given the financial pressures many are experiencing during COVID-19, what if some of those other hired contractors were less than thorough, or less than scrupulous, hired by homeowners who just want a job to pass inspection? What if they were given the same hastiest of “inspections” that my driveway received?

What if that kind of slipshod performance extends to other jobs in Cleveland Heights, such as pouring concrete, building an addition, or putting on a roof?

The reason a city has an inspection process for new building is so that the quality of housing stock in the city will be maintained, and perhaps enhanced—especially as it ages to 100 years and more. The carelessness I witnessed in what now passes for building inspection in Cleveland Heights bodes ill for the future of this city that I love. Let us hope that perhaps a new Cleveland Heights mayor will move to reinstate a true building department—and terminate an outsourced department of box-checking and paper passing.

Dean Sieck is a 45-year Cleveland Heights resident. He’s a former board member and president of HRRC (then FHC Housing), and former member of Forest Hill Homeowners Executive and Standards committees. A member of Forest Hill Church, he enjoys gardening, canning and writing poems.
One step away from an amazing smile

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Lee Barbee

Greetings fellow Cleveland Heights residents, my name is Lee E. Barbee II. I would like to introduce myself as a candidate for Cleveland Heights City Council.

I was born in Cleveland. My family moved to the Forest Hill area of Cleveland Heights in 1970. My parents (Lee Barbee Sr. and his wife, Marlene) wanted to move from our home on 142nd Street, off of St. Clair Avenue. The neighborhood was changing, and our home was robbed several times. I remember an incident as a child: We returned home and I saw the robber inside; he walked past the front window. My father became the protector he was and enacted his Second Amendment right and reached for a gun. He instructed us to go to his brother’s house around the corner while he secured the premises.

My father retired after working for 44 years at a Ford Motor plant; my mother worked 20 years at General Electric at Nela Park. The home I live in was our family home, which I have vouched to always keep in our family. The traditions that were started here in Cleveland Heights reverberate through our family to this day, and I will keep them abreast.

I live in the home I grew up in because I love the neighborhood, and I always have. Every time I hear the sound of owls in the late evening it reminds me of quiet summer days in Forest Hill. This section of Cleveland Heights is different from others: the residents are zoned to attend East Cleveland City Schools (East Cleveland, once a formidable suburb). Forest Hill is divided by the East Cleveland School District (ECSD) and the East Cleveland side of Forest Hill. So, I have voted on ECSO issues and city of Cleveland Heights issues. Individuals from past to present have moved into this unique and beautiful area and been confused and defeated. They have sought help from courts to send their children to Cleveland Heights—University Heights schools, and have failed.

I applied [to join] the Citizens Advisory Committee and was recently appointed to serve on it. I believe in this community! I am not running as a Democrat or Republican. I will be running as an independent, non-partisan candidate whose interest is all residents. [Editor’s note: All elections for Cleveland Heights office are nonpartisan. Per the city’s charter, all ballots used in elections provided for in the charter “shall be without party marks or designations.”]

I believe that 2021 should be the year of diplomacy. We should be teaching our kids and other adults that, no matter what your party affiliate is, we should all use diplomacy toward one another. We can all agree to disagree, but move forward as a community based on the entire body as a whole.

For example, we have just witnessed a division of opinion with the CH-UH school levy; but we should accept the decision of the people and move forward as a community. At the same time, the winning side of the vote should take into consideration those who opposed the issue and work together as a community.

This was an issue within the Forest Hill homeowners association; because we disagreed on an approach to an issue, we became tribalized in our perceptions of one another. This was one of the main things Machiavelli spoke of; therefore, please consider me for a CH City Council seat for 2021, to bring the city together to achieve common goals for the progress of Cleveland Heights—my home and yours.

Lee Barbee is a candidate for CH City Council.

Barbee announces candidacy for Cleveland Heights City Council

2021 IS THE YEAR OF YOUR YARD!

What Does YOUR Ideal Yard Look Like?

Whether it’s a beautiful space to spend time with family and friends, or a lush haven to escape the daily stresses of life, make 2021 the year of your yard!

Call us, and let’s discuss how we can help you love your landscape!

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5th Annual FREE Furnace Giveaway! Watch our website for details in 2021!
Speak up for democracy

We imagine everyone will be glad to put 2020 in the rearview mirror. The ugliness of presidential politics, police brutality, and the COVID-19 pandemic have touched us locally and roiled the nation. As we write, not only is President Trump still disputing the election, it appears that Ohio electric ratepayers will be charged an extra $7 per month for the foreseeable future, thanks to our General Assembly’s failure to repeal their utterly corrupt creation, House Bill 6. These are failures, not of democracy, but of governments that serve the power of money, rather than the public interest.

There will be plenty for citizens to address at Cleveland Heights’ eighth annual Democracy Day on Thursday, Jan. 28, at 7 p.m. For the first time, the public hearing will be virtual, livestreamed on YouTube. Whether as an audience member or a participant, please plan to attend. Do you have something to say about the corrosive effect of corporate power and big money on our democracy? You can speak for up to five minutes (about 500 words). Send your full name, e-mail address, and topic to Carla at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com by Tuesday, Jan. 26, to receive a participants’ link. The link will also be posted on the city calendar.

In 2013, with a 77 percent “yes” vote, Cleveland Heights voters passed a citizens’ initiative calling for a 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to establish that human beings, not corporate entities, have constitutional rights, and that money is not speech. The initiative also created, by city ordinance, an annual public hearing on these topics (Title 15, Chapter 183 of the Administrative code). Eleven other Ohio cities have passed similar initiatives, the most recent being Painesville, last November, with 78 percent voting “yes”. Note Painesville’s location in deep-red Lake County; this is not a partisan issue, and the supporting organization, Move to Amend, is non-partisan.

The 28th Amendment, which so many Ohioans and others across the country have voted to support, is House Joint Resolution 48. Its 75 co-sponsors include Ohio representatives Marcia Fudge, Marcy Kaptur and Tim Ryan. Here is the full text of the 28th Amendment:

Section 1. The rights protected by the Constitution of the United States are the rights of natural persons only. Artificial entities, such as corporations, limited liability companies, and other entities, established by the laws of any State, the United States, or any foreign country, shall not be considered persons for any purpose of this section.

Section 2. The Constitution of the United States shall not be construed to mean that the United States or any State has granted to any corporation the right to vote, to hold office, or to participate in political campaigns.

Section 3. The right of the people to elect representatives and senators shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of corporate membership.

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continued on page 7
Have you ever lost your credit card and worried that a stranger was ringing up a big bill for you to pay? Fortunately, once you discover you have lost your card, you can cancel it and stop the theft. In most cases, the credit card company will cover the fraudulent expenditures assigned to your small piece of plastic. Deduction funding, the way the state legislature funds private-school vouchers and charter schools, is like a community losing its credit card and then having the state legislature pick it up and use it to advance its agenda, without paying for it. The legislature has had a field day over the last decade, cutting taxes and looking good to voters, while simultaneously increasing education costs and slowly shifting more funding responsibility to local taxpayers and more blame to local boards of education. Its spending spree has forced an increase in local taxes just to keep up with the state funding that is being forfeited to private schools. State education dollars are appropriated based on local need and are supposed to satisfy the legislature’s obligation to fund its public schools, but deduction funding ignores this goal. Instead, school districts are expected to use state aid appropriated for their students to pay for students they don’t educate. In so doing, the legislature fails to support universal access to well-funded public schools and increases local education costs. The Cleveland Heights-University Heights school system demonstrates the damage caused by the state’s willingness to advance unregulated and unaccountable alternatives to public schools. We are the hardest hit of any Ohio district by the percentage of our state funding that is diverted to pay for private-school tuition. This year, the loss of state resources left us with two unacceptable choices: cut programs or raise local taxes. Our district did both, yet it is still not enough to keep pace.

Standard opposition to tax levies places the blame on bloated budgets, bad board decisions, or greedy teachers, but these are not the reasons we faced a financial cliff this year. It is decisions by state lawmakers that sent us back to the ballot for increased local funding, led to multiple layoffs, and brought the teachers union and board of education to a painful standoff. This funding void pushed the board to demand giveaways from teachers that were comparable to asking each teacher to subsidize a voucher. Everyone who cares about public education was put in the horrible position of seeking funding options that created pain and division within our community.

The legislature’s failure to treat public schools fairly creates deep division and conflict between teachers and school leaders, and mistrust and worry among voters. Our community must now try to heal from the local fallout of destructive state policy. These lasting wounds are the cost of legislators abdicating responsibility for school funding and using local communities as their credit card. As I write this column, the fair school funding plan, as set out in House Bill 305 and its companion in the Ohio House of Representatives, and is awaiting action by the Ohio Senate. It is a robust solution to a terrible problem. One key component is direct funding of vouchers. If approved, it would be a game changer. It’s the only way out. We can only hope that the fair school funding plan becomes law. Then we can press to ensure that the legislature adequately funds public education in every Ohio community, so that all Ohio students will have access to a high-quality public education.

Susie Keaser 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.
There’s always a path to compromise

A TEACHER’S VOICE

Karen Rego

Coming to an agreement during contract negotiations can be a long, tough road. Both sides begin negotiations with the intention of finding a settlement quickly. As negotiations move along, however, finding times to meet and agree on language that both sides can accept takes longer than anyone expects.

There are moments of good discussion and mutual agreement, and there are other moments when union and management strongly disagree. In the end, it’s all about compromise. Neither side will get everything they desire, but ultimately both sides will achieve some of what they want.

TEACHER’S STRIKE continued from page 1

The path to the current agreement between the CH-UH Board of Education (BOE) and Cleveland Heights Teachers Union was long and, sometimes, arduous. But our bargaining team strongly believed that we were never at an impasse. The union always trusted that there was a way to reach an agreement.

We negotiated for months. The last, 13-hour, overnight session took us down to the wire. There were moments when we thought an agreement might not be reached. But neither side gave up, both sides pushed on.

Both the BOE and the union walked away from the table feeling that a good compromise had been reached. We know we have more work to do to fix the financial crisis that the state of Ohio has created through EdChoice vouchers. But contract negotiations are over, and now is the time to focus on bridging the fiscal crisis together.

House Bill 305 passed the Ohio House overwhelmingly, and now moves on to the Ohio Senate. Its proposed new funding system would give our district some relief from having to allocate local taxes to subsidize private schools. Under the proposed funding bill, voucher payments would come directly from the state.

Local public schools are funded primarily through property taxes. This money should remain with our public schools.

Because of an inequitable funding system, the CH-UH school district is forced to put levies on the ballot every few years. It’s time for the state to fix school funding, and provide the relief that our public schools need and that our children deserve.

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 the president of Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

BEST OF HEIGHTS continued from page 1

The vote for their favorite businesses online at https://conta.cc/gmvuAS, or by using the paper ballot that will appear on the last page of the January and February print issues of the Heights Observer. Voting will conclude Feb. 15, and winners will be announced in the April issue of the Heights Observer.

All Cleveland Heights and University Heights businesses are eligible to be nominated.

Each person who submits a valid ballot qualifies for a chance to win one of four packages of gift certificates to local businesses (each worth a minimum of $50!). Additional ballots can be obtained with a donation to FutureHeights: two chances for $10 and six for $25.

“Proceeds will help cover the costs of the forum and support the work of FutureHeights to create a vibrant and sustainable future for our community,” said Fisher, “not to mention helping support our local businesses when they need it most.”

According to a study conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, each dollar spent at a locally owned, independent business returns three times more money to the local economy than one spent at a chain. Indeed, local businesses are often owned by people who live in the community, those owners have a natural interest in the community’s long-term health, and many participate in community causes.

To vote in the Best of the Heights Awards, visit www.futureheights.org, or fill out and return the paper ballot. For more information, call FutureHeights at 216-320-1423 or send an e-mail to info@futureheights.org.

Sally Kramer is a longtime Cleveland Heights resident and the administrative assistant/Heights Observer distribution manager at FutureHeights.

The invites residents to play an active role in this event. Share what you think is an important challenge for Cleveland Heights’ first elected mayor.

Here are a few details and requests for your video:

• Record your video by holding your phone horizontally (landscape orientation).
• Make sure that your room is well lit with ample light in front of you, and try to eliminate all background noise.
• Can you decide what to wear? Suits always work best on camera.
• Be brief; a maximum of 30 seconds is ideal.
• Once recorded, upload your video by going to www.watertm.com. Drag the video file into the website window, enter your e-mail address and enter digitzoommedia@gmail.com for the recipient e-mail address. If you prefer, you may use Dropbox or Google Drive, also digitzoommedia@gmail.com as the recipient address, and submit your video by Tuesday, Jan. 26, at 9 p.m.

The organizers invite residents to play an active role in this event. Share what you think is an important challenge for Cleveland Heights’ first elected mayor.

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• Questions? Contact us at info@futureheights.org or call 216-320-1423.

ELECTED MAYOR continued from page 1

submitting a 15- to 30-second video clip expressing an important challenge for Cleveland Heights’ first elected mayor (see instructions in box on page 2). Videos should be submitted no later than 9 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

The forum will begin with a brief overview of the process for electing a mayor, and will revisit some of the qualities and qualifications that mayors from surrounding communities had emphasized at a previous forum. The groups will then present the results of the online survey and share video clips from the residents as a jumping-off point for discussion of the issues. Participants will also have an opportunity to ask questions and comment during the forum.

“Through the forum not to place to register complaints or a soapbox for the public,” said Susan Efroymson, CEM member. “It is not our goal to tell them what that platform should be, or flesh out solutions to Cleveland Heights’ many challenges in a 90-minute forum. We feel this will be robustly helpful to them in knowing what topics their constituents are looking to see addressed.”

For more information and to RSVP for the forum, visit https://tinyurl.com/576daq93.

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• Questions? Contact us at info@futureheights.org or call 216-320-1423.

Dianna Bremer Fisher is executive director of Heights Navigator, the Heights Observer.
Brennan applauds new teachers’ contract; urges state funding changes

University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said residents are the winners in the new contract agreed to by teachers in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District. He said he hopes the agreement will lead to a renewed effort to fix Ohio’s system of funding schools.

At the school board meeting on Dec. 8, Brennan congratulated the teachers’ union and board of education on the new two-year contract. “Everyone at the bargaining table made their points and came away with wins, but the winners overall are the students and families of this district,” Brennan said. “In spite of everything stacked against this district, both sides were tenacious in asserting their valid and competing interests...”

Brennan urged both sides to lobby state legislators on school funding. “Everyone needs to pivot and be as engaged in school funding issues as we were in ensuring fair compensation for our teachers and fiscal sustainability for the district as a whole,” Brennan said.

“The future of University Heights and Cleveland Heights, our fortunes, our success, are all tied at the hip, together with our shared school district,” he said. “May we all prosper together, and dedicate our efforts to ensure that happens. It does not happen without reform in Columbus on school funding.”

Noting that achieving school funding reform “may seem difficult, impossible even,” Brennan pointed out that, until recently, achieving a new contract without a long strike seemed impossible.

“Rather than feel spent by this last round with each other, let us all be energized by it, join forces in this common goal, and fight for fair school funding,” urged Brennan.

On Dec. 2, Brennan testified at the Statehouse in favor of House Bill 305, which would have made significant changes and improvements to Ohio’s school funding system. The legislation passed the Ohio House, but was not acted on by the Senate.

Brennan anticipates the legislation will be reintroduced early in 2022, and he is optimistic it could be part of the next state budget.

Brennan has discussed school funding reform with State Sen. Sandra Williams, as well as the Senate Finance Committee chair, State Sen. Matt Dolan. “After speaking with them both, I know they both understand how important reform is, especially to the CH-UH district,” Brennan said.

“We’re going to need to keep up the pressure to make it happen.”

HB 305 addressed the funding disparity in Ohio’s school funding system, found to be unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court in the 1996 DeRolph decision. The proposal determines a base cost of education unique to each district, together with a new formula for local share. HB 305 resolves the over-reliance on property valuation by implementing a blend of income wealth with property wealth.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.
via the emergency department. In addition to a new, 75,000-square-foot, three-story structure, plans include the renovation of 21,000 square feet of existing space. MetroHealth’s capital investment in the construction and renovation is $42 million. Cuyahoga County will contribute an additional $5 million—part of opioid settlement funds it received. MetroHealth is requesting no incentives from the city of Cleveland Heights.

Plans call for no reduction in current services offered at MetroHealth’s Cleveland Heights Hospital, which, in 2019, had 90,000 patient visits. The facility will also remain home to the Regional Dispatch Center.

MetroHealth brought the proposal before Cleveland Heights City Council’s Committee of the Whole on Nov. 23. In what he described as a “tight timeline,” Frolik said he anticipated that the proposal would go before the city’s board of control in late January or early February, and would be considered by the city’s planning board on Feb. 10. Planning and development are underway, said Frolik, and MetroHealth hopes to have “shovels in the ground by spring.”

“Our investment and commitment support the city’s goal to revitalize Severance,” noted Frolik, a 39-year Cleveland Heights resident. “By investing there, we’re hoping others will see that, and think it’s a good idea to invest.”

In a Nov. 20 letter to Cleveland Heights residents, posted on the city’s website (www.clevelandheights.com), Mayor Jason Stein described MetroHealth’s proposed expansion, and stated that city council is supportive. “This is an opportunity to provide a much-needed service while also improving our local economy,” Stein wrote.

Frolik estimates the labor budget for the new construction and renovation will be $32 million, bringing $270,000 in income tax to
Cleveland Heights

In 2019, Frolik said, MetroHealth's CH hospital had a payroll of $44.6 million, for 171 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees. In the new facility's first year of operation, MetroHealth projects a payroll of $9.6 million for an additional 157 FTEs.

Frolik pointed out that MetroHealth’s minimum wage is $15 per hour. A mission-driven provider, MetroHealth treats all patients, regardless of their ability to pay.

Between 2021 and 2026, MetroHealth projects the new facility’s income-tax revenue to the city will be $1.76 million.

The behavioral health hospital will serve adolescent, adult and geriatric patients, with an average stay of 6–10 days. The goal, said Bruner, “is to get them started in treatment and stabilized, then transition them to outpatient care.”

“All facilities will have a locked process,” explained Bruner. “Some patients will be required to stay there because they are at risk of harming themselves.”

“MetroHealth security officers will be on duty, and are well-trained,” said Bruner. “We have a psychiatric department on MetroHealth’s main campus, and have never had anyone leave there who wasn’t meant to.”

Bruner described the hospital as “a mental-health, addiction space, not a medical space.” As such, said Bruner, “It will be more dependent on therapists and therapy technicians, with large areas dedicated to group counseling.”

Because treatment will be going on throughout the day, visitation will take place only during brief evening hours.

Asked about the new facility’s impact on nearby residents, Frolik noted that the existing hospital and outpatient facility at MetroHealth’s Cleveland Heights site already has an extensive buffer of “high berm and trees” between it and adjacent properties. Bruner added, “The placement of the new building recognizes that we have neighbors, and want to be a good neighbor.”

In wrapping up his presentation to council on Nov. 23, Frolik said, “We look at tonight as the beginning of a long discussion and expansion of our relationship. The city has been a really good neighbor to us, and that’s one of the reasons we look forward to expanding here.”

Stein commented, “We look forward to having some community engagement and public outreach, educating our neighbors and residents about this exciting development, and then, hopefully, April groundbreaking.”

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

Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 16, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kate Ewan, Mary Durban, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell and Michael Ungar. Also present were Susanan Niamene O’Neil, city manager; Amy Himmelman, clerk of council, and William Hanna, law director.

Public comments

Nine residents attended council to reconsider amendments to the Landmark Commission as recommended to the council by city planning commission coming up for vote at tonight’s council meeting. Among them were Deanna Brenner Fisher and Robert Brown of Futurinhights, who advocated table the ordinances to allow for further study.

Chief of police report

Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg reported no new violations and indicated charges. Warrants have been issued for a suspect in the kidnapping that occurred at the Cedar Hill Apartments. No gun shots were fired last week, but police remain vigilant and responsive.

The department received its state certification on engagement and use-of-force and hiring. It will be working to obtain the bias-free and vehicle-pursuit certifications next. The Safe Community initiative from the White House encourages transparent, safe and accountable policing. The Department of Justice will be credentialing municipalities through individual state agencies. Mecklenburg will be submitting her report to include the department’s policy adherence to state and local laws and procedures of chauvinism.

City finances

Finance Director Amy Himmelman highlighted the projected budget and said that the city is doing well. Income tax collections are down only 3 percent from 2019. An October infusion of $1.5 million in COVID-relief funds made a big difference.

Refuse and recycling

Council approved an ordinance repealing and replacing Chapter 935 “Solid Waste Collection and Disposal” of the city code, in anticipation of the purchase of new, automated equipment for waste collection. The ordinance mainly changes the fee structure for solid waste collection. Fee increases will cover the cost of new equipment and increased cost of services.

Landmark Commission

Council approved legislation changing provisions of the Landmark Commission in the city code. Prior to approval, the legislation was amended to delete a subparagraph that would have ended the permit renewal requirement. Council Member Ungar moved to waive two readings of the ordinance, and the motion passed. Council Member Durban voted against all three actions, saying she needed more time to evaluate changes, as her e-mail had been inaccessible due to a power outage.

Council Member Seren assured residents that there will be further discussion on this legislation, to make certain citizens’ concerns can be heard on future landmark issues.

Vacant council seat

Council Member Hart advised council and the public that she is supporting Tony Cuda, Anthony Maddox and Robert Koonce, in that order, for the vacant council seat. She said she could not support Craig Coble because he already was appointed once and lost in a general election. Prior to her statement, Council Member Ungar objected, saying it was not appropriate for her to state her selections publicly. Law Director Hanna ruled that she could do so, as she is expressing her opinion.

CARES Relief Funds

Council approved legislation regarding the city’s Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Relief Funds by amending previous legislation to include the Cleveland Network Housing Partners as recipients of $300,000 in CARES funds. Council Member Ungar advised council that hundreds of thousands of dollars will be released to help residents pay rent.

Foreclosure penalties

Council approved amendments to the city code that strengthen the penalties that landlords engaged in foreclosures in Cleveland Heights must pay if they do not pay the foreclosure bond.

Racial Justice Task Force

Council Members present welcomed Council Member Russell that Legal Aid will be making a presentation in 2021 regarding residents’ rights when they are engaged with eviction. He confirmed that 70 applications for the Racial Justice Task Force had been received. He agreed to meet with Russell to discuss how the applications are to be processed.

LWV Observers: Gail Carson and Blanche Valancen.
Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 10, 2020
Board members present were President Jodi Sconce, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, James Posch and Beverly Wright. Also attending were Superintendent Elisabeth Kirby, Treasurer Scott Garner and Athletic Director Joe D’Amato.

District response to the pandemic
Superintendent Kirby reviewed the district’s response to COVID. She expressed frustration that the state has given detailed guidance for athletic participation, but little for academic requirements. She recommended the district remain in remote-learning mode for the full second quarter. Some students are receiving in-person education. The board voted for the schools to remain in remote learning for the second quarter.

District’s role as a financial agent
Scott Garner explained how the district’s responsibility for acting as a fiscal agent to some non-public schools requires considerable time on the part of his department.

JLV Observer: Robin Kuslen.

NOVEMBER 17, 2020
All board members, the superintendent and the treasurer were present, as were Assistant Superintendent Felisha Gould, Director of Data, Research, and Assessment Allison Byrd, and six school principals.

Resolution to support Ohio HB 305
The board unanimously approved a resolution in support of the Fair Schools Funding Plan (Ohio House Bill 305).

First-quarter educational data report
Superintendent Kirby stated her commitment to the strategic plan and said data must be analyzed to determine whether adjustments are needed.

Assistant Superintendent Gould said all seven elementary schools have attendance rates at or above 90 percent; secondary schools are reporting rates of 85 percent to 90.75 percent. Staff regularly connect with families to provide support and intervention.

The principals use strategies to reduce problems with student attendance and technology. These include home visits to struggling students, and opportunities for vulnerable student groups to come into school to work in a supportive, supervised setting.

JLV Observer: Rosemarie Freeman.

NOVEMBER 23, 2020
All board members were present, as were the superintendent and the treasurer.

Strike preparation
Superintendent Kirby addressed the difficulty of the (pending-strike) situation, particularly because teachers have done a tremendous job this year under trying circumstances. She emphasized to parents that school attendance and continued instruction is compulsory during a strike.

Board President Sourini apologized to families for the failure of the board and the teachers union to reach an agreement.

Board Member Posch said that, given the failure of one levy and (approved) passage of a smaller one, one cannot assume community support for higher taxes. He said that even if the board’s last, best and final offer (LBFO) is accepted, it: —is well below the Teachers Union’s last, best and final offer (LBFO) —will require the teachers union to reach an agreement.

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Contracted Huffmaster Crisis Response L.L.C., an outsourcing substitute company, to provide substitute teachers and other personnel.

Update on the pandemic response
The superintendent reported that the district currently has nine COVID cases (six staff and three students). She recommended that: —the district institute a high-alert plan during the county’s stay-at-home advisory through its expected expiration date of Dec. 12 —in-person instruction for students in MO/AU (multiple disabilities/autism) classes be suspended until Dec. 16.

Childcare services continue
—All sports practices and games be suspended —District buildings and facilities remain open, with limited staff

Planning will continue for January reopening. The board approved her recommendations.

Treasurer’s report
The current forecast shows a positive 2022 year-end balance of $2,931,399 and a negative 2023 year-end balance of minus $2,371,978. The compensation and fringe-benefits provisions in the board’s LBFO are included, as are $2 million in cuts yet to be identified. The forecast assumes passage of the 4.8 mill levy will survive the recount. The state auditor’s office is requiring a statement discussing financial difficulties due to COVID funding cuts and additional expenses. Also required is a note that the district is still in fiscal distress because of ESChoice deductions.

JLV Observer: Kathy Petrey.

When Don and Dottie Kuhn started searching for a place to enjoy their senior years, one option stood out. With its 5-star health care, a venerable history, and not-for-profit status, Judson Park offered everything the couple was looking for.

“Judson has a long, good reputation in the community. They have really invested in their programs. There is always something interesting and engaging to do,” says Don.

The Kuhns also sought out the best in care: “I’m retired from Cleveland Clinic, and Dottie is retired from University Hospitals. We are used to being well taken care of—and we knew we would be at Judson.”

“After all these years we can truly say, Judson was absolutely the right decision,” says Dottie.
Heights Libraries again among top rated

Sheryl Banks

Heights Libraries has once again received the highest possible rating—five stars—in Library Journal's Index of Public Library Service. The just-released Star Library report is based on 2018 statistics, so does not reflect the impact COVID-19 has had on public libraries since spring 2020.

Heights Libraries has earned the five-star designation in 10 of the 13 years that Library Journal has published the ratings; it received a four-star rating the other two years.

Library Journal is a trade magazine that reports news about the library world, emphasizing public libraries, and has a nationwide circulation of 100,000.

Libraries are categorized by yearly expenditure and rated on criteria that includes circulation of physical items and eMedia (such as ebooks), visits, program attendance, public computer use and WiFi sessions.

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Formerly husband and wife, and engineers, John Emerman and Tatyana Rehn have been business partners since 1995, when they opened The Stone Oven Bakery and Café in Cleveland Heights. Located at 2267 Lee Road, The Stone Oven serves fresh-baked European-style breads and pastries, and homemade soups, salads and sandwiches. Open for takeout, the bakery is accepting orders online at www.stone-oven.com. Free parking (at all city meters, compliments of the city of Cleveland Heights), is available at the front and back of the café. While you’re there, pick up a copy of the Heights Observer along with your order. You’ll find the monthly publication in the rack by The Stone Oven’s Lee Road entrance.

Virtual • January 23 • 12 Noon
Preregistration Required @ RuffingMontessori.net
3380 Fairmount Boulevard, Cleveland Heights

OPEN 2020
HOUSE 2021
Ruffing Montessori School
The topics of racial equality and a fight for justice dominated headlines in 2020. The issues have forced many to decide where they stand—whether they choose to stand in unity, agree to disagree, or just disagree. In the latest Heights Arts exhibition, Posing the Question, artists tackle these topics and our nation’s response to them.

Featured artists are Kenneth Bernstein, Matthew Deibel, Mona Gazala, Kenn Hetzel, Scott Kraynak, Liz Maugans, and Omid Tavakoli, with an accompanying spotlight show by Helen Liggett. Their work features photography and paintings that reflect systemic racism, and manipulated photos taken during social justice protests in 2020. Maugans’ paintings recall a time of self-reflection in 2020, when she enrolled in a social justice class and started daily morning runs to meditate on what the classes taught her.

“On these runs, I wonder how things can be fixed, what those new ideas and structures can look like, so they are equal and fair and socially just,” Maugans said. “It is hard to find an hour that is hopeful, but this temporary escapism and affirmation of sweating the toxins and stress from my body allows me to face the day ahead with this very simple vision of equality and love.”

In Tavakoli’s Sea of Cops, the artist multiplies figures of state troopers in full SWAT gear to fill half of a canvas. He said the image is intended to evoke current concerns about over-policing.

“From a distance, the work looks like a black blob of ink; then, as the viewer gets closer, they start to see markings. As they investigate further, they see the bigger picture, much like all the issues that have made 2020 such a monumental year,” Tavakoli explained.

The adjacent Spotlight Gallery features work by artist Helen Liggett, whose photographs depict women she has known for years as they gather for clay-making classes. Liggett considers her spotlight show to be a complement to Posing the Question. In contrast to some of the direct political statements in the main exhibition, these pieces, showing artists at work making things of clay, present the idea of stillness as an answer.

“They worked in an open space with layers of clay below and floating, flowing, rippling conversation above, fashioning worlds based firmly in experience and in the clay,” said Liggett. “The hands of potters have an intimate relationship with their materials. These hands and their work are such familiares that at some point the differences between them begin to blur. Photography reveals this process, announcing truths both humble and profound.”

Posing the Question opens Jan. 22 and will run through March 14. Originally scheduled for summer of 2020, the show was pushed back, to enable the public to view it in person.

The Heights Arts gallery is at 2175 Lee Road. Visit www.heightsarts.org for hours and additional information.
LIBRARIES continued from page 12

reference questions, tech questions, and even limited printing services.”

“People need us now more than ever,” Levin continued, “and we are finding new ways to help them safely with services like virtual résumé help, online storytimes, and free online tutoring services.”

The entire state of Ohio did well in general in Library Journal’s rankings, compared to the rest of the nation. Ohio, with 31, was second only to New York State, with 34, in terms of the number of libraries that received star ratings.

Sheryl Banks is the communications manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.
Might as well jump

By the time you read this, you probably will have missed seeing me jump off the couch. If I do that this year. And if anyone actually sees it happen. I’m writing this before Jan. 1, naturally—because this is the January edition, and it gets printed, so it’s not like an online-only publication is, and everything is written in advance. So, I don’t know if I’ll really jump off the couch. But the couch is lower than a chair, if you know what I mean. And I’m fairly certain you don’t.

A few weeks ago I read an essay online, written by my younger brother, Noah, that included this paragraph:

“...When I was a child, probably around 8 or 9 years old, my mother and father, and me, all standing on furniture, watching our large, boxy TV set as the ball dropped in New York City, and the three of us clumsily leaping into our unknown future as Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians struck up ‘Auld Lang Syne’.”

I had totally forgotten about that chair-jumping thing. I was already out of the house by then—“I’m 11 years older than Noah—but I heard a lot about it, and I’m pretty sure I witnessed it once or twice. Or else I was told about it and the image was so vivid and strange that it has given me a false memory of it.

The last New Year’s Eve I spent at the house I grew up in, on Belmar, was when I was in what I laughingly refer to as the 12th grade (it was more like the 12th year that I sometimes walked into a school building). It was the 1966–67 New Year, so Noah was 6. My mother asked me if I would stay home with Noah so my parents could go out. I have never liked New Year’s Eve parties. I had a small number of my Heights High friends over. During the event, Noah drew a picture of the scene (sort of like a court reporter); then, the next day, my mother helped him with some writing on it. The only thing I remember about it is that someone was saying, “Where! More pop!” I remember because my friend Walt quoted that for many years afterward, whenever we were at a dull party.

But dull parties are preferable to me. New Year’s Eves are like any other night. This year, of course, I won’t have to worry about what not to do on New Year’s Eve. There are no parties to turn down. And Nighttown, at the end of my street, is temporarily closed again. So, it will be dinner at home for us. And TV. And... “Whew! More pop!”

People everywhere are saying they’ll be glad to see 2020 go. But 2021 probably won’t be much different, at least for a while. Though there are some signs of hope. A new U.S. President and administration, and all that entails. And maybe a COVID-19 vaccine. And, for me, winter walking. I started walking in May. But I haven’t seen Cleveland Heights during the winter since the late 1970s. Since then, until this year, I have just stayed inside from November to April. If I had to go somewhere, I’d jump into the car, drive, get out at my destination and hurry inside. I haven’t even owned any cold-weather clothing for 40+ years—just a light coat and a pair of gloves I could never find.

This year I have a real winter coat, with a hood, from one of those sporty companies that everyone but me knew about, and heavy-duty gloves, even long underwear. And new boots that are made for walking, and that’s just what they’ll do. Yes, Cleveland Heights, one of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you.

And I’m going to have cataract surgeries. Not a big deal—everyone tells me. But I’ve been avoiding it for many years because almost nothing freaks me out more than the idea of someone sticking knives into my eyes. And I can’t see much. And, this year, it was much harder to say I couldn’t because I had a musical performance coming up, or anything else.

Much was different in 2020, and it looks like 2021 will include even more changes. So, I’m planning to jump off the couch—because it’s lower than a chair—at midnight on New Year’s Eve. This seems to be the year for taking leaps.

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