LEI builds community in time of isolation

El Millette

In late March 2020, Lake Erie Ink (LEI) was presented with a problem. After almost a decade of providing creative expression opportunities across Greater Cleveland, a global pandemic disrupted in-person programs.

In response, LEI facilitated a new program series—Creative Community Challenges—to address the increased need for community-building and creative expression during a time of social isolation. LEI called for and gathered submissions from throughout the community, and published them in bound anthologies. To further the program’s reach, LEI also worked with the Cov-HS.

A roadmap to electing a new CH mayor

Tony Cuda

On Nov. 2, Cleveland Heights residents, for the first time, will directly elect their mayor. In November 2019, voters overwhelmingly approved (with 64 percent voting in favor) the Issue 26 charter amendment, changing the city’s form of government to a mayor-council structure from what had been a council-city manager form.

The new mayor—who will now be directly elected by the city’s voters, rather than chosen by the city’s council members from among their own ranks—will appoint a professional administrator to help run the city, and work alongside CH City Council.

In the lead up to the fall election, detailed below are some key dates and provisions of the new charter amendment regarding the process of electing a new CH mayor.

The mayor: The mayor is elected in a non-partisan race every four years, beginning in 2021, with no term limits. The mayor serves as full-time CEO of Cleveland Heights, and as the city’s safety director. (The safety director is an unpaid role for the mayor. It was formally the role of the city manager.)

The mayoral salary, as set by CH City Council in fall 2020, is $115,000, plus benefits. The mayor can veto legislation, council can override a veto with five or more votes. A candidate must live in Cleveland Heights for at least 18 months prior to Election Day, be at least 18 years old, and be a registered voter.

The city council: The charter amendment did not change CH City Council’s makeup or function. It continues to comprise seven people, elected at-large, for four-year terms.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2021, the president of council can no longer also be the honorific title of “mayor,” as the CH mayor is directly elected by city voters.

The charter amendment extends the city’s two-term mayor to four-term mayor, with no term limits.

The city council: The city council will be elected at-large, for four-year terms. The mayor can veto legislation, council can override a veto with five or more votes. A candidate must live in Cleveland Heights for at least 18 months prior to Election Day, be at least 18 years old, and be a registered voter.

To date, the Neighborhood Mini-Grants program has provided a total of $30,186 to 47 projects in Cleveland Heights. Funded projects range from gardening and beautification, to community and social services.

Projects are driven by residents and neighborhood groups who know their neighborhoods’ needs and assets intimately,” said Fisher. “In 2021, we’d love to support more projects led by new voices, such as teens, young adults and those under 35.”

Applications for the spring round of grant-making are due by 5 p.m. on Monday March 15. The fall deadline is Sept. 15.

The program, which began in fall 2015, provides funding of up to $5,000 to grassroots or neighborhood groups in Cleveland Heights and University Heights that have ideas for creative solutions, projects, and programs that build on and enhance existing assets in their neighborhoods.

Noble Neighbors’ employ COVID Creativity

Brenda H. May

Noble Neighbors responded to adversity with creativity in 2020. While COVID-19 necessitated restricted gatherings, it exposed overwhelming generosity. Springtime planning for the annual “We Are Noble” festival was suspended with the Ohio stay-at-home orders. In those early days of the pandemic, restriction horizons were discussed as weeks or perhaps a month of inconvenience. When it became clear that Ohio might not reach, LEI also worked with the Cov.

Neighborhood Mini-Grants program expands to UH

Sruti Baz

The FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants program is now available for projects in both Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

“We are excited to be able to support the grassroots work of our neighbors in University Heights,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. “We support one another in many ways already, and share a school and library system. This is another opportunity to strengthen our interconnected communities.”

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In this year’s Nov 2 general election, Cleveland Heights voters will elect a mayor for the first time in the city’s history. If more than two mayoral candidates run for the position (with the required number of signatures) with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections by the June 16 deadline, CH voters will decide who will throw the field in a Sept. 14 primary election.

In addition, three CH City Council seats, three UH City Council seats, and three CH-UH Board of Education seats will be on the Nov. 2 ballot.

In past local-election years, the Heights Observer’s election policy limited publishing by candidates online or to print any candidate who could publish in limited print space. At the same time, the policy put no such limitation on candidates’ supporters. So, what was to prevent a spokesperson or supporter from acting as the voice of a candidate?

In looking ahead at this year’s potentially denser local-election schedule, and likely more crowded field of candidates, the Heights Observer’s advisory committee decided on a different approach—one that doesn’t prohibit submissions from candidates at any point.

**Heights Observer’s Election Policy**

“The Heights Observer will review election-related submissions with a goal of providing fair and equitable access for those seeking office.

“Candidates for office are expected to identify themselves as such when submitting anything for publication.

“Candidates’ supporters and campaign representatives, and anyone writing about any candidates, election issue, are expected to disclose any personal or professional relationship they may have with any candidate, or with the subject of their submission. The Heights Observer is written by you—the readers. We ask that all contributors disclose any personal or professional connections to a subject they write about. When they don’t, and we suspect there might be one, we ask; but we don’t have researchers and fact-checkers to delve deep—we operate on a honor system.

The thing is, everyone who writes an article or opinion and submits it to the Heights Observer has some connection to the subject. If they didn’t care—if, for example, they didn’t feel strongly about a school levy, or want to let the community know about a volunteer effort, or a book by a Heights author that just hit the presses—they wouldn’t take the time to write in the first place.

So, take the time to write about what concerns and interests you, whether it’s an opinion or an article. The Heights Observer’s success as a community forum relies on the contributions it receives from all members of the Heights community.

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

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School board should save Millikend wetlands

To the Editor:

I have seen the rooftop of the stable of the old Sewerage service from Severance Circle for years now, so last month I decided to take a drive by Millikin school to see first-hand the property that has been so much controversy. What I found was possibly the last little hidden gem left in Cleveland Heights. (Michael Morse’s and Jim Miller’s opinions in the December 2020 Heights Observer gave me even more insight into this little oasis. Check out Jim Miller’s YouTube videos on Dugway Brook). The stable has a fairly new roof and appears to be structurally sound.

What I have not observed in the new development in the Heights, we can all see from the architecturally unattractive and inappropriate development of the Top of the Hill project that there is has been such a controversy. I have seen the rooftop of the stable of the Heights Observer. What’s on the other side? With the recent changes in the town, I really wonder if there is a choice for the next mayor and council members.

The current challenge theme—a prompt created by LEI’s teen editorial board—aims to tackle a question on many people’s minds: “What’s on the other side?” With fear and uncertainty leading the way into 2021, LEI hopes to promote honest reflection on what kind of impact our present will have on our future.

To participate in LEI’s current Creative Community Challenge, respond to the theme “What’s on the Other Side?” with a piece of original work (writing, photography, painting, etc.) and share it online, or deliver it in person or by mail to LEI’s office (2843 Washington Blvd., Cleveland Heights, 44118). The Web address to submit online is https://form.jotform.com/210035079119146. If you experience any problems in submitting, or have any questions, send an e-mail to creativecommunitychallenge@gmail.com, or call 216-320-4757.

Submissions will be open until Feb. 19.

El Millette works as the communications and board director at Lake Erie Ink, and lives in Cleveland Heights.

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Heights Observer’s election policy: more—and less—of the same

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Are all welcome in Cleveland Heights?

Naomi Stern

I am writing in response to the opinion piece by Eric J. Silverman, “Former BOE member feels Millikin déjà vu,” in the December 2020 Heights Observer. Although I have only been a resident of Cleveland Heights for the past six years, my husband’s family has lived here for almost 20 years! To say that we are a loyal Cleveland Heights family would be an understatement. I love the diversity of Cleveland Heights, and I thought the “All Are Welcome” initiative was a very fitting way to mark the city’s centennial celebration.

As a mother of four who also works full time, I admit that I do not have much spare time to closely follow local issues related to taxes or property development. However, when someone showed me Mr. Silverman’s article, I felt very hurt. I would like to give Mr. Silverman the benefit of the doubt, and I hope that he did not intend his words to come across the way they did. However, the tone of his article made me feel that perhaps the Orthodox Jewish community, which I am proud to be a part of, is actually NOT welcome in Cleveland Heights. I thought we were a valued part of a diverse and welcoming city— are we just a “special-interest group”?

Surely there is nothing wrong with religious schools looking to purchase land or property is there? Surely there is nothing illegal about being interested in unoccupied lots in close proximity to the current school and its families, is there? Surely there is nothing sinister about purchasing a property for a school that has woods included and not using all of the land for the campus, is there? Why is Mr. Silverman surprised that the families and institutions located in close proximity to the neglected Millikin campus are interested in seeing it put to better use?

I am sorry to hear that there are also empty lots at Noble-Nela, Noble-Mayfield, Lee-Meadowbrook, etc. I am sure that the families and communities living near those locations also care about that land being put to good use. I hope they are fortunate enough to have individuals, such as Jessica Cohen, who do find the time in their busy schedules to join various committees and advocate for changes that they feel would benefit their neighborhood, and—by extension—the city as a whole. Growth in any part of Cleveland Heights should be celebrated, should it not?

Personally, I do not want to see the Millikin property developed into large single-family homes. Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. I believe the city as a whole, and particularly the residents in close proximity to the property, should be able to hear arguments for and against any new proposal, and be able to voice their preferences. Please remember that families who choose to send their children to religious schools continue to pay property taxes. Should they not be able to give input into how their tax money is being spent?

I am glad to hear that the school district is filling a great need by using Millikin for trades and bulk storage. If so, should it not be taking better care of the property? If caring for that property is too much to manage, perhaps the board should more actively search for “a new home for the district’s trades” which would not require the same level of maintenance. In any case, I wish Mr. Silverman would have expressed his support for the current use of the Millikin property in a more tactful way.

Naomi Stern is a mother of four and a full-time speech-language pathologist in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Her children are third-generation students at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.
COVID-19 and CH Municipal Court

J.J. Costello

We have all had to adjust and re-examine how best to carry out our everyday activities this past year. This public health emergency has also impacted Ohio courts, including Cleveland Heights Municipal Court (CHMC). There have been many challenges, but CHMC has adapted and responded to the COVID-19 crisis. Our focus has been on protecting the health of the staff and all those who enter the courthouse, while serving our vital purpose of administering justice without denial or delay.

Shortly after Gov. DeWine first declared a state of emergency, I issued a temporary order suspending nearly all in-person hearings, including arraignments, criminal and traffic trials, and evictions.

Before the pandemic, I changed the bond so that almost all non-violent misdemeanors received personal bonds. I have since modified the bond to include all non-violent felonies of the 4th and 5th degrees. In addition, I suspended all warrants that, at their inception, would have a personal bond under the modified schedule.

Although the number of case filings decreased significantly (CHMC ended the year down more than 30 percent from the year prior), the work of the court never stopped; in fact, our workload increased. The staff and I had to re-think almost every process we had in place.

We acquired supplies of masks, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies, which were initially in short supply. The halls, waiting areas, and courtrooms were marked to ensure social distancing, and signage was placed throughout, noting that masks were required. Plexiglass barriers, paid for through CARES Act funding, were installed at the check-in station and in the courtrooms. We obtained a $53,000 grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio to upgrade our video-conferencing capabilities in the jail, probation department, and courtroom. We updated and increased the number of online forms available to the general public, and are in the process of switching vendors to make the online payment of fines and costs more efficient and less costly to defendants.

Even while I halted in-person hearings temporarily, we found ways to continue to adjudicate cases. For example, before the pandemic, criminal and traffic pre-trials were conducted with attorneys and defendants appearing in person. Now, those pre-trials are conducted via telephone. Similarly, whenever possible, our updated video-conferencing equipment is put to use. Most plea changes and sentencings are now conducted remotely.

Though it is difficult to see this pandemic as any sort of positive, there are examples of changes for the better. No longer are attorneys and parties spending time waiting in the courthouse for their case to be called, and the defendant does not need to take time off from work to attend his or her hearing.

With all of this in place, in the middle of June, the court began thoughtfully increasing the number of in-person hearings. To avoid large numbers of litigants at any one time, we staggered our docket thoughtfully increasing the number of in-person hearings. To avoid large numbers of litigants at any one time, we staggered our docket.

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Groundhog Day at CH City Hall

By law, Cleveland Heights will make these changes, ready or not.

The other five provisions cover the timing of elections, the mayor’s qualifications and salary, and other matters that must be settled so that the first mayoral election can take place on Nov. 2, 2021. In October 2020, council did pass legislation establishing the mayor’s salary. (Additional charter changes take effect in January 2022.)

To check out the amendment for yourself, find it on the city’s website, under “Quick Links.”

In addition to preparing for a mayoral election, the city has less than a year to review its codified ordinances and make them consistent with the newly modified charter. We were not pleased to learn that Hanna has outsourced this work to former Cleveland Heights law director James Juliano, Briley’s and council’s right-hand man in fighting Issue 26.

On a brighter note: City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil reports that staff is preparing a “transition book” describing the workings of each department and division of the city, to be completed in February. Since Briley originally promised to deliver this document last February, we are looking forward to it. So too, we imagine, are prospective candidates for mayor.

Over the last 14 months, we and others have urged council to create a timeline of transition steps, as well as to research the experiences of other cities that have made this change and to consider how those experiences apply to Cleveland Heights.

Absent council action, some transition-related activities are happening ad hoc. Council Member Melody Hart and Citizens for an Elected Mayor (CEM) co-sponsored an excellent forum featuring three local mayors. For those who missed it, the recording is linked at citizensforan-electedmayor.com.

Hart also presented a second forum on Jan. 20, featuring the mayor of East Providence, R.I., which recently transitioned from a city manager to an elected mayor. Additionally, Future Heights and CEM will sponsor “Electing Our First Mayor: Moving Cleveland Heights Forward” on Wednesday, Feb. 3, on Zoom.

Deborah Van Klee and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.
Residents with ideas for improving their neighborhoods are invited to apply for a grant. The program is guided by a grant-making committee comprising seven Heights residents with a history of community involvement. The committee reviews and makes all grant decisions.

In addition, FutureHeights is launching an exterior home-improvement mini-grants program as an extension of its Model Block program, overseen by its Future Homes Committee. The FutureHomes Mini-Grants program will offer small grants of up to $500 on a rolling basis to homeowners residing in a designated FutureHomes Model Block area. Eligible projects include exterior painting, porch repair, landscaping and other improvements visible from the street. Applicants must own and occupy their homes as a primary residence.

For more information, contact FutureHeights at info@futureheights.org. To learn about projects funded to date, and download an application, visit www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-programs/.

Sruti Baz is the director of community-building programs.

The lingering question for our schools is do we return to the classroom, or not? With the exception of some special-education students, CH-UH schools have remained remote, thus far. Last November, when COVID cases were surging, our special education students and staff returned to remote learning. At that time, many Ohio districts chose to suspend in-person learning. So, when is the right time to go back?

Remote learning is not ideal. More than anything, teachers want to be with their students. Schools, however, are unlike other businesses. We are in the business of teaching children, and this is difficult to do safely during a pandemic.

By nature, children don’t “social distance,” so that’s out, even if space were available. Many adults have difficulty wearing a mask properly, so we can’t expect children to wear them properly at all times. Teaching behind dividers is neither ideal, nor helpful, for the one-on-one instruction that many students need.

Those who want students back in classrooms believe that, because other businesses are open, schools should be, too. Remote-learning routines are not ideal, but they are working as best they can under difficult circumstances.

Could we do a hybrid model, in which some students attend school in-person two days a week, while others learn at home? If a successful hybrid model could be found, perhaps our district should go that route. Hybrid programs bring students back into the building, but working parents still need to find childcare for the other three days a week.

Some families do not want their children to return at all, until it is safe to do so. Some staff members are at high risk for serious complications if they contract COVID.

It is difficult to teach some students in-person and hope that those at home on their computers are learning at the same rate. The hybrid model is new territory and has yet to show much success in any district that is using it.

Going to in-person, full-time teaching does not seem like an option now. COVID numbers are still high, and school personnel are next in line to be vaccinated. While we await vaccines, are schools safe enough to operate without incubating a mass outbreak? Probably not.

In-person learning should return when COVID numbers go down, and faculty and staff have been vaccinated. Students under 16 years of age have not been approved for vaccination, which means we must protect them as best we can.

Starting a hybrid model, or bringing students back full time, could result in a surge, and then a return to remote learning. Because we are no longer required to quarantine after exposure to COVID in schools or on buses, another surge in cases would be catastrophic for our school system.

Remote instruction is where we are right now. Our teachers are working hard. Our students and their families are making it work as best they can. We all want to return to the school buildings, but only when it is safe to do so. When we know with certainty that it’s safe to return, we will explore the best way to do it.

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.

Eileen McKeon 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.

Eileen McKeon
216.233.6726
EileenMcKeon@HowardHanna.com
Cleveland Heights Office
TheMcKeonGroup.com

Eileen McKeon
216.233.6726
EileenMcKeon@HowardHanna.com
Cleveland Heights Office
TheMcKeonGroup.com

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EileenMcKeon@HowardHanna.com
Cleveland Heights Office
TheMcKeonGroup.com
Seeing inequities via Chromebook

Robin Koslen

Winter break is here, and this retired public-school teacher has time to reflect on being the home teacher for my granddaughter, a first-grader. I’ve had a Chromebook view of education in our diverse community during the pandemic. There’ve been conversations about the implications of educational inequality on a national scale, but educational inequality is also a problem here in the Heights.

Our district’s teachers are doing a remarkable job, under difficult conditions. But remote learning is fraught with problems—devices freeze, websites don’t work the way they are supposed to, and lesson plans that were triple-checked before class suddenly have issues. But the real reason I’m writing is to call attention to the glaring inequities I’ve observed.

Everyone is on the same device, but not everyone is in the same portal. At the beginning of the year, it was clear that some kids had more experience and greater ease with technology. Some of these same kids have parents who are technologically savvy. Then there’s the rest of us. Sure, we e-mail, we post to Facebook, and we even know how to save a document; but troubleshooters we are not. When young students have tech problems, and they all sometimes do, some caregivers can solve them, and even explain to the child how to solve the problem the next time it occurs. But some of us struggle.

Kids like my granddaughter can sit at a computer by themselves, in a quiet room, with help just a shout away. That’s definitely not true for all kids. One young student does her work in daycare. When she needs help, she has to wait until someone can come to her aid. Furthermore, it’s a noisy, busy atmosphere where concentration is problematic.

Some kids are in different locations on different days. Some days a kid might work from home, but on other days he may go to where mom works. If mom is working, that child is probably on his own for academic and technical issues. Mom’s boss is being considerate by allowing her to bring her child to work, but work is what she has to do. That is the reality for several kids in my granddaughter’s class.

Everyone’s home is different, as well. If there is a toddler playing in the room, it is not quiet; materials may not be where the student left them; and mom might be busy doing laundry, or working herself. She might not notice that it is time for class to resume, so the student might arrive late, or not at all. If dad’s just gotten off working the night shift, he’s not going to be the child’s contact person; maybe it’s an older sibling. But he’s doing his own school work and needs to be left alone, so he can graduate.

This is what I’ve observed from the other side of the Chromebook. I know there are other issues families are coping with (economic, social isolation, health). I also know that eventually we will need to be there to help—it’s what we must do if we aspire to be the community we profess to treasure. Where do we begin? Reaching Heights has tutoring programs for different age groups. Lake Erie Ink is always looking for volunteers to work with their student writers. If I do not have all the answers, but let us, as a caring community, open the discussion and keep it going until we find ways to level the playing field.

Robin Koslen, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a mom, grandma, retired teacher, full-time rebel, and an optimist.
State legislature again defeats school-funding equity

Susie Kaiser

It is hard to imagine that any school community has fought with more fervor to end EdChoice than Cleveland Heights and University Heights. EdChoice is the state program that transfers state aid from local school districts to pay for private-school vouchers, a scheme known as “deduction funding.”

The Heights Coalition for Public Education has put the state’s war on public education on the local agenda, and fostered understanding of the damaging effects of state policy on local communities—ours and yours. Forums, book discussions and research documenting the impact of this theft of public funds have helped people understand the issues and fight for remedies. Legislative resistance pushed our board of education to join a legal challenge to EdChoice.

In 2020 the Ohio Legislature finally put forth Senate Bill 305, the Fair School Funding Plan, which would have ended deduction funding. We were there to support this remedy.

In March, school board members, Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby, and carloads of parents, students and community members made the pilgrimage to Columbus to support the end of EdChoice. Multiple voices pleaded for an end to a policy that increases funding inequality and shifts the school-funding burden to local taxpayers. After a pandemic shutdown, the legislature reconvened in December, and Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) rammed through his preferred plan, which retains deduction funding and penalizes high-poverty school districts like ours.

The community mobilized again during the levy campaign to support SB 305. Kirby showed up to testify, while community members submitted testimony and joined a postcard campaign. The bill had strong bi-partisan support in both houses, and enough votes to pass. It flew through the House on a vote of 88-7 but died when Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) refused to take up the proposal.

We lost these legislative battles, but not because of silence. There is not a legislator in Columbus who doesn’t know that vouchers are a disaster for public school students in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights district. This was not widely understood five years ago, and our efforts through these years to increase the pressure have helped keep this issue alive; but can we still win?

I have examined the data on who is most affected by the loss of public resources to EdChoice. Ninety percent of EdChoice vouchers are awarded in just 21 school districts, eight of which are in first-ring suburbs, and six of which are in Cuyahoga County. The other big losers are 14 urban districts. The majority of students enrolled in these districts are poor and children of color, and are represented by Democrats.

EdChoice is undermining education funding for the most vulnerable students. The students are defenseless because the majority of elected officials who represent them, with the notable exception of Huffman, are in the minority, too. Democrats wield little power, because Republicans hold supermajorities in both the House and Senate. Ohio students are at the mercy of policymakers who are more loyal to low state taxes and religious education than to them.

We know institutional racism is alive and well in policymaking circles. If there were a serious concern for equity and truly guaranteeing every student access to high quality education, EdChoice would be called what it is, and it would be thrown out in a second. Unless it can ride the tide of new fair-funding plans, a legislative remedy seems impossible. That leaves us three other bigger projects: a court case, an end to gerrymandering, and a large-scale revival of commitment to public education as a fundamental cornerstone of democracy. In my view, we need to work on all three.

Susie Kaiser is a 49-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.

THE COMMON GOOD

Hoping to re-energize state legislative efforts to end EdChoice, the legislature reconvened in December 2020. It passed a new funding plan that maintains deductions and reduces funding for high-poverty districts. This is a serious setback for public education in Ohio.

In response, the Heights Coalition for Public Education launched a legal challenge to the new plan. The coalition is working to ensure that every student in Ohio has access to a high-quality public education.

We know that education is a fundamental right in this country. Everyone should have access to the best possible education, regardless of their zip code.

We are all in this together. Let’s work together to ensure that every student in Ohio has access to a high-quality public education.

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Think Luna this Valentine’s Day!
Cleveland Heights names new planning director

Mary Trupo

Eric Zamft is the new planning director for the city of Cleveland Heights. He began his new position on Jan. 11 after conducting an extensive search for a new planning department head, to take over from Richard Wong, who retired.

The city manager and human resource directors met with the candidates, who hailed from across the country.

“I am excited to join the Cleveland Heights community,” Zamft said. “I visited friends in Cleveland Heights a few years back and fell in love with this city. To be able to move here and help usher the city into the future is a great honor and privilege.”

“The department's work with The Diversity Association and city-planted trees provide a safe place to walk the neighborhood to savor the displays of ‘All in This Together,’” the unof- ficial slogan. The weekend gave neighbors an opportunity to express gratitude during the early days of social distancing.

Even before the weather warmed, two lot-sized projects began. At Kosmole and Noble roads, Brian Sosnowski and Laura Marks transformed a vacant lot into a public mini-park. They recon- firmed a low retaining wall from a straight line into a lovely sweeping curve, planted perennial and wildflowers, and recon- structed a crushed-brick path into a riverwalk way. A Little Free Library (there is another at Central Bible Baptist Church) is stocked with children's books and surrounded by seating. A picnic table invites adults to watch over kids from a comfortable distance, and city- planted trees provide shade.

The park has become a feature of Cleveland Heights. COVID permitting, there will be a big celebration, soon, including practical suggestions about how to celebrate the neighborhood’s 100th anniversary of Cleveland Heights. COVID permitting, there will be a big celebration, complete with a time capsule.

Chief of Police report

Noble is home to kind, caring, creative, generous, hopeful people. Read more at www.nobleneighbors.com.

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

Cleveland Heights City Council meeting highlights

DECEMBER 21 and 20, 2020

These were two short, special meetings, each with a different agenda. Attendance was the same: Council Members Jason Stein (Mayor), Kahlil Sears (Vice Mayor), Mary Dunbar, Melissa O'neil, Brenda Hart, Terry Ryan on Lee Road were present; Donada Russell was absent. Also present were Acting City Manager Susanna Niemann O’Neill, City Solicitor, William Hanna, and Low Director William Hanna.

CARES Act fund (Dec. 21)

Council amended an appropriation ordinance to increase the amount previously approved. This was necessary to spend, by Dec. 31, $1,180,000 in CARES Act funds allocated to the city. This was necessary to spend, by Dec. 31, $1,180,000 in CARES Act funds allocated to the city. Council amended an appropriation ordinance to increase the amount previously approved. This was necessary to spend, by Dec. 31, $1,180,000 in CARES Act funds allocated to the city.

City manager report

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Two-family homes are a boon to owner-occupants

Sydney Chickos

Cleveland Heights has more than 1,200 two-family houses, located in many of its neighborhoods. Also known as doubles, duplexes, and two-flats, this housing type was popular between the 1910s and 1930s, when the city was developing. Having fallen out of fashion in more recent decades, many Cleveland Heights residents are rediscovering the benefits of this unique housing style.

“It has been a great way to transition into homeownership,” said Amanda Isaacson, who lives in one unit of a double she owns in North Coventry. “There are good mortgage options for first-time homeowners and owner-occupants. The property pays for our mortgage and makes income. Buying and occupying a multi-family home is a great way to invest and create capital.”

A multi-family home is any residential building with separate spaces for two to four families. They often were designed to blend in seamlessly, sharing the eclectic architecture of a neighborhood’s single-family homes. Some multi-family homes lend themselves to live-work arrangements, enabling owners to have convenient, separate home offices.

While renting out half of a two-family home takes effort, the benefits, according to Helen Hertz, are well worth it. Hertz, a longtime owner-occupant in Cedar Lee, and a realtor with RE/MAX Traditions, explained that any renovations or improvements can be used as a tax benefit.

Though maintenance and landscaping can be a full-time job, owner-occupants can outsource these responsibilities to a housing manager or landscape company. “Owning and occupying a multiple-family home is a great investment in the housing market, and Cleveland Heights has many such homes for sale,” said Hertz.

Popular Cleveland Heights duplex neighborhoods include areas between Euclid Heights Boulevard and Mayfield Road, Severance and Cedar Lee, Grandview and Belfield avenues, and the Noble neighborhood.

“When owning and occupying a two-family home, you are able to build a close relationship with your tenants,” Isaacson said. “We often see tenants get to know each other and develop community.”

Another benefit, said Hertz, is the ability to rent to family members, such as young adult children or elderly parents. “You can remain close while providing support,” she said.

FutureHeights, the community development corporation for Cleveland Heights, has recently renovated two doubles through its FutureHomes program, which renovates vacant and abandoned housing through a partnership with the city and county land banks, and trusted renovation partners.

“We thought it was important to provide quality and successful rehabs in our target neighborhoods, enable owner-occupants to accumulate wealth, and create stronger communities,” said Abby Lawless, director of real estate development at FutureHeights. “The duplexes provide more flexibility and can be a long-term income stream. We can also allow people to have space to work from home. It allows you to be flexible as the market shifts.”

“There are many beautiful doubles available in Cleveland Heights,” said Lawless. “I’d encourage anyone interested in investing in the housing market and becoming an owner-occupant to contact a local Cleveland Heights real estate agent.”

Learn more about doubles in the city at www.clevelandheights.com/250/two-family-doubles.

Sydney Chickos is a FutureHeights intern and a student at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

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UHFD urges residents to make fire safety a priority

Mike Cook

The University Heights Fire Department (UHFD) is urging residents to make 2021 a healthier and more fire-safe year.

The U.S. Fire Administration reports 8 percent of all fire deaths in the U.S. happen in homes. These preventable fires result in more than three-quarters of all fire deaths, and thousands of injuries.

The UHFD offers the following fire-safety suggestions:

Make sure that your home is protected by working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms can wake you up if there’s a fire. “Half of all home fire deaths happen at night, when people are sleeping,” said UH Fire Chief Robert Perko. “Install alarms when people are sleeping,” said UH Police Department (UHPD) of -

Have a plan. Make sure that everyone in your home knows how to get outside and where to meet if the smoke alarm sounds.

Install alarms on every level. You need a working smoke alarm on every level of your home, including the basement. Interconnected smoke alarms provide the best protection because when one sounds, they all sound.

Test your alarms. Having a smoke alarm with a dead or missing battery is the same as having no smoke alarm at all. Test all of your smoke alarms to make sure that they are working. Replace smoke alarms when they are 10 years old, or if they don’t make a sound when you test them.

Be safe in the kitchen. Cooking is the main cause of home fires and home fire injuries. While you’re preparing meals, remember to make safety the first ingredient. Stay in the kitchen when you are cooking at high temperatures; for example, frying, boiling or boiling. Fires start when the heat gets too high. If you see any smoke, or the grease starts to boil, turn the burner off.

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

UH Police Department offers simple identity-protection tip

Mike Cook

Being the victim of identity theft is aggravating, time-consuming, and expensive. The University Heights Police Department (UHPD) offers this simple tip to reduce the chances of becoming a victim:

If you carry your social security card in your wallet, UHFD urges you to take it out. Leave it at home in a safe place. There is no good reason to keep it with you on a regular basis. In the unfortunate event that your wallet is lost or stolen, by not carrying your social security card, you can limit the personal information you expose to others.

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

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Church hosts conversation about stress and addiction

On Saturday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m., First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland (FBC) will host an online community conversation, via Zoom, on stress and addiction in teens and adults.

Recognizing that stress, isolation and uncertainty have become a new normal, due to COVID, FBC’s youth program is providing resources to help connect young people, and their families and caregivers, to mental health and addiction resources. These resources are free to the community and all are welcome to participate.

The Feb. 27 event, a Rock of Faith Community Conversation, will seek to answer the question “How will I know?” (How will I know that I have a problem? How will I know where to get help? How will I know if a friend is struggling?)

The event will provide a safe environment in which teens and young adults will be able to ask their questions and learn of valuable resources from a panel of experts.

FBC’s youth department also plans to host an event for parents and other adult caregivers, later this year, to provide additional mental health and addiction recovery resources.

For registration and additional information, visit www.firstbaptist-cleveland.org/conversations/

Kelley Pernicone is a member of First Baptist Church and its Rock of Faith Community Conversations Team.

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3. After logging in, click the Submit New Story button in the left-hand column [Don’t see it? It’s nested under “Writer”). Then follow the prompts. Hint: keep your original file open so you can easily copy and paste into the text box.

4. Reward yourself; you’re about to be published. We’ll review and edit your article, and let you know if we have any questions.

Local news that speaks to you

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Heights Observer February 1, 2021 12 www.heightsobserver.org

CH residents to pitch visions for CLE

Two Cleveland Heights residents are among those who will present ideas to improve Greater Cleveland at Accelerate: Citizens Make Change, a civic pitch competition, Feb. 22–25.

Presented by the Cleveland Leadership Center in partnership with Citizens Bank, the event will be virtual for the first time since its 2015 debut. It has launched dozens of initiatives that impact everyone from pre-kindergarteners to seniors.

The Cleveland Heights presenters are:

Jing Lauengco, Other Brown Girl: Lauengco’s initiative is a social-impact storytelling platform that uses conversation, literary and creative arts, technology, and mentoring to create deeper awareness, understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism.

Lauengco, whose family moved to the U.S. from the Philippines when she was an infant, said she felt like a "cultural chameleon" growing up in rural northwestern Ohio. When she visited the Philippines as an adult with her mother, she said, “I had to either defend being American or become more Filipino.”

Lauengco wants to use her background as a brand strategist and designer to make multiculturalism and diversity less abstract; not corporate or mandated, but celebrated. “It’s about a feeling of belonging,” she said.

Jess Boeke, Rust Belt Fibershed: The Cleveland Flax Project, part of Rust Belt Fibershed, encourages people to grow flax to make linen—restoring the environment, building the local economy, and creating a healthier world. “People think of farm-to-table for food, we think of soil-to-skin for garments,” she said.

Boeke, a high school English teacher, is pitching with her twin sister, Sarah Pottle. Their efforts using plants to naturally dye textiles led them to the national fibershed community, which seeks to reduce the climate impact of fossil fuels in manufacturing fibers such as polyester. In 2018, they co-founded the local fibershed, which encompasses parts of Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York.

A trial project in Newbury showed flax could be grown here as it had been until the 1900s. Now, Boeke and Pottle want to expand the network of farmers, processors and consumers. “Using flax is regenerative—for people and the environment,” Boeke said.

The preliminary Accelerate rounds will be livestreamed Feb. 22–24. Community leaders will judge and select one finalist from each of six categories. Finalists will pitch their ideas live on Feb. 25, and viewers will select the winner, who will receive $5,000. Runners-up each will receive $2,000.

The event is open to the public. Information and pay-what-you-can tickets are available at www.cleveland.org/accelerate. For one purchase, a household can access livestreams of the preliminary category competitions, a competition for ideas leveraging technology, and the finals (including voting), and can watch recordings of all pitches.

Cleveland Heights resident Allison Hite was a finalist at Accelerate 2019 for her inspiring storytelling project, Never, Ever, Give Up Cleveland. She recently compiled some of the stories into a book.

Michael Bennett, a Cleveland Heights resident, is vice president of external affairs for the Cleveland Leadership Center.
Millikin neighbors enhance their park

Residents of the neighborhood surrounding the former Millikin Elementary School have come together to enhance the small playground on the site and create a vibrant community space.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District closed the school in 2006 and is currently using the buildings there to house its maintenance operations.

Starting with just six neighbors in 2018, the Millikin Neighborhood Group began efforts to revitalize the playground, which continued to be used by many young families in the neighborhood. The group organized a cleanup of the playground area.

Under the leadership of Cindie Carroll-Pankhurst, Deby Auerbach-Brown, Robin Koslen and others, the group began to raise money for additions and renovations, including new landscaping and playground equipment. The group has built slides and installed a storage bench, a balance beam, and a tetherball court. Neighbors planted flowers and provided chalk, bubbles, and other toys to neighborhood children who frequent the park. "The tetherball has been a surprisingly big hit with the children," Pankhurst said.

Last November, the group installed a two-part mural on the façade of the former school building. Local teenagers submitted works of art through their schools. Six pieces were selected to be part of the mural. More than 78 neighbors gathered to celebrate the mural’s unveiling on Nov. 8. Several of the teen artists, along with their families and teachers, attended.

Pre-pandemic, the group hosted several events, including a chalk festival and a music consort comprising students and alumni of Cleveland Heights High School. While the pandemic has made gathering more difficult, neighbors continue their efforts to raise money for the playground, tend to the landscaping, and improve this valued community space.

In July 2020, residents learned that the city of Cleveland Heights had made a preliminary offer to the school district to market the Millikin property for redevelopment. Pankhurst said she would like to continue to see the space used as a neighborhood playground. "This has been a positive factor in embracing our diversity," she said.

To learn more about the group and how to get involved, visit "The Millikin Neighborhood Page" on Facebook.

Sydney Chickos is an intern at Future Heights and a student at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.
COMMUNITY NEWS

When families struggle financially and seek assistance obtaining essential items, community resources are generally available for free food and clothing. Diapers, however, are in constant demand, but often not offered through local pantries because they are expensive and “non-essential” in limited food budgets. Families with babies and toddlers are left with the significant challenge of obtaining this basic item.

Thanks to donations from the Metropolitan Ministry fund at Cleveland Heights’ Church of the Saviour UMC, the congregation has been meeting the demand for diapers for the past several years, distributing them at the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center, an East Cleveland food pantry and clothing bank serving Cleveland’s East Side.

Congregation members Tom and Lisa Wadsworth manage the diaper inventory on behalf of Church of the Saviour. Thanks to financial and diaper donations, the church supplies an average of 10,000 diapers per year, for weekly distribution.

“When the Saviour’s connection to the overall work of the Father Michael Wittram Ozanam Center seems relatively small in the grand scheme of things, considering how many people are served,” said the Rev. Andy Call, the church’s lead pastor. “But it isn’t small to the families who need diapers for their children.

“Some of the most impactful ministries often don’t come at the institutional level, but in the work of individuals who strive to live the way Christ did. That’s what this ministry is all about and what makes it so special.”

The Wadsworths support the effort by purchasing and delivering the diapers, along with fellow church members who regularly volunteer.

“If it is a privilege for Church of the Saviour to partner with the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center,” said Tom, “we are inspired by the many volunteers from the 14 churches that support this important ministry for East Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, and the surrounding communities.”

The Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center operates every Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon, as one of eight hunger centers with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Cleveland.

The center is located at 1584 Euclid Ave., at St. Philomena Church in East Cleveland. A registered agency with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, the all-volunteer organization provides individuals and families with free food and clothing.

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/groups/fmwoc.

Carol Iott is an arts consultant, a board member for the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center, and a member of Communion of Saints Parish.
Deanna Bremer Fisher

With the $80 million Ascent at the Top of the Hill project rising in the Cedar Fairmount Business District, the announcement that Brendan Ring has sold Nighttown signals that more change is on the way.

On Jan. 5, a syndicate of real estate investors, headed by Rico Pietra and Yaron Kandelker, purchased all of Ring’s holdings in Cedar Fairmount: the building that houses CL Barber Salon, the former Zoss building, the former Fifth Third Bank, and the iconic Nighttown restaurant, which Ring has owned since 2001. A regional destination and community gathering place, generations of Heights residents have celebrated significant life events at the restaurant, and cherished the cozy Irish pub’s eclectic atmosphere. Ring expanded the restaurant over the years to include 435 seats in several rooms, two three-season patios, and musical offerings that led DownBeat Magazine to name it “one of the top 100 jazz clubs in the world.”

Ring closed Nighttown in March 2020, out of concern for the safety of his patrons and employees, before the state mandated shutdown. He reopened on July 1, and then closed again on Nov. 22, when COVID cases began to rise. He said he had not planned to sell, but that the unsolicited offer and some health scares made him realize that the time was right.

“We are so happy for Brendan, and so sad for the rest of us,” said Myra Orenstein, executive director of the Cedar Fairmount Special Improvement District (CFSID). Ring helped create the Cedar Fairmount Business Association in 2004, which later became CFSID. The state of Ohio enables the creation of nonprofit Special Improvement Districts (SIDs) to enable property owners in a geographic area to pay an additional tax that is designated for specific improvements, such as marketing, special events and beautification efforts. Ring served as CFSID’s founding president and then its treasurer until last month. Board meetings were often held at Nighttown.

“I hope the new owners will continue with the SID. It is the reason why Cedar Fairmount is so successful,” said Ring. “When we first started, the area had no cohesiveness. It was a bit worn down. We weren’t getting anything done.” CFSID began holding an annual street festival. In 2009, CFSID created a streetscape improvement plan; it implemented the $4-million streetscape and Cedar Road resurfacing project in 2018. Ring

continued on page 19
Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 8, 2020

Board President Jodi Sourini and members Dan Heist, James Posch and Beverly Wright were present. Mala Lewis was unable to att

and entrance exams. Based on those exam results, some students received scholarship offers, in various amounts, from the high schools for which they took entrance exams:

• Brady Foss: Benedicent High School Scholarship — Merit Scholar
• Victor Gideon: St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar; Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin Scholarship — Prestigious Merit Scholar
• Charlie Hubbard: St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar
• Gabe Ewen: St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar

Communion of Saints School celebrates students’ achievements

Gerry Whiteley

The eighth graders at Communion of Saints School have been busy connecting with high school scholarship and entrance exams. Based on those exam results, some students received scholarship offers, in various amounts, from the high schools for which they took entrance exams:

• Emmanuel Lewis-Davis: Villa Angela-St. Joseph — VASJ Scholarship
• Bridget Mathias: Beaumont High School Scholarship — Beaumont President Academic Scholarship
• Zoe Onwuzulike: Beaumont High School — Beaumont Presidential Scholarship
• Della Daehler: Beaumont High School — Beaumont Presidential Scholarship

Eva Panza scored in the 95th percentile for the Reading ISEE exam. A rigorous exam used for admission to private high schools.

Communion of Saints School congratulated these eighth-grade students on their achievements.

Gerry Whiteley is principal of Communion of Saints School.
Library welcomes board member; honors outgoing president

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest board member, Tyler McTigue. His term began in January 2021.

McTigue, the director of enterprise solutions sales for Acuity Brands, has lived in Cleveland Heights for nine years, and will serve a seven-year term on the library board. He replaces James K. Roosa, outgoing board president, whose 10 years of service ended in December 2020.

“To say I am humbled to serve the Cleveland Heights-University Heights library system as a library trustee is an understatement,” said McTigue. “I am incredibly proud of the Heights and hope to help Heights Libraries continue to open doors for the people of our great city to diverse opportunities and ideas.”

“COVID-19 has forever changed how our world operates,” added McTigue, “and I’d like to support the library’s efforts to bring [its] services to people wherever they are.”

Outgoing president Roosa was appointed in 2010 to finish out the people of our great city to diverse opportunities and ideas.”

Outgoing president Roosa was appointed in 2010 to finish out his term,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “We will miss his expertise and passion for the library.”

“I will miss the opportunity to collaborate on a regular basis with all of the board members with whom I’ve had the privilege of working over the last 10 years,” said Roosa, who has lived in Cleveland Heights for 20 years. “They are all incredibly committed to the library.”

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

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board

Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 7, 2020

Board members present were President James Roosa, Vice President Dana Fluellen, Patt Crenshaw, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto, and Vikas Tukurika.

Recognition of board member

The board approved a resolution of tribute for James Roosa for his completion of 10 years of board service and leadership.

2020 amended permanent appropriation

The board approved an appropriation of $1,634,433.93 for expenses during the current fiscal year, ending Dec. 31, 2020.

Furniture purchase

The board approved a purchase order to buy Buy-Right Office Supplies, in the amount of $11,804, for staff furniture for the Heights Knowledge and Innovation Center (HKIC).

Property, liability and cyber insurance

The board approved the annual premium of $48,009 for the library’s comprehensive, property, and cyber liability insurance with The Ohio Plan, and $3,901 for cyber insurance with Traveler’s Insurance, for the period Dec. 1, 2020, through Nov. 30, 2021.

Personnel policies

Several policies had to be modified or created to apply to pandemic situations. The board adopted the following policies:

• HR Policy 3.6 Exposure to Contagious Disease
• HR Policy 5.10 Temporary Sick Leave Policies
• HR Policy 5.12 Critical Leave & Pay

Vision and life insurance

The board approved a contract with VSP Insurance for library-provided vision insurance, for coverage effective Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2022. There was no increase in vision insurance coverage from the previous year.

The board approved library-provided group life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance for each eligible employee, for coverage effective Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2021; and for Voluntary Life Insurance, fully paid by the employee, at the rates published in the Lincoln Renewal Summary.

Five-star library

The library director reported that Heights Libraries was designated a five-star library (the highest ranking) by Library Journal (based on statistics for the year 2018).

Curbside service resumes

Due to the receptivity in COVID cases, library services have reverted to curbside delivery, phone reference and virtual programming.

Library board meetings are recorded and available on YouTube on the Cleveland Heights University Heights Public Library Channel.

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Heights Observer February 1, 2021

www.heightsobserver.org
Look for the Heights Observer at Tommy’s

Tommy Fello, owner of Tommy’s restaurant (1824 Coventry Road), has been taking care of customers for nearly 50 years. He encourages readers to support independent local businesses now, more than ever. Tommy’s menu offers something for everyone—especially those who love milkshakes. Currently, Tommy’s is open for both dine-in and take-out orders. (Visit www.orderstart.com/tommys to place your take-out order.) While you’re there, be sure to pick up a copy of the Heights Observer.

Pick up the Heights Observer at Heights Hardware – a CH business since 1911

Heights Hardware has been a fixture on Coventry Road since 1911. Andy Gathy, the owner, describes the store as an “old fashioned” nut-and-bolts hardware store with everything one might need to complete any project. Gathy and employees Jef Lowell and Kaila Isom are happy to assist. Heights Hardware stocks COVID-protection supplies including KN95 masks, Purell hand sanitizer, and Lysol wipes, as well as snow shovels and ice melt—and copies of the Heights Observer. Heights Hardware (www.heightshardware.com) is located at 1792 Coventry Road.
NIGHTOWN continued from page 15

and CFSID were tireless advocates for development at the Top of the Hill site.

“The SID unified the district, bringing the merchants, owners and neighbors together,” said Ring. “The streetscape came together and is beautiful. Without the support of the SID, Top of the Hill wouldn’t have happened.”

Ring said the new owners are investing in the building’s façade, and will upgrade the 16 apartments above. They plan to reopen Nighttown this summer, and are negotiating with “an elite local celebrity chef.”

A new drive-thru Chipotle concept, where customers order with an app for fast pickup, is slated to open in the former Fifth Third Bank building in March.

“It’s an exciting time to be in Cedar Fairmount,” said Ring, adding that he hopes that the new owners will build on the legacy of Nighttown, add the new chef’s talent, and take it to the next level—and that they will be actively involved in the SID.

Ring’s future plans are uncertain. He and his wife will do some traveling, but he says he has no intention of abandoning Nighttown.

“I’m looking forward to being on the other side of the bar,” he said.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.
You may be forgetting something

David Budin

There is something that I think a lot of us are not thinking about this February. We are thinking about the pandemic, the economy, the change in U.S. presidents and administrations, the possibility of insurrection, and if and when we can get vaccinated, and other issues that may be weighing heavily on us. Here in Cleveland Heights, we’re also thinking—because it’s normally the worst part of winter—about the ever-present potential for unlivable temperatures and massive snowfalls. And, for those with kids, if and when public schools are going to open for in-person learning, and whether that will be totally safe when they do.

What many of us are not thinking about is Valentine’s Day. And, I mean, what’s more February than Valentine’s Day? Other than Lincoln’s birthday. And my anniversary. Three good opportunities to eat candy. Why candy? Well, Valentine’s Day is self-explanatory. The other two . . . because it’s February and, around here, it’s dark and cold, and that calls for candy. In my opinion.

Why did we get married in February, in Cleveland? Because in December we decided to get married in January, when we’d be on a trip to Los Angeles. It was going to be 40 years since my parents got married in January in Los Angeles, so we thought that would be a good time. Until we figured out that my parents would be in Cleveland when we got married in Los Angeles, and they’d be annoyed that we didn’t have the wedding here. So, we planned a small wedding ceremony for soon after we got back, not thinking that a huge snowstorm could prevent our siblings from coming to Cleveland, which it did.

The storm hit Cleveland the day before and then moved right along and away from Cleveland. But it moved east and closed the airports our siblings were flying from. So, the wedding ceremony was even smaller than anticipated. But we had a party afterward, with a big Corbo’s cassata cake, for an expanded gathering of family and friends. It might have made more sense to do it in June. I mean, it was cold outside. But not inside.

Our anniversary is two days from Valentine’s Day. So, candy. And cards. That is: card (one of us doesn’t like greeting cards . . . even though I used to get paid for writing them). This year, I’m going to make two Valentine’s Day cards for my grandchildren. They’re not in school. Last year, they were in preschool and this year the older one is in kindergarten at Fairfax, but not at Fairfax; she goes to school in a computer. Which she likes, by the way, and she’s learning. But no in-class Valentine exchange (if they still do that).

When I was in elementary school, at Coventry, our teachers had us make large, heavy-paper envelopes which we decorated and taped to the front of our desks. Then we walked around placing Valentine cards in each of them. I remember spending a lot of time deciding which card should go to which kid. And I loved the year that Topps produced cards called Funny Valentines, with sayings like: “Your teeth are like stars . . . . They come out at night. And: “Your skin looks like a million dollars . . . Green and wrinkled.”

I’m not sure why this has stayed with me, but I remember that I had to make a Valentine’s Day card when I was in second grade, when I was walking home from school with my large envelope of cards under my arm, a couple of kids who were goofing around accidentally bumped into me and knocked the envelope out of my hand and into the slushy gutter, as we waited for the light to change at the corner of Coventry and Mayfield, and that the Cleveland Heights police-man who was acting as the crossing guard there bent over and picked it up for me. It’s a warm memory, and I thought a lot about often when police officers on Coventry were roughing me up, 10 years later, when I was a hippie hanging out on the street. But, still . . . it’s a nice memory.

When I was about 30 and working in the promotion department of a rock radio station, M105, downtown, on Valentine’s Day, I took a large mailing envelope and wrote “Place Valentines here” on it and taped it to the front of my desk. I actually received a few.

This year I’m going to make fancy Valentine cards to give to my grandchildren. With candy, of course.

It’s February, and it’s dark and cold. But it’s 2021. There’s a new president and administration. There’s a vaccine. The hours of daylight are getting longer every day. So, don’t forget about Valentine’s Day this year. Or candy.

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

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Write in the names of your favorite Heights businesses or visit www.futureheights.org to complete the online ballot.

Deadline for ballot submission: February 15, 2021

Valid Ballots: All valid ballots will receive a chance to win a prize package of gift certificates to Heights businesses ($250 min. value)
- One ballot per person; must supply complete contact information below.
- Vote only for businesses located in the cities of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.
- Must fill out at least half (6 categories)
- Do not vote for the same business in more than 3 categories
- Ballots not meeting these requirements will be considered invalid.

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