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

Tommy's restaurant celebrates 50th anniversary

Deanna Bremer Fisher

On Friday, Jan. 14, Tommy's restaurant celebrated its 50th year in business. (Fifty years? How is that possible? Tommy must have been a kid when he opened the business!)

In fact, Tommy Fello was just a teenager when he began working as a soda jerk and stock boy at a drug store and soda fountain on Coventry Road. And he was just 19 when he purchased the business from the former owner in 1972 and opened Tommy's restaurant. Its original location on Coventry had only seven seats. It now seats 125, and has become one of the most-loved businesses in Cleveland Heights.

About 50 people gathered outside the restaurant at 11 a.m. on Jan. 14, for a "love-in" to show their appreciation for Tommy Fello and



Tommy Fello standing outside Tommy's first location in Coventry Village in 1972.

Tommy's restaurant. Some carried signs reading, "Tommy Fello for mayor of Coventry" and "Make falafel, not war."

Fello thanked the crowd and said, "There's no place I'd ever want to be than down on Coventry." As

members of the crowd chanted, "50 more years," Fello joked that his retirement plan was to be Bernie in the movie "Weekend at Bernie's." "They'll just prop me up at the front of the store so that I can waive to everyone,"

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DCC hosts open house for new arts center



Djapo Dance Workshop at DCC.

Marsha Dobrzynski

Disciples Christian Church (DCC) invites the community to tour its newly renovated facility on Feb. 12, between noon and 4 p.m. Guided tours will be offered every half hour, starting at noon.

The building and sanctuary have been remodeled to include a 500-seat performance space with great acoustics, flexible dance studio space, classrooms, teaching studios, and more. It is now home to a cultural arts center for young people and families. Visitors are invited to explore the space, and the many program offerings

DCC is offering program space,

free of charge, to artists and art organizations that make the arts accessible to youth in the community. In addition, part of DCC's mission is to provide reasonably priced rehearsal and performance spaces to Cleveland-area art organizations.

Individuals and organizations are welcome to tour the building and learn more about this ongoing project. There will be rental information available, guided tours of the space, and demonstrations for spring and summer classes offered in the building. Masks are required, and social distancing within the building will be practiced.

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CH City Council may decide on park ballot initiative by Feb. 7

Deanna Bremer Fisher

Cleveland Heights City Council could decide at its Feb. 7 meeting whether to adopt, amend, or reject a citizen-led initiative to require the city to construct a park on the city-owned site at Lee Road and Meadowbrook Boulevard. That decision could determine whether the initiative will appear on the May 3 primary ballot.

At the Jan. 10 city council meeting, CH Finance Director and Clerk of Council Amy Himmelein certified that an initiative petition for an ordinance to require a public activity park be created on 1.07 acres of city-owned land at the corner of Lee Road, Tullamore Road and Meadowbrook Boulevard had obtained sufficient signatures for inclusion on the ballot.

A group of Cleveland Heights residents, led by Ralph Solonitz, Garry Kanter, Lee Barbee, Albert Oberst and Frances Mentch, had submitted the petition to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections on Nov. 29, but were told to collect additional signatures by Dec. 27. The group submitted additional signatures, and, on Jan. 9, the board determined that the initiative had met the 10 percent requirement for inclusion on the ballot.

The Cleveland Heights City Charter required the certification. City council referred the matter to its Council Committee of the Whole (COW), and discussed it at its Jan. 18 meeting. CH Law Director William Hanna explained that the COW must make a report and recommendations to the full city council no later than council's second regular meeting, on Feb. 7. Once that occurs, council must act within 30 days—by March 9—to

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UH mayor proposes 'People First' budget for 2022

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan introduced his proposed 2022 budget—the "Putting People First" budget—on Jan. 10. It next moves to UH City Council, for consideration.

"My budget priorities are what University Heights residents have been asking for over the last few years," said Brennan.

"Residents want us to do something about flooding. They deserve to have roads fixed. And they insist on a



modern and sustainable approach to improved recycling. It's also time to make new city facilities a reality.

"I've heard the residents, and

their priorities are my priorities—indeed they are the City's priorities"

Highlights of the proposed budget include the following goals:

Reduce flooding: "Too often when it rains in University Heights, residents are subjected to sewer backups in their basement," Brennan said. "In my budget, we'll use federal funding to begin a manhole separation project, separating access to storm and sanitary lines, with an eye toward the eventual building of separate trenches for the lines. This

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Letters Policy

The *Heights Observer* welcomes letters to the editor. They must be submitted electronically, along with the writer's name, phone number and e-mail address, to: www.heightsobserver.org/members.

HEIGHTS OBSERVER

The *Heights Observer* is a citizen-based news source published monthly by FutureHeights, a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization dedicated to civic engagement and quality of life. 2843 Washington Blvd. #105, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118 216-320-1423 Copyright 2022 FutureHeights. All rights reserved. Reproduction is forbidden without written permission.

PUBLISHER

Deanna Bremer Fisher
dbfisher@futureheights.org

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kim Sergio Inglis
city.editor@heightsobserver.org

E-NEWS EDITOR

Jessica Schantz
jschantz@futureheights.org

ADVERTISING

Bob Rosenbaum
216-401-9342
brosenbaum@heightsobserver.org

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Deanna Bremer Fisher, David Budin, Greg Donley, Judith Eugene, Jewel Moulthrop, Vince Reddy, Bob Rosenbaum, Jessica Schantz, Kim Sergio Inglis

EDITORS

Jamison Babb, Maryann Barnes, Deanna Bremer Fisher, David Budin, Greg Donley, Jewel Moulthrop, Vince Reddy, Bob Rosenbaum, Jessica Schantz, Kim Sergio Inglis.

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Temma Collins, Diane Roberto

DISTRIBUTION

Sally Kramer

The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the *Heights Observer*, its publisher and staff, or of FutureHeights, its staff and board of directors.

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

About the Observer

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

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

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

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

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

- To make a submission of any kind, go to www.heightsobserver.org and click on "Member Center" at the left.
- For information about writing style, article length, etc., click on "Become an Observer" at the left. For questions that aren't answered there, call the FutureHeights office at 216-320-1423 or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

Articles to be considered for the March issue must be submitted by Feb. 7. We publish some articles online only. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

CH City Council should respect citizens' park initiative

Fran Mentch

Congratulations to Cleveland Heights residents for a successful exercise in democracy! We were able to gather 4,619 signatures (a Herculean task) in support of a public park on the 1.07 acres at the corner of Meadowbrook Boulevard and Lee Road. A sufficient number of the signatures were valid, so we can take the next step to place the initiative on the ballot.

Every one of those signatures required one person talking to another and explaining what the petition was about—so there were 4,619 conversations, and we shared lots of concerns and suggestions about our community and our local government. Democracy is a long hard slog; democracy always

has been and always will be one person talking to another and getting a signature on a paper petition. Our initiative proves that if you care about something, you must act. Everyone who helped mattered, and everyone who acted owns this success.

That next step for the initiative involves Cleveland Heights City Council. It was quite discouraging to watch the Jan. 10 Council Committee of the Whole meeting (posted online at <https://youtu.be/viYNIFhILXk>). City council members did not celebrate this exercise in democracy by the citizens they represent—the same citizens that just elected them with high hopes for a new form of government, and to whom the newly elected officials had promised greater transparency and citizen engagement

and communication. Instead, council members appeared to be discussing how the initiative could be managed to help Flaherty & Collins, and talked about a possible lawsuit—which has confused and alarmed some citizens.

City council members have been fully informed of the park initiative since August—by e-mail, personal discussions, and numerous public comments made in council meetings. We turned in the petition on Nov. 29, prior to the city acting on the developer agreement. *Nota bene:* I made a public comment about the developer agreement at the Dec. 8 city council meeting and suggested that the city insert a clause about the initiative in the agreement, to prevent confusion if we prevail at the ballot box. Unfortunately, it did not do so.

The petition was a litmus test of our community. A measure of our values. The community said that what is green stays green. The community said it wants a public park—a place to be together. The community said it has creative fresh ideas about public space and what we want our city to look and feel like—how we want to live together.

How council treats this petition is its litmus test. Do council members value citizen participation; the democratic process; good governance; a progressive, creative community; our city charter? Or is their relationship with the developer all that matters?

The city has not given citizens, who are heavily subsidizing this project, a complete explanation of the complicated finances of the Flaherty & Collins developer agreement. Council abdicated the political process to the developer, and by doing so generated unnecessary conflict among us.

Council could negotiate with Flaherty & Collins for both the 1.07-acre public park and a modified development, couldn't it? The projects would energize and support each other.

Council should move the [park] initiative forward as quickly as possible, stop advocating for the developer (let the developer advocate for itself), get out of the way and let citizens decide what they want at the ballot box, as our charter provides.

Fran Mentch is chair of the executive committee of the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club group, and a community activist who worked to turn the former Oakwood Country Club into a Metropark, not a Walmart.

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Heights Observer

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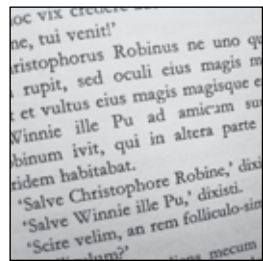
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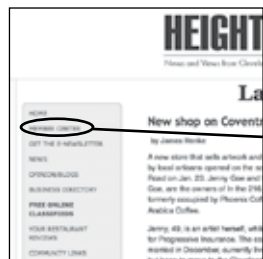


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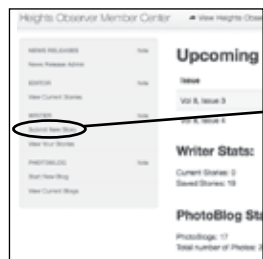
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2. **Register/log in** at the Member Center (www.heightsobserver.org).



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.

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HEIGHTS OBSERVER
Published by [FutureHeights](http://FutureHeights.org)

An open letter to ‘People for the Park’ petition signers

Destiny Burns

To anyone who signed the “People for the Park” petition—I want to make sure you understand what you signed.

I believe this effort, championed by a small group of Cleveland Heights activists, is not really about trying to create another park on a commercially zoned piece of city-owned property in the middle of a business district located on a major traffic thoroughfare. I believe this is actually about trying to stop economic development and progress in our city. Here are some reasons why I believe this:

- There is NO funding in city budgets for the creation, nor for the maintenance, of a new park within the Cedar Lee district. It is relevant to note that FutureHeights has been seeking outside grants for years to bring a sustainable activity park to the city-owned Cedar-Lee Mini Park in the district. This new park the activists say they want would be a very expensive project—when you signed the petition, were you told how this park would be funded and maintained?
- If these activists truly want an activity park in our business district, why haven’t they been vocal and engaged in bringing the existing and already partially completed Cedar-Lee Mini Park project, located just one block north of the Lee-Meadowbrook lot, to fruition?
- Some of these same activists also have protested other development efforts in our city, including Top of the Hill and the Cleveland Heights Community Center projects. Both are transformative projects for our city, our small-business community, and our citizens.

If you signed the petition, did you know that your duly elected city council representatives already voted UNANIMOUSLY in December to proceed with the Cedar Lee Meadowbrook (CLM) development partnership with Flaherty & Collins? Did you know that the city is under contract with Flaherty & Collins for this project? Did you know that this reputable and

proven development partner plans to invest \$30-plus million into the Cedar Lee Business District? Did you know that Flaherty & Collins, as an integral part of its project, will create a green space/activity park on a sizeable portion of the same Lee-Meadowbrook lot in question? The developer will maintain this park at its expense, rather than at taxpayer expense. If a new park at Lee-Meadowbrook is the true objective of these activists, why is this already planned and funded park in that same location not sufficient?

I believe a large, but less vocal, number of citizens want our city to grow, progress, and compete for residents, tax dollars, new businesses, school funding, parking improvements, jobs, and housing options that new economic development projects generate.

To survive and thrive as a city, we NEED this investment and development now. The CLM development project enables our city and our business district to compete with nearby communities that already are aggressively making investments like this, and luring potential residents and customers with modern amenities and offerings. Every small-business owner in the district is struggling to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, and the CLM project is as much of a lifeline to us as it is to our entire city.

I am strongly in favor of the CLM project. I own a home in the Cedar Lee district, and am a small business owner in the same district. Everything I have is literally on the line here, and I believe this is worth fighting for. I pledge to do everything in my power to convince my fellow citizens that the CLM project currently under contract must come to fruition as planned—without delay. Please continue to educate yourself on the facts about this important development project, and its many benefits to our community. #BuildCLM!

Destiny Burns is a Cleveland Heights resident and owner of CLE Urban Winery.



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We need 'The 1619 Project'

Brian Larson

In the January *Heights Observer*, Alan Rapoport wrote to tell us he is upset that Heights Libraries uses tax money to sponsor public seminars about The 1619 Project. He is concerned that this fosters "a one-sided, biased and ideological approach" that appears more authoritative than it actually is, and that, in dredging up the racial harms of the past, it "encourages the worst type of racial division."

Mr. Rapoport has things backwards.

I, too, am weary of so often having to hear that so much of American society is pervaded by racial antagonisms and tensions. But my weariness comes from the actual existence and continuation of these problems, not from efforts like The 1619 Project that may call attention to them.

Mr. Rapoport claims to be a student of history, but his learning seems to have some gaps. I wonder if, for example, he has read *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen,

in which the author examines high school history textbooks, concluding that they generally tell a lackluster tale of American goodness and grandeur in which events unfold without cause or conflict or relevance to the present, and which tend to avoid altogether, or give short shrift to, what it was like to be a racial or ethnic minority in this country.

If you had been a person of color in the Jim Crow era, you most certainly would have been keenly aware that the pervasive and relentless racism of American society affected just about every aspect of your life—from access to jobs, schools, voting rights, housing, even lunch counters and cemeteries. If you were not a person of color, but paid any attention to what was going on, you could not possibly have been oblivious. If, today, you have no awareness of this history, you need to educate yourself about it. It is an inherent part of American history.

There are those who say we should just put it aside, forget about it and move on.

Really?

Trying to pretend it away won't

work. We are where we are and what we are because of what we were. William Faulkner famously said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

This does not imply that we today need to blame ourselves for the conduct of our ancestors. But directly or indirectly it is our history. Attempting to gloss over uncomfortable aspects not only avoids necessary efforts at genuine understanding, but such an approach also relegates into insignificance the real experience of large segments of American society. They and their ancestors lived it. They know what went on, even if many in the majority culture are oblivious, and wish to remain so.

It is not clear how we address and rectify things to go forward, but we do know it will be difficult. We should also understand that ignoring facts cannot possibly help. Efforts such as The 1619 Project can provide much-needed perspective.

Brian Larson is a University Heights resident, affiliated with a nonprofit group that sponsors community forums.

Point-of-sale inspections are obsolete

Alan Rapoport

After decades of experience, Cleveland Heights City Council should consider whether point-of-sale inspection of real property still makes sense.

In the early 1980s, I co-authored the Cleveland Heights ordinance, along with a past president of the Cleveland Area Board of Realtors who was a fellow council member. It incorporated best real estate practices. Its purpose was to incentivize the improvement of properties. A city inspection was required. If repairs were needed, the parties could negotiate some rebate to the buyer. The buyer then would purchase the property "as-is," while receiving cash at closing to do repairs. It was a sensible arrangement.

Well-intentioned social engineers later changed the rules. The city now often demands money be withheld in escrow after closing, to be released only upon proof that repairs actually were completed. That may seem reasonable. But such withheld money is unavailable to pay upfront for those repairs. Also, this escrow requirement could make sales impossible if a potential buyer wanted to use FHA financing. Present rules therefore harm all current owners who someday may be sellers.

There were few qualified private inspectors in the 1980s. Private inspection at buyer expense now is standard practice, regardless of whether brokers are involved.

Private inspections are more thorough. They protect both parties. The buyer knows better what is being bought. The seller gets less exposure to being sued for failing to disclose defects. Private inspection gives each party equal knowledge about the physical condition of property. The parties then can negotiate. They can decide whether or how to compensate the buyer for a willingness to accept the property "as-is." The city need not be involved in this process.

So, why still have point-of-sale inspections?

Some may argue that point-of-sale inspection remains important because it aids with municipal code enforcement. But a free-market approach is more acceptable than the potential criminalization of all new owners. Caveat emptor! Let the buyer look first and then beware, as civil law requires.

The city should conduct even more routine exterior inspections to prevent blight. But it no longer needs to police properties at the time of sale.

Our municipal government has limited resources. It cannot do everything. In this matter, it should redirect its efforts. It should not do point-of-sale inspections. They are obsolete. No more public money should be spent on them.

Alan Rapoport, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, served on CH City Council (1980–87) and as mayor (1982–87).

Bustling with activity. That's how Pat Mallik and her husband Singh describe the newest

"There are so, so many reasons we're happy at Judson."

chapter in their lives. After the Malliks relocated from Seattle in 2018, their son and daughter-in-law quickly pointed them to nearby Judson Park. And for Pat and Singh, there's been no looking back.

Gardening, reading, staying fit, and freely sharing her beauty expertise with neighbors are everyday occurrences for Pat. "We're so busy! Just because we are retired doesn't mean we're going to sit in a chair and sleep. The exercise options are great, people are so friendly, and help is here if you need it," says Pat.

Read the full story at
judsonsmartliving.org/blog

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Things we share



HEIGHTS OF
DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

Some years ago, PBS stations aired a spot with a voice intoning, “This belongs to you,” over images of the Grand Canyon and other natural wonders, followed by clips from popular programs. Even knowing it would culminate in an appeal for funds, we wanted to burst into a chorus of “This Land Is Your Land.”

Of course, the Grand Canyon doesn’t “belong” to anyone, and we certainly hope it stays that way. Contained within a national park, it is conserved and protected by the National Park Service (NPS), an agency of the federal Department of the Interior. The NPS is likewise responsible for our own Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Parks—national, state, regional and municipal—exist for everyone, including the nature within their boundaries. They are among the things we share.

Things we share enrich our lives. They contribute to our safety, security, health, knowledge and pleasure. Available to all, they include not only our parks, but our public services, libraries and schools, and natural resources such as our streams and Great Lake. They connect us to a world beyond ourselves and our families—to community, nature, ideas, information and history.

Things we share do not manage themselves, nor do we manage them by direct democracy. We look to public and quasi-public entities to provide and care for these amenities and resources.

These agencies are governed by our elected representatives or their appointees, according to state laws and local ordinances. The result is a hodgepodge of sometimes arcane selection processes. Cleveland Metroparks, for example, is overseen by a three-person board of commissioners appointed by the presiding judge of the Probate Court of Cuyahoga County. The seven-member board of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System is chosen by the elected members

of the CH-UH school board. For their funding, Ohio Metroparks and libraries depend on levies passed by the voters.

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS) has a dual mandate: (1) to treat our sewage before discharging it into Lake Erie, and (2) to protect public safety and water quality through stormwater management. Thus, it stewards the water we use for drinking, washing and recreation—an essential resource we share.

NEORS’s seven board members are appointed by the mayor of Cleveland (3); the Suburban Council of Governments, which comprises mayors and managers or their representatives (3); and the Cuyahoga County Council (1).

Volunteering at parks, libraries and other institutions enhances our connection to the things we share, but participation is not the same as oversight.

According to Ohio law, the Metroparks, NEORS, and public libraries all constitute “public offices” and, as such, are subject to state sunshine laws, which require holding open meetings and fulfilling public records requests. Must these meetings be held at times convenient for the public to attend? No. Are there many exceptions to public records requests? Absolutely.

We are fortunate that the CH-UH Public Library System and NEORS solicit public input, even when not required to do so. Using focus groups and surveys, the library extensively engages the public in its strategic-planning process about every three years. NEORS conducts a variety of community-engagement activities as part of its project-planning process. Stressing the importance of two-way communication, Frank Greenland, NEORS’s director of watershed programs, stated, “A good organization is going to do it.”

Legal frameworks offer some assurance that the things we share will be managed and tended in service of the public interest; but laws are only effective when followed. A vibrant free press and a vigilant citizenry are essential as well.

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

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Can litigation save the common good?



THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

Lawsuits take time and money. They can feel like a longshot, and sometimes a clear solution can be elusive. A moral victory does not always change things. But the political process is also time-consuming, costly and unreliable. State lawmakers openly flout the Ohio Constitution. When an issue like the proper use of state funds is consequential, the legal route is worth the effort. On Jan. 4, more than 25 years after the state created its first program using public funds to pay private-school tuition, a coalition of 100 school districts filed suit in Franklin County Common Pleas Court, challenging the constitutionality of Ohio's EdChoice program. The legislature made vouchers widely available in 2005 when it created EdChoice, one of Ohio's five voucher programs.

The litigation questions the legality of the state funding two separate education systems when the constitution requires the state to "secure a thorough and efficient system" of common schools—i.e., public schools. The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District (CH-UH) was the first in the state to join the lawsuit and is one of five lead plaintiffs, the others being Richmond Heights, Columbus, Barberton and Lima. Dan Heintz, a CH-UH school board member, serves on the steering committee for what is known as the Vouchers Hurt Ohio Coalition, which worked with the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding to bring the suit. It took the group of about 10 school-district leaders from across the state two years to recruit 100 districts, find suitable representation, formulate the charges and arguments, and finally launch the case. The lawsuit is the outcome of a demanding process that transformed the injustice felt by local school district leaders into a strong legal case that could change the course of education funding in Ohio. According to Heintz, "The

legislature left us no choice." I agree. The loss of state education funding to vouchers has hurt our community. I have watched with horror as the program has grown from the 79 EdChoice vouchers awarded in 2015-16 to more than 1,800 six years later. While vouchers are presented as a way to save students from failing schools, 95 percent of voucher recipients have never set foot in a public school. The total cost of EdChoice vouchers in our district grew from about \$300,000 at the start to more than \$9 million last year, with a significant share of those funds coming directly out of state aid for public schools. The statewide cost for the voucher programs in 2020 exceeded \$390 million. Over the last five years school leaders and community members have fought hard to rein in state spending on private education. We were visible in the statehouse sharing our story as lawmakers insisted on expanding choice. It made an impression, but it did not stop legislators from increasing access to vouchers and increasing the amount the state offers to those who use them. We need a lasting solution. If

successful, the court will order the state's education department to stop writing tuition checks to private schools. Vouchers hurt Ohio. They not only drain essential resources from our public system, which serves 90 percent of Ohio's children, they undermine a much larger concept: Public education means we share responsibility for all children. Private education abandons this commitment, in favor of each family for itself. If the plaintiffs prevail, the case will affirm our interconnection. It would be a profound and democratic outcome. I appreciate the school district leaders who decided to stand up to the legislature on behalf of public education and the common good. For more information, including the text of the lawsuit, visit <https://vouchershurt ohio.com>.

Susie Kaeser has been a proud Cleveland Heights resident since 1979. She is the former director of Reaching Heights, and is active with the Heights Coalition for Public Education and the League of Women Voters.

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Best Care for the Community During a Pandemic

Best Welcoming Storefront or Window Display

Best Innovative Product or Service During a Pandemic

Best "Opened-Our-Doors-During-A-Pandemic" Business

Best Cleveland Heights Business

Best University Heights Business



Bonus Questions:
What do you miss most about shopping/dining in the Heights since the onset of Covid-19? Share with us your favorite past experiences and what you are looking forward to doing again once the pandemic is over.

What new business would you like to see in the Heights? Why? (Let us know if you have a specific neighborhood or building in mind.)

Deadline for ballot submission:
February 15, 2022

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.

Complete the ballot online at:
www.futureheights.org/boh2022

Mail your ballot to:
FutureHeights
2843 Washington Blvd. #105
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118

Scan and e-mail your ballot to:
info@futureheights.org
Questions? Call 216-320-1423

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

If you are a business owner or operator, name of business: _____



UH BUDGET continued from page 1



Judge Francine Goldberg administered the oath of office to Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan, standing with his wife, Gina Ventre, on Jan. 2. On Jan. 10, the mayor proposed his new budget.

will reduce backups significantly.”

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds would be used to remedy or reduce sewer flooding along Meadowbrook Boulevard, with repair work being done on Fenwick, Traymore and Channing roads.

Repair roads: Residents would see major repairs to Cedar and Traymore roads in 2022.

Cedar Road would be resurfaced from South Taylor Road to South Green Road. The Cedar Road project would be done in partnership with South Euclid, and would use funds from federal, state, county and local governments.

Delayed in 2021 due to supply chain issues, the Traymore Road Water Main Project should begin in April of 2022. This \$500,000 project would replace the water main along Traymore Road, from Hillbrook Road to Warrensville Center Road.

In addition, the city would resurface Bushnell, White and Glen-don roads in 2022, and replace the curbs.

Brennan noted that residents are dissatisfied with the city’s previous failure to replace curbs. “Over time, we will rectify this as resurfacing projects continue,” he said.

Improve recycling: University Heights currently has one of the most inefficient recycling programs in Cuyahoga County.

In the current system, blue bags filled with recyclables are sent to a Kimble facility in Twinsburg for processing. While the materials inside the bags are recycled, the blue bags themselves are ripped open and sent to a landfill. “It’s wasteful, and frankly, it goes beyond the whole intent of recycling,” Brennan said.

The proposed budget would provide for a large recycling cart for each household in University Heights. Residents could put their recyclables directly in the bin, without a blue bag. The University Heights Service Department already has cart flippers on hand for handling the carts.

New municipal facilities: Brennan’s proposed 2022 budget includes a \$100,000 transfer to the new facilities fund.

“This budget proposal reflects what we all know,” Brennan said. “City hall is out of date and inaccessible. There is no gathering space for the community. The buildings for our police, fire, and service department are woefully inadequate.”

Brennan said UH City Hall and the city’s fire and police departments

ideally would remain at their current location, on the corner of Warrensville Center and Silsby roads.

“Residents need and deserve year-round senior and community programs, and new facilities will allow that to happen,” Brennan said. “The new city hall will be environmentally efficient and ADA compliant, with

community spaces.”

Investment in public safety: Public safety remains a priority in the proposed budget, which includes funding for two new police cars, and money to complete the police radio system upgrade. The budget would continue to fund the UH Fire Department’s voluntary Home Safety Inspection Program.

To help ensure that trash is collected efficiently, roads are plowed quickly, and leaves are picked up on schedule, the proposed budget calls for the hiring of two additional UH Service Department employees.

Continue rebranding: The mayor’s budget proposes \$125,000 for new signs, in the next phase of the city’s rebranding project. “In 2022, our new logo and branding will be seen on new signs welcoming visitors to University Heights,” Brennan stated.

The proposed 2022 University Heights budget can be viewed on the city’s website, at www.university-heights.com/mayor.

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

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Cleveland Heights City Council

Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 13, 2021 – Special meeting

Council members present were President Jason Stein, Vice President Kahlil Seren, Craig Cobb, Josie Moore, Davida Russell, and Michael N. Ungar. Melody Joy Hart was absent. Also present were City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil, Clerk of Council and Finance Director Amy Himmelein, and Law Director William Hanna.

Desota Avenue infill construction
A resolution authorizing a development agreement with Amato Homes, for single-family homes on lots owned or controlled by the city on Desota Avenue, received a first reading and will be voted on next week. (A full discussion of the legislation took place at the committee of the whole meeting following this special meeting.)
LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

DECEMBER 20, 2021

Melody Joy Hart was home due to COVID and, while unable to vote, participated in the discussion by phone. All other council members were present, as were the city manager, the clerk of council and finance director, and the law director.


Public comments
Lee Barbee announced that he has applied for the council seat to be vacated by Kahlil Seren when he becomes mayor, and stated his qualifications. He said one of his primary issues is lower property values in the Cleveland Heights section of the East Cleveland school district.

Fran Mentch of People for the Park stated that 25 percent of the signatures on the initiative petition for the park at Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook were not accepted as valid by the county board of elections. She urged voters to sign a petition, and provided a phone number to call for information on how to do so in the next few days, before the deadline.

City manager’s comments
City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil said that it had been an honor and a privilege to serve as the last city manager of Cleveland Heights. Council and all in attendance gave her a lengthy standing ovation.

Council actions
Council approved, on second reading:

- A lease/purchase agreement with U.S. Bancorp Government Leasing and Finance for an aerial ladder fire truck. The 10.5-year lease is for \$1.2 million at a 2.5 percent annual rate.
- A development agreement with Amato Homes for construction of single-family, owner-occupied infill homes on Desota Avenue.
- An ordinance adopting a new city code chapter: “Tenant’s Right to Pay to Stay,” which protects residents against eviction and homelessness. Championed by Ungar and Seren, this was passed at Ungar’s last meeting as a member of council.
- An ordinance to reschedule the annual Democracy Day hearing from January to June, with the expectation that better weather should encourage more participation.
- An agreement with Arthur J. Gallagher & Co. to continue the protected liability self-insurance program for the city.



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

Council approved, on first reading:

- Amendments to the 2021 appropriations and expenditures to adjust the budget.
- Authorization for the mayor to submit the 2022 Community Development Block Grant entitlement application.
- An ordinance accepting and ratifying the Janssen Settlement Agreement pursuant to the OneOhio memorandum of understanding consistent with the terms of the July 2021 National Opioid Settlement Agreement. This will create an effective means to distribute opioid settlement funds in Cleveland Heights.
- Authorization of a memorandum of understanding with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to provide Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination services and Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping training for service department personnel. These services will be provided to Cleveland Heights at no cost, and paid for by the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District from storm-sewer revenues.
- Establishing the Jan. 3 council meeting as an organizational meeting and the Jan. 10 meeting as the first regular meeting.

Presented on first reading was an ordinance for issuing \$3.1 million in economic development nontax revenue bonds for the purpose of refunding the Series 2015 bonds issued for the construction of a multi-level parking deck.
LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

JANUARY 3, 2022

Present were Mayor Kahlil Seren, and Council Members Craig Cobb, Tony Cuda, Melody Joy Hart, Davida Russell, and Anthony Mattox Jr. Council Member Josie Moore was absent. Also present were the city manager, the clerk of council and finance director, and the law director.

Council action
No legislation was read or voted upon at this meeting.


The mayor and newly elected council members took the oath of office. Council elected Melody Joy Hart to be council president, and Craig Cobb as vice president, and accepted Seren’s Dec. 31, 2021, resignation from council.

Committees were not formed, as a new housing committee is to be added when relevant legislation is enacted on Jan. 10.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

More details on these meetings, including council member comments, can be found in online reports at www.heightsobserver.org. Meeting packets, legislation, and other information can be found on the city website: www.clevelandheights.com/1142/2021-Agendas-and-Minutes. Videos of council meetings can be viewed at www.youtube.com/user/ClevelandHeightsOH.

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



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Seren sworn in as first Cleveland Heights mayor elected by residents



Kahlil Seren, with his mothers Mary J. Ostendorf (at left) and Leslye M. Huff, took the oath of office as Cleveland Heights' new mayor on Jan. 3.



Kahlil Seren signs the mayoral oath of office held by William Hanna, Cleveland Heights law director, who administered the oath to the city's new mayor.

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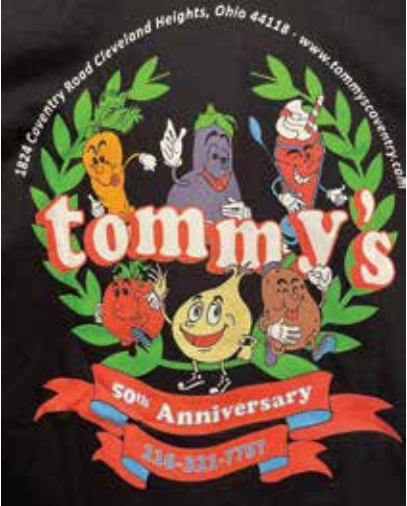
TOMMY'S continued from page 1



Members of the crowd surround Tommy Fello, carrying signs and sporting creative milkshake-inspired headgear.



About 50 people gathered outside Tommy's restaurant on Jan. 14 for a love-in for Tommy's.



he said. "Thank you so much for all the support and the love that you are giving me now. That's what I feel all the time when I'm down here is that love. That's what makes my job so easy."

Cleveland Heights Mayor Kahlil Seren presented Fello with a proclamation from the city. Julianna Johnston Senturia, executive director of the Heights Schools Foundation, gave Fello a T-shirt, and announced the creation of a fund in his honor. The Tommy's Education and Enrichment Fund honors Fello's positive impact on the community, and amplifies his values and legacy. It will "support strategic efforts that will help Cleveland Heights-University Heights' students thrive."

Fello, a 1970 Heights High graduate, was inducted into the Heights High Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame in 1990.

Response to the fund so far has been great, said Senturia. "There are

continued on page 11



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CIFF46 STREAMS
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TOMMY’S continued from page 10



Tommy Fello (at left), owner of Tommy’s restaurant, and (from left) employees Ian Anderson, Becky Dedenbach, Karla Zagari and Ivan Lemus, holding 2021 Best of the Heights winner certificates for Best Curbside Pickup and Best Community-Conscious Business, and finalist certificates for Best Online Ordering, Best Socially Distanced Dining, Best Ecologically Friendly Takeout, Best Employee Pandemic Support and Best Pandemic Pivot.



Tommy Fello with his Winner of Best Heights Vibe certificate in 2020.



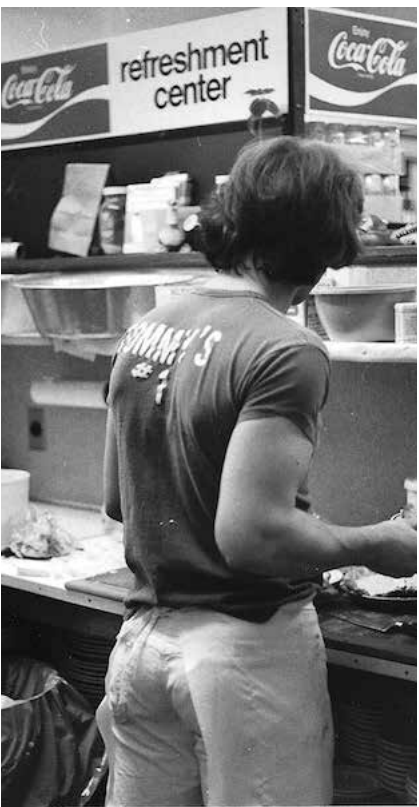
Cleveland Heights Mayor Kahlil Seren presented Tommy Fello with a proclamation from the city.

many people who want a simple and effective way to say ‘thanks.’ So many of us have personal stories connected to Tommy’s, and the new fund offers a way to make a difference in Tommy’s honor.” As of mid-January, nearly \$3,500 had been donated by 33 people.

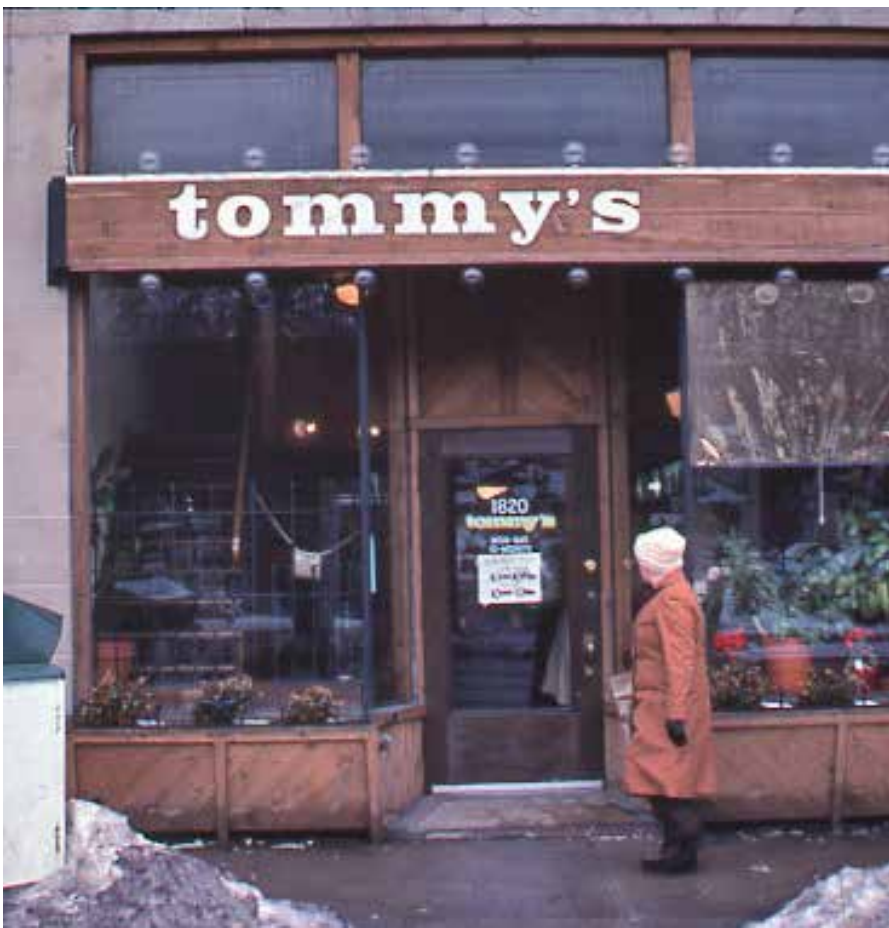
Contributions to the fund can be made online at www.heightsschools-foundation.org or mailed to Heights Schools Foundation, 2155 Miramar Blvd., University Heights 44118.

Tommy’s is currently open for dine-in, take-out, and curbside pickup seven days a week, from noon to 8 p.m. Learn more about the restaurant’s history at <https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/435>. Learn more about the anniversary celebration at <https://tommyscoventry.com/> and www.facebook.com/tommyscoventry.

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



This photo from the 1970s shows Tommy Fello working behind the grill. You can often still find him there today.



Tommy’s second location was at 1820 Coventry Road. When a fire broke out that destroyed half the block, he was able to salvage his kitchen, but had to create a new dining room at 1824 Coventry Road, which is the restaurant’s location today.



Tommy’s original location had limited seating. Fifty years later, the restaurant now seats 125.

CH organ recipient seeks to encourage donors

Elaine Materise

In 2018, Jacques Smith, a lifelong resident of Cleveland Heights, made it off the organ transplant list after a two-year wait for a liver transplant. Now, he's helping to bring attention to the importance of organ donation.

Smith, a deacon and current program manager of the Black American Council at Cuyahoga Community College, was diagnosed with primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC) in 2016. A rare autoimmune disease, PBC progressively destroys the liver's bile ducts, impeding the organ's ability to function.

After several failed surgeries, it was determined that Smith needed a liver transplant, and he was added to the waitlist. Two years later, with the help of Lifebanc, a nonprofit organ and tissue recovery organization serving Northeast Ohio, Smith received a life-saving liver donation.

Today, as Lifebanc's newest board member, Smith works to educate others—especially people of color—on the need for organ donations, and on overcoming the incorrect and negative perceptions some have.

In Ohio alone, there are nearly 3,000 individuals awaiting transplants, 30 percent of whom are African American. While transplant matches can be made regardless of race, they have higher rates of success when the donor and recipient share similar ethnic backgrounds. In 2021 only 17 percent of donors were African Americans, indicative of the disconnect between need and availability.



Cleveland Heights native Jacques Smith uses his experiences to help educate others about the need for organ donations.

Smith participated in a recent Lifebanc campaign, which followed people like him, whose lives were saved thanks to organ donors. In one spot, Smith read what would have been his obituary. To view the spot, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LSYPn7SIM.

Another lifelong Cleveland Heights resident, Jimmy Sollisch, helped develop the campaign. Sollisch, creative director at Marcus Thomas, is himself a living donor.

To learn more, or become a donor, visit: www.lifebanc.org.

Elaine Materise is a senior director of engagement at Hello LLC, a PR agency. Lifebanc is a client.

'Vouchers Hurt Ohio' lawsuit is topic of Feb. 23 online forum

Susie Kaeser

Vouchers Hurt Ohio is a coalition of 100 Ohio school districts that filed suit on Jan. 4, 2022, challenging the constitutionality of Ohio's two EdChoice voucher programs. Vouchers give families state funds to pay for private school tuition.

The lawsuit claims the growth of vouchers has hastened segregation, and depleted the pool of public funds available to finance a high-quality public education as required by the Ohio Constitution. It challenges the legality of the state operating two systems of education. Five school districts are named as lead plaintiffs: Cleveland Heights-University Heights, Richmond Heights, Columbus, Barberton, and Lima.

The public is invited to an online forum on Feb. 23, at 7 p.m., to learn more about the litigation.

School board members from plaintiff districts will discuss the impact of private education (EdChoice) vouchers on public school funding, their motivation for filing suit, the substance of their claims, the desired relief, and next steps for concerned citizens.

William Phillis, director of the Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding, another plaintiff in the case, will also speak.

The Ohio Constitution makes funding a system of public schools one of the state government's primary responsibilities. The suit charges that the state is failing to fulfill this responsibility,

in part by diverting public funds to private schools.

Vouchers began in Ohio with the Cleveland Scholarship Program in 1995. The legislature has since added four more voucher options that expand who can use public funds to pay for their private school education. The legislature has consistently loosened restrictions on voucher use and increased the payment amounts. Ohio Department of Education data shows that in 2020 more than \$394 million of state funds was spent on the five programs that paid for more than 59,000 vouchers that year, without providing for adequate public school funding as mandated by an earlier lawsuit.

The forum is hosted by the Heights Coalition for Public Education, the CH-UH and Richmond Heights boards of education, Reaching Heights, Ohio PTA and the CH-UH Council of PTAs, League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland and its CH-UH chapter, Public Education Partners, Ohio Public School Advocacy Network, and Northeast Ohio Friends of Public Education.

Registration for the forum is required. Visit the Heights Coalition for Public Education website, <https://chuh.net/wordpress-4.81/>, to register, and to find additional information about the lawsuit as well as a complete list of sponsors.

Susie Kaeser is a member of the steering committee of the Heights Coalition for Public Education.

Have you had a stroke or mini-stroke?

Researchers at University Hospitals are seeking participants for a research project designed to help African-American men learn about stroke risk factors and how to best take care of their health after a stroke.

If you are an African-American man 18 years of age or older, and you've suffered a stroke or mini-stroke within the last five years, you may be eligible for this study.

Participants will be compensated, and virtual intervention sessions will be available.



Call **440-656-2267** to learn more.



Heights Scouts earn Eagle rank



New Eagle Scouts, from left, Anders Sorensen, Michael J. Price, Matthew Skubas, and Bailey Fischer.

Christopher Jacobs

Boy Scout Troop 22, hosted by Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, recently celebrated four of its Scouts achieving the rank of Eagle Scout—Bailey Fischer, Matthew Skubas, Michael J. Price and Anders Sorensen.

In earning this achievement, these young men have hiked and camped in all weather, learned valuable leadership skills, and given back to their communities for many years. They each earned 13 required merit badges along with at least eight additional badges—often more—and each worked hard to plan and organize their individual Eagle Scout projects. The projects are not tasks that Scouts complete on their own, but rather opportunities to demonstrate the organizational and leadership skills they have learned on the trail to Eagle, leading, but also working with, groups to complete projects that benefit their communities.

Fischer, despite a well-deserved reputation as a man of few words, is known for his willingness to help others. He served in multiple leadership roles in the troop, guiding and training boys who joined after him. His project benefited The Music Settlement and included retrofitting a playground. He follows his older brother Desmond, who earned the rank of Eagle Scout from Troop 22 in 2017, and his father and Scoutmaster, Rob Fischer, who earned his rank several (!) years earlier. A 2021 graduate of Benedictine High School, Fischer is now a freshman at The College of Wooster.

Price, a talented hockey player, is well regarded for his work teaching younger scouts. His final adventure with Troop 22 last summer included backpacking more than 60 miles at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. Price's Eagle Scout project benefited

Benedictine High School, where he carried out a re-landscaping of the school's front yard. The project seemed overwhelming in scope, but Price coordinated the work of many helpers and got it done quickly. As his mother loves to say, "Teamwork makes the dream work." A 2021 grad, Price is still playing hockey while attending the University of Toledo—so keep an eye out. He may be taking those leadership skills to the NHL someday!

Skubas joined the troop in 2017, having been an active member of a troop in New York prior to moving to Cleveland Heights. He rose to the highest leadership position in the troop, that of senior patrol leader. His project benefited Saints Constantine and Helen Cathedral in Cleveland Heights, where he installed patio benches and planters, and restored a storage box. Skubas graduated from Saint Ignatius last year and is now a freshman at Purdue University. His brother Apostolos earned his Eagle Scout rank in 2019.

Previously active as a Scout in Texas, Sorensen joined Troop 22 in 2018. Like Price, he also experienced a Philmont Ranch adventure. Sorensen's Eagle Scout Project benefited Saint Paul's and entailed clearing overgrown bushes from the Coventry side of the church and re-landscaping the area. He is a senior at Gilmour Academy.

The four new Eagle Scouts celebrated their achievements with friends and family at an Eagle Court of Honor, held at Saint Paul's on Dec. 21. There have now been 87 Eagle Scouts who have come through Troop 22.

Christopher Jacobs, a FutureHeights board member, is the assistant scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 22, at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights.



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DCC continued from page 1

During the open house, Djapo Cultural Arts Institute will offer ongoing demonstrations in tai chi, capoeira, yoga, African drumming, dance, craft-making, cooking in the Diaspora, and Rites of Passages programming. In preserving traditional dance and music of Africa and the Diaspora, Djapo's mission is to educate, enrich, and motivate individuals to create positive images of family and self, while incorporating valuable experiences that promote healthy lifestyles and community healing through stage performances, workshops, community outreach,

international travel, and cultural exposure. Founded by Talise A. Campbell, artistic director, Djapo brings individuals from various backgrounds together to learn about their similarities and differences through traditional dance and music. For more information, visit <http://djapo.com>.

Center for Arts-Inspired Learning (CAL) will provide information about its summer ArtWorks program, a paid arts apprenticeship for teens. CAL's mission is to ignite student learning, creativity, and success through the arts, providing innovative learning experiences that close learning

gaps, teach creative thinking and problem solving, and help students succeed in school, in their first jobs, and beyond. ArtWorks is an arts-based college- and career-readiness program for students in grades 10 through 12, in which teens are mentored by professional teaching artists to learn skills in the arts and 21st-century skills through hands-on learning in a creative space for self-discovery. For additional information, visit www.arts-inspiredlearning.org.

DCC thanks the Arts Advisory Council, Case Western Reserve University, and Baldwin Wallace University for their support.

Disciples Christian Church is located at 3663 Mayfield Road in Cleveland Heights, across from Severance mall. Free parking is available behind the building.

For additional information about the church and its arts facilities, partners and programs, contact Community Arts Liaison Amanda Powell at amanda@discipleschristian.org.

Marsba Dobrzynski is a longtime Cleveland Heights resident, and former CEO of the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning. She is passionate about ensuring that youths have opportunities in the arts.

BALLOT INITIATIVE continued from page 1

approve, disapprove or amend the initiative. If council adopts the initiative, it would become law. If council rejects or amends the initiative, the petitioners then have 10 days to determine whether they want it to appear on the ballot.

Hanna further explained that March 3 is the deadline for council to request that initiatives appear on the May 3 primary ballot. If council decides to take the entire 30 days to make its decision, it would miss the deadline and the initiative would have to appear on a special election ballot. If the initiative appears on a special election ballot, it would cost the city \$120,000; if it appears on the May 3 primary ballot, it would cost the city \$18,000.

City council held a public hearing on the proposed ordinance at its Jan. 24 COW meeting. Twelve citizens addressed members of council at the hearing, and Himmelein read 10 additional comments received via e-mail. Four of those who commented voiced their support for the ordinance; 18 urged council to reject the ordinance, citing the need for economic development, with three of the 18 stating that they regretted having signed the petition. COW members unanimously passed a motion to recommend that city council reject the proposed ordinance, and instructed staff to prepare a report. The COW will present the report and recommendation at its Feb. 7 meeting, and city council will likely then vote on the issue at its regular meeting that evening.

The city has been working to redevelop the city-owned parcels in the Cedar Lee Business District for 18 years, beginning with the construction of a parking garage in 2007 to accommodate new residential and commercial parking. The city's 2011 citywide strategic development plan identified the site as a critical focus area for new, complementary mixed-use development. The city's 2017 Master Plan also recommended that development focus on target areas, including the Cedar Lee Business District.

At its Dec. 6 meeting, city council unanimously approved an agreement with developer Flaherty & Collins (F&C) for a mixed-use

development at Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook, which includes the site in question. The \$50-million project is anticipated to comprise 200 to 225 market-rate apartments, 5,000 to 9,000 square feet of non-residential (commercial, retail and/or restaurant) space, and public gathering and green spaces.

F&C presented a report to the city's Transportation & Environmental Sustainability Committee on Dec. 1, regarding traffic, parking, and sustainability. On Dec. 8, the Planning Commission reviewed a preliminary site plan for the project. On Dec. 21, the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) reviewed a preliminary presentation on the architecture, materials, and overall "look" of the proposed buildings and structures. On Jan. 19, the Board of Zoning Appeals considered requests for minor variances to the zoning regulations for the project and voted to approve them. The city held a parking and traffic workshop at the Community Center on Dec. 14, at which the city's parking and traffic consultants presented their preliminary findings and recommendations for parking and traffic improvements in the Cedar Lee Business District.

The project is anticipated to come before the city's Planning Commission for review and potential approval of the site plan and conditional use permits on Feb. 9, and is anticipated to come before the ABR



Site plan of the entire proposed Cedar Lee Meadowbrook development.



Site plan of the proposed Lee Meadowbrook portion of the CLM development, showing a public park at the corner of Lee Road and Meadowbrook Boulevard.

for review and potential approval of the architecture on March 1.

Both meetings will be held at 7 p.m., either virtually or in Council Chambers at City Hall, depending on public health and safety protocols. For details, including whether the meetings will be virtual or in-person, check the city's online calendar at www.clevelandheights.com/calendar.

The city's consultants are expected to complete the parking and traffic studies by March. Those studies, and other updates, will be posted on the project's webpage: www.clevelandheights.com/1154/Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook.

On its face, if passed as written, the ballot initiative would require the city to construct an activity park on the site, and suspend all construction

activities associated with it. However, the city's law director advised that, in his opinion, passage of the initiative ordinance—either by council or by the city's voters—would not negate the city's development agreement with F&C because the ordinance, in his opinion, would run afoul of state and federal constitutional provisions barring laws that result in the "retroactive impairment of a contract." Nevertheless, the city is required to follow the process outlined in the city charter.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer. FutureHeights supports the proposed mixed-use development at the Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook site.

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 15, 2021

Board members present were President James Posch, Dan Heintz, Jodi Sourini, and Beverly Wright. Malia Lewis attended virtually. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

December social media threats

Superintendent Kirby reviewed threats that occurred Dec. 6 and 14, which resulted in school closure. A student has been charged in the Dec. 6 threat. [For more information about the threats, see the article at www.ideastream.org/news/northeast-ohio-schools-have-received-a-wave-of-shooting-threats-heres-how-theyre-handled.]

The superintendent wants to develop and adopt administrative guidelines which will be in place if metal detectors are implemented. Wright, reporting that the Safety Advisory Committee is undecided about the use of metal detectors, advised that the committee and board continue to explore the issue. Kirby will begin obtaining feedback on metal detectors.

Student walkout concerning sexual misconduct allegations

Heights High students held a peaceful walk-out on Dec. 10, to express concerns regarding the district's handling of allegations of sexual misconduct among students. The superintendent met with a team to review current support for students, and training for staff designed to eliminate inappropriate interactions between students. A committee comprising community members, parents, students, and district staff and administrators will develop and propose solutions.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

DECEMBER 21, 2021

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

Public comments

Community members spoke about why the use of metal detectors is not appropriate in the school district, the need for the district to be less dismissive of sexual assault reports, and the need for consistent and enforced safety procedures to combat COVID when schools resume after winter break.

Sexual assault concerns

Superintendent Kirby made it clear that she is listening and will continue to do so, and that she takes responsibility for keeping students physically and emotionally safe.

Pandemic update

The county board of health suggested encouraging vaccination and stepping up safety efforts. The district's goal is to keep students in the classroom because students experienced both academic loss and emotional difficulties with remote instruction.

LWV Observer: Robin Koslen.

JANUARY 4, 2022

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

Election of board officers

The board elected Malia Lewis as president; Beverly Wright, vice president; and Dan Heintz, treasurer pro-tem.

OSBA membership

The board did not renew membership in the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) in light of its decision to withdraw from the National School Boards Association. The board wants to consider further the membership and its benefits, and will seek more information.

State board testimony

James Posch read a letter that he plans to send to the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union, regarding his testimony on Dec. 14 before the state board of education. He said that his intention for giving testimony was to explain the positive impact of the school district's equity policy on its students. He did this in opposition to the state board's rescission of the antiracism and equity resolution it had passed in 2020. He apologized for answering questions asked by the state board in a manner that did not present CH-UH teachers and students as he intended, and for any hurt caused by his remarks.

Public comments

A parent asked that the board be more inclusive, that the agenda be distributed and be more accessible online, and that board meetings be held in a regular place to eliminate confusion.

A student affirmed that a statement read by another person at a previous board meeting was hers. She was a victim of sexual assault. She gave an overview of the trauma that a victim of sexual assault experiences, including the added trauma when authorities do not respond or believe the victim. She said the board has the power to change this for trauma victims.

COVID update

Superintendent Kirby thanked teachers, staff, community members, and the board for their time and work related to COVID during winter break. She said data indicate that most students learning remotely suffered academically and emotionally, which is consistent with state trends. In-person learning aligns with health guidelines. An educational plan is ready in case a class, school, or building needs to shift to virtual instruction. The mask policy is in effect, and ventilation complies with guidelines.

Voucher lawsuit

Dan Heintz reported on Vouchers Hurt Ohio, a coalition of 100 Ohio public school districts that have come together over the private school voucher program. The school districts and other organizations have filed a lawsuit questioning the constitutionality of EdChoice vouchers.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed from the Board of Education webpage: www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx. Board meetings are livestreamed on the district's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools) and recorded for later viewing.



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Library breaks ground on Coventry renovation



COURTESY HEIGHTS LIBRARIES

Board members and staff broke ground on renovations at the Coventry branch on Jan. 5. From left: Tyler McTigue, library board member; Gabe Crenshaw, board president; Dana Fluellen, board member; Nancy Levin, library director; Debbie Herrmann, fiscal officer; Tim Pasbrig, buildings manager; Maggie Kinney, Coventry branch manager.

Sheryl Banks

On Wednesday, Jan. 5, Heights Libraries, the Albert M. Higley Company, and Robert P. Madison International Inc., broke ground on a \$1.7-million renovation project at Heights Libraries’ Coventry branch. The renovation will cover interior renovations to the basement and the staff office, and installation of a new HVAC system in the nearly 100-year-

old building.

Higley, a Cleveland-based construction company, was awarded the design build contract for the renovations by the library board last July. Since then, Higley has been working with Robert P. Madison International Inc., a minority-owned, Cleveland-based architecture firm, to design the building’s renovations. Higley has already completed some asbestos abatement, and replaced some plumbing to

avoid flooding during heavy rains.

“These updates will expand the services we can provide in the Coventry neighborhood,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director. “Our basement will be turned into a large, multipurpose meeting room with AV technology and a new makerspace.”

These expanded spaces will allow staff at the Coventry branch to offer a wider variety of free pub-

lic programs to enrich the lives of children and adults in the Heights community, and allow local groups additional options for their own meetings. Additionally, the ground-level rooms will make outdoor programming in the library’s PEACE Park more convenient.

Other renovations will include a new main-floor restroom, a lactation room, a new elevator, and electrical upgrades.

“My staff and I can’t wait to welcome the community into these new spaces,” said Maggie Kinney, the Coventry branch manager. “Having a large meeting room on the lower level and a restroom on the main floor will support our accessibility initiatives, which can be tricky in an almost 100-year-old building.”

“We’re also really looking forward to being able to support the community with innovative programming in the makerspace,” Kinney continued. “We’re already thinking about what we can accomplish with life-skills programs such as cooking, living healthy lifestyles, sewing, going green, and financial wellness. We’re really looking forward to partnering with local organizations and experts to bring this to life!”

The branch will remain open during renovations, which are scheduled to be completed in July.

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

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Heights Libraries again receives LJ’s highest rating

Sheryl Banks

Heights Libraries has again received the highest possible rating in *Library Journal’s* (LJ) Index of Public Library Service. The five-star rating is given to the top U.S. libraries each year. LJ’s Star Library report, released in December 2021, is based on 2019 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 11 out of the 14 years that LJ has published the rating (the library received a four-star rating in two of the years, and was not rated one year). LJ is a trade journal 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 such as circulation of physical items, visits, program attendance, public computer use, WiFi sessions, and eMedia circulation of material such as eBooks.

Heights Libraries circulation came in at 32.3 circulations per capita in its

service area of 57,867 residents, up from a previous high of 30.33, meaning that roughly 32 items were circulated for every resident in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights service area. Visits per capita averaged 12.35, program attendance averaged .97 (up from .89), public computer use was 3.89, WiFi sessions were 5.88 (up from 2.37), and eMedia circulation was 3.52 (up from 2.56).

“These numbers reflect our best year ever, statistically speaking,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “In 2019, we had our highest circulation ever in our history, just a little over 2 million items loaned or downloaded. That high will make next year’s COVID-influenced stats a shock, so for now we’re just enjoying this bright spot in a very challenging year.”

“But even now,” Levin noted, “with COVID restrictions, our community members are still borrowing items; attending virtual and socially distanced programs; taking advantage of reopened study rooms and seating

areas; getting help on the phone and in person with things like reference questions, tech questions, and printing services. People’s need for us hasn’t changed—if anything, they need us now more than ever.”

The entire state of Ohio did well in general in LJ’s report, compared to the rest of the nation: Ohio was second only to New York state in terms of the number of libraries that received star ratings, 27 to 34, respectively.

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

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Library staff braves freezing temps to serve community



During December and January, Heights Libraries had to return to curbside-only service due to staff shortages caused by rising COVID infections. Staff members from every department took shifts at each branch, delivering materials to waiting cars, even in freezing temperatures. In the top photo, Amani McGee (left) and Destiny Evans wait for cars to pull up for curbside service at the Lee Road branch. In the lower photo, they deliver materials to patrons waiting in cars.

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Registration opens for Reaching Heights music camp



The brass section of Reaching Heights Summer Music Camp 2018, rehearsing with camp instructor and professional trumpeter Theresa May.

Krista Hawthorne

After a two-year, COVID-caused hiatus, Reaching Heights Summer Music Camp will return to Cleveland Heights High School, June 13–18. It is open to 85 young musicians, ages 10–15, who live in the CH-UH City School District, and who have at least two years of experience playing an instrument.

This one-week camp brings together local musicians and music educators to create a music-immersion experience. The camp fee is \$200, with scholarship support available.

Each camp day runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Campers participate in two orchestra rehearsals, a master class and sectional rehearsal, and a chamber group rehearsal. They develop their understanding of music theory in small groups, and explore

a new musical interest, such as jazz, percussion ensemble, ukulele or choir. Somehow, there is also time in each day for lunch, outdoor play time, and arts and crafts.

In one intensive week, the campers and music educators affirm every person's ability to learn and work together toward a challenging common goal. At the end of the week, the campers perform in a chamber group recital on Friday afternoon, June 17, and in the finale concert on Saturday morning, June 18. The public is invited to attend both performances.

Families of Heights musicians in grades 5–8 will receive camp registration forms in the mail, or they can sign up their young musicians online, at www.reachingheights.org, starting Feb. 1.

Krista Hawthorne is the executive director of Reaching Heights.

ARTFUL hosts Feb. 26 'Art for the Masses' sale



Shannon Morris

ARTFUL is planning its first "Art for the Masses" event for Saturday, Feb. 26, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., at Coventry PEACE Campus.

Artists who create one-of-a-kind work, who are interested in clearing out older work, or offering less expensive versions of their art—such as prints and sketches—are invited to participate.

The event is intended to enable artists to connect with an audience that may not be experienced in art

buying, or might think it cannot afford to collect art. Nothing will be priced over \$200.

ARTFUL hopes to create an environment that is beneficial for artists and buyers alike. It will be an opportunity to meet the artists personally, and for the artists to engage with, and learn from, their audience. Trading with other artists is encouraged, and it is also a perfect time to offer a great deal to a longtime patron.

This event is free to the public. A nominal \$25 dollar fee is requested for a table, for participating artists.

ARTFUL studios will also be open to visitors during the event.

Shannon Morris is executive director of ARTFUL, a nonprofit located at the Coventry PEACE Campus with a mission to provide affordable space to artists, and help make their creativity and inspiration more accessible to the community at large.



Poet Andrew Valdez reading at a past Ekphrastacy event at Heights Arts.

Poetry and art event draws emotion from corrosion

Tom Masaveg

Beauty expresses itself in many ways, both at surface level and beneath. At Heights Arts this February, poets and artists will convene to respond to two current exhibitions: *Rust*, and Jesse Rhinehart's Spotlight show.

The event—Ekphrastacy: Artists Talk and Poets Respond—is one of Heights Arts' most popular recurring programs.

This month, on Feb. 17, at 7 p.m., four poets will respond to the shows on view with performances that combine sight, sound and the soul. Cleveland Heights Poet Laureate Ray McNiece will be the emcee.

McNiece, in collaboration with Heights Arts' Heights Writes volunteer community team, selected three guest poets for their ability to use the spoken word. Poets Robert Miltner, Andrea Doe, and Molly Fuller will give voice to the exhibitions' images and objects that have

so many stories to tell.

Audience members will also hear from some of the exhibition artists, who will discuss why they might incorporate rugged or repurposed materials, and industrial or post-industrial subjects in their work, and how living in the Rust Belt informs their art.

Ekphrastacy is planned as an in-person event at Heights Arts Gallery, 2175 Lee Road, but it could end up being presented online, pending ongoing pandemic precautions. Prospective audience members can check for event status updates, and find more information about Heights Arts' multidisciplinary programming, at www.heightsarts.org.

Tom Masaveg is a local public artist specializing in augmented reality installation and graphite works on paper. He's also the programs manager at Heights Arts. Contact him at programs@heightsarts.org.

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SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

These four guys walk into this little Cleveland Heights recording studio where I'm working in the autumn of 1967, and they record about six of the most unusual—in a good way—rock songs I've ever heard. Then, a couple of months later, I leave for New York City, get myself into a rock band, and start playing around that area.

A few months after that, in between music projects, I'm homeless in NYC, walking around midtown one night and I run into those four guys. They're in the city to record an album for Epic Records, which had signed them, based on those demos we recorded in Cleveland Heights.

Meeting up with them kind of saves my life, but to spare you a bunch of pathetic stories that typify life in the music business, let's say that three years later, we're all back in Cleveland. I start hanging out with one of those guys, Bill Ryan, a singer, songwriter, joke writer and cartoonist.

We start eating a lot of meals at Tommy's, the first summer Tom Fello has his restaurant, which, at this time, still consists of seven stools at a lunch counter in the back of Ace Drugs on Coventry Road.

One day, Bill and I are the only ones there, looking at the tiny menu, written on the mirror behind the counter, and Bill asks Tommy if there's a sandwich with a certain combination of ingredients. Tommy says no, but he'll make one and asks Bill what he wants to call it. Bill says, "The W. Zedd," which is supposed to be his initials, because his first name is William and his middle name, he insists, starts with a Z, which in England is called "zed."

Tommy writes "W. Zedd" on the mirror. So, I ask if there's a sandwich with another certain combination of ingredients, Tommy says no, but he'll make one and asks me what I want to call it. I say, "The DB." Tommy writes it on the mirror. That was 50 years ago, and those items are still on the menu.

Bill and I start spending a lot of time in Tommy's, writing jokes for . . . we don't know what. Bill gets a job writing jokes for American Greetings' funny card line. I start writing jokes for them as a freelancer. You have probably read our work.

Bill learns that, through a connection, he can get us on WMMS-FM's "Coffee Break Concert," a popular weekly hour-long live broadcast on one of the top-rated rock radio stations in the country. There's normally a months-long wait, but Bill has this connection who schedules us in for one week later.

The night before the show we meet at my apartment on Euclid Heights Boulevard and put together an hour's worth of comedy material for the show. We tell the show's host, Matt the Cat, that we're country singers from England (though we don't bother with accents), named Luke Warm and Farron Mild. The broadcast is weird, but WMMS's receptionist tells us it has stirred up some reaction, mostly positive, from listeners.

We decide to turn this into a regular comedy-music duo. Though I soon realize I can't do this and my rock band at the same time, so I decide to concentrate on the music. But I recommend Phil Baron to take my place. He does, and they call the act Willio & Phillio.

They play all the major venues in the area, get a morning-drive-time radio show on WBBG-AM, do a weekly slot on the TV show "PM Magazine" on WJW-TV (using our crazy Cleveland Heights house as their onscreen headquarters), and release a record album. And I continue to write and perform bits with them, until Willio & Phillio move to Los Angeles in 1980.



Bill Ryan (Willio), Phil Baron (Phillio) and David Budin in Tommy's on the restaurant's final day in its original location on Coventry Road in 1978.

They both become successful—first writing songs and doing voices for Disney Channel kids shows, and then doing voices for everything. In the '80s, Phil does the voice for the talking, singing toy bear Teddy Ruxpin, and Bill is Teddy's friend Grubby. From the '80s on, Bill, now known to the world as Will, is one of the top voice artists in the world, doing voices in thousands of animated features, cartoons and other movies, and TV and radio shows. In the early 2000s, Bill launches a 1930s-style animated web series called "Elmo Aardvark," and more recently creates and stars in a series of short 1940s-style movie comedies called "The Adventures of Biffle and Shooster", while record-

ing and performing around LA with his cowboy band.

Bill and Phil, after breaking up the comedy duo, continue to do many projects together, and we all remain friends to this day. Except, well . . . not exactly, because Bill, diagnosed with cancer this past September, dies, right before Thanksgiving. But we can see him and hear him in all the work he left us.

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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FutureHeights staffer highlights unique Heights businesses

Deanna Bremer Fisher



Belle Espinal

On Jan. 3, Belle Espinal joined FutureHeights as business outreach manager for the nonprofit community development corporation.

Originally from New York City, Espinal now lives in Cleveland Heights. Her professional experience includes teaching, working with minority- and women-owned businesses

on community events, and starting her own wellness business.

In her new role at FutureHeights, Espinal will be reaching out to Cleveland Heights businesses, to learn about their concerns and successes, and working on programs and initiatives to support them.

Espinal has already begun introducing herself to business owners, and put together the following series of photos with captions to celebrate and honor Black History Month by focusing on some of the owners of Black-owned businesses she's had a chance to meet.

Next month, look for Espinal to feature some women-owned businesses in the pages of the *Heights Observer*. In the meantime, to contact Espinal, send an e-mail to bespinal@futureheights.org, or call her at the

FutureHeights office, at 216-320-1423.

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



BELLE ESPINAL

Urban City Codes, a nonprofit founded by Tondi and Terrance Allen, offers technology classes to anyone over the age of 18. The training site is located at 3096 Mayfield Road in the Mayfield Lee Business District. Courses, which are offered on topics such as coding, drones, IT support, cyber-support and digital literacy, are designed as a career path pipeline, offering state-recognized certifications and industry credentials. Graduates are then connected to jobs. The Allens say there is no place like Cleveland Heights and no place they would rather be: "All our teachers, mentors and coaches are Black. We know how important representation is for receiving guidance and help. We want our people to feel comfortable."

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BELLE ESPINAL

Zelee Belete's Zoma, located at 2240 Lee Road in the Cedar Lee Business District, offers Ethiopian food for vegetarians and meat eaters alike. A Heights resident, Belete recommends the restaurant to those who want to be adventurous and try something new. "People's eating habits are changing. More people are eating healthy foods, and we are taking advantage of that," he said. Belete appreciates the city's diversity, and sees it as a place where people can appreciate Ethiopian culture and the unique offerings of locally owned businesses. "People should support not only our business but all small businesses. Small business owners suffered a lot during the pandemic," he said.

continued on page 21

Chris Hann **Bill Hann**

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FUTUREHEIGHTS continued from page 20



Franklin Myles, with wife Tanya, is owner of Franklin Myles Insurance Agency and the building in which it and several other businesses are located, the Jamm Strip Mall. Myles offers an umbrella of insurance and financial services, including auto, home, life, and health insurance, investments, and mortgages. Myles grew up in the Heights, and said he is committed to doing his part for the city: “We are a service-first business. We are attentive to customer service and very knowledgeable of the insurance business in general. We operate with integrity, honesty and trust. We want the customer to be what drives us.” Myles renovated his building, located at 3970 Mayfield Road, in the Center Mayfield Business District, through the Cleveland Heights Storefront Rehabilitation Program.



Robert Craig, along with his wife, Allison, has owned and operated The Sweet Fix Bakery, located at 2307 Lee Road in the Cedar Lee Business District, for five years. “I make it a point to make sure my desserts are on point,” he said. While the couple loves Cleveland Heights, they also have opened a satellite location in Cincinnati, managed by their son.



Owner Paul Morrison (at left) with designer Domonique Golphin at The BluePrint, 1627 Lee Road in the Mayfield Lee Business District. The shop offers quality custom apparel, including T-shirts and sweatshirts. “We have a little bit of everything, and if we do not have it—we will find it for you. I live in the Heights, my kids go to school in the Heights and I like the traffic here,” said Morrison. The retail store also sells its customized apparel online.

continued on page 22

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FUTUREHEIGHTS continued from page 21



Teaspot Tutoring, owned by Iteisha Bankston, offers daytime, in-person support for students who are learning virtually, one-on-one tutoring, STEM workshops, etiquette and personal representation classes for girls, socio-emotional mentoring for young men, and professional development for teachers. "Teaspot Tutoring loves catering to families and students," said Bankston. "We mean that wholeheartedly. We are serious about education and standards-based learning. We love teaching people how to learn." The business is located at 2065 Lee Road, near the Cedar Lee Business District. Bankston, a former school principal, said, "This community embraces diversity and does the best it can for its kids. There are good things happening in Cleveland Heights schools."



The Fresh Fix of Heights, located at 2234 Lee Road in the Cedar Lee Business District, offers healthy foods with vegan and vegetarian options, including soups, salads and smoothies. "We love to help people on their health journey," said owner Joyce McAlpine. "Our customers include pregnant mothers and people who are fasting. We want people to enjoy their food as they try to eat healthy." McAlpine lived in the Heights for a long time, and believes the Cedar Lee neighborhood is a vibrant place where people want healthy options.



Jasmine Rene owns a fashion studio, co-working space and event space that bears her name. Jasmine Rene Studio and Design Suite, 3982 Mayfield Road in the Center Mayfield Business District, offers "classy clothing with a luxury vibe," and alterations, specializing in prom, bridal and formal occasions. "I want people to look and feel good," said Rene, who lives in Cleveland Heights. Each year, the studio offers a sponsored prom-dress giveaway for two girls.

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