futurehomes program brings vacant houses back to life

In 2019, FutureHeights, in partnership with the city of Cleveland Heights and the Cuyahoga County Land Bank, initiated FutureHomes, a housing rehabilitation program focused on bringing vacant homes in Cleveland Heights back to productive use; and improving the economic, social, and environmental conditions in their respective neighborhoods.

Since its inception, and despite the challenges created by the pandemic, FutureHomes so far has managed the rehab of 20 properties. “Homes have luckily sold quickly, but we haven’t been able to show-case the good work through open houses because of COVID restrictions,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. “We’re looking forward to that changing.”

The program originally focused on the “center city” area, comprising the block surrounding Heights High, in order to leverage the public investment.

Continued on page 9

CH City Council appoints Gail Larson to fill vacancy

Deanna Bremer Fisher

At its Feb. 7 meeting, Cleveland Heights City Council appointed Gail Larson to the seat vacated by Kahlil Seren, who was sworn in as mayor on Jan. 3. The appointment runs through Dec. 31, 2022. Seren’s full unexpired term runs through Dec. 31, 2023. The last year of it will be on the ballot in November 2022. Larson said she plans to run for the seat in that election, to serve out the remainder of the unexpired term.

The timing of the appointment came as a bit of a surprise, even to Larson, who happened to be at the council meeting.

Council Member Tony Cuda said that Larson was a “great choice,” but noted that, while council had discussed applicants in executive session just prior to its public meeting, there was no guarantee that council would agree on a candidate that evening. When the vote was taken, however, council unanimously voted in favor of appointing Larson.

“Am delighted to be a part of this newly constituted council at this historical time in the city’s history,” said Larson. “It is an honor to have been selected.”

A retired payroll specialist and speech pathologist, Larson has lived in the city’s Noble neighborhood for eight years. She is a member of the Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) Housing Coalition (GCC) since 2015. Larson, who was sworn in as council member last year, noted how the years have moved between the GCC and FutureHomes, saying that “Homes have luckily sold quickly, but we haven’t been able to show-case the good work through open houses because of COVID restrictions,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. “We’re looking forward to that changing.”

The program originally focused on the “center city” area, comprising the block surrounding Heights High, in order to leverage the public investment.

Continued on page 9

‘Heights Conversations’ on race continue in March

Lydia Ward

In cities like Cleveland Heights and University Heights, so often praised for being “walkable,” how do we see pedestrian safety being addressed, discussed, and prioritized? In her nonfiction book Right of Way: Race, Class and the Silent Epidemic of Pedestrian Deaths in America, Cleveland-based journalist Angie Schmitt shines a spotlight on social inequities revealed by pedestrian accidents and pedestrian deaths.

According to the book’s publisher, Island Press, “These accidents don’t happen because of jaywalking or distracted walking. They are predictable, occurring in stark geographic patterns that tell a story about systemic inequality. These deaths are the forgotten faces of an increasingly urgent public health crisis that we have the tools, but not the will, to solve.”

Last year, several Heights organizations hosted conversations about race and equity in our community. In 2022, the conversations continue with two community events that will focus on the intersectionality of race, class and economic, social, and environmental conditions in their respective neighborhoods.

Since its inception, and despite the challenges created by the pandemic, FutureHomes so far has managed the rehab of 20 properties. “Homes have luckily sold quickly, but we haven’t been able to show-case the good work through open houses because of COVID restrictions,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. “We’re looking forward to that changing.”

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Continued on page 9

UH’s Brennan reports state of the city is strong

Mike Cook

In his fourth State of the City address, delivered Feb. 9, University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan played some greatest hits, before introducing songs from the new album. Or, rather, the newly re-elected mayor of University Heights offered new policy initiatives and events.

Brennan recapped some accomplishments of his first four years, including the creation of an Economic Development Department, the successes of the rebuilt Finance Department, and the new homes being constructed. Brennan said he’s especially proud of how the city “persevered through the pandemic,” while refocusing on racial and social justice.

“It is not a complete catalog,” Brennan said. “It speaks of greatest hits, and doesn’t even explore the deep tracks.”

Brennan asserted that he’d only just begun, “We are not here to rest on our laurels,” he said. “We are here to continue the relentless pursuit of seeking the best . . . and never being satisfied with anything less.”

Brennan said his “Putting People First” budget, which he proposed in January, reflects what residents already know—“UH City Hall is obsolescent, out of date and inaccessible. There is no gathering space for the community. The buildings for the city’s Police, Fire, and Service departments are also woefully inadequate.”

“The residents of University Heights expect and deserve better,” Brennan said.

According to Brennan’s budget, UH City Hall, and its Fire and Police departments would ideally remain located at

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Free parking continues at all Cleveland Heights meters

Continued on page 2

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In support of Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook development project

To the Editor:

I strongly support the CH City Council's decision to proceed with development at Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook (the CLM project). This project is the single most promising initiative I've seen in my 29 years as a Cleveland Heights resident. I strongly urge our city council to continue to pursue this development project with all due speed.

As incoming president of the Heights Arts Board of Directors, and as a concerned citizen, I welcome the revitalization this project would bring to the entire CLM community of residents, service providers, and local businesses.

In addition, I find the current ballot initiative proposing that the entire vacant acreage be used for a public space unboth short-sighted and legally irrelevant: Short-sighted, because the approved project already includes provision for inclusion of a public space; legally irrelevant, in light of the city law director's opinion that passage of this initiative ordinance would be rendered moot by existing constitutional provisions barring laws that result in "retroactive impairment of a contract."

The CLM development project will bring an invigorating mix of new residents and businesses to the proposed area, as well as a public space. Please continue to support and advance this crucial development project. It will bring benefits to Cleveland Heights and its residents for decades to come!

Bill Stigelman
Cleveland Heights

Pedestrian Safety, a public forum will feature a panel of experts, including author Schmitt and Heights Librarian John Piche, who will discuss the social trends that are putting pedestrians at risk, and the impacts of systemic, structural and racial inequality on communities of pedestrians of color. Attendees will learn about pedestrian safety in the Heights, and have the opportunity to discuss the intersectionality of pedestrian safety with the panelists. For more information and to register, visit www.futureheights.org/intersectionality.

Heights Conversations is a partnership between FutureHeights, Heights Community, Family Connections, Libraries, the Cleveland University-Heights City School District, Reaching Heights, Road Prinz, Compass Consulting Services, and the City of Cleveland Heights that is focused on creating spaces for dialogue surrounding anti-racism and equity issues within the community.

Lydia Ward is a graduate student at the Mandela School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, and is a FutureHeights intern.

Telling the truth to our children

Cynthia Lehman

I write in response to Alan Rapoport's opinion piece about The 1619 Project in the January 2022 Heights Observer. He asserts that "many qualified scholars" have questioned the veracity of Nikole Hannah-Jones's work. I have searched many online sources to locate the "many" but have found only a few. Even those few, for the most part, do not question Rapoport's version of the balanced interpretation made by Hannah-Jones. The major dispute seems to be over the notion that we fought the Revolutionary War to maintain slavery. My conclusion is that what she reworked that section before her book was published. (However, I would note that a paradox opposing slavery as omitted from the Declaration of Independence, an indication of the institution's strong hold on the colonies) is fascinating that Mr. Rapoport fears a "one-sided, biased, and ideological approach" in The 1619 Project. I took American History in high school and in college. The details presented by Hannah-Jones and many other scholars about the history of enslaved peoples and their descendants rarely, if ever, appeared in my textbooks or in lectures.

James W. Loewen wrote Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong in 1995. His conclusion was that the "history" we present in classrooms is a watered-down and altered account of what really happened.

Every day, our children enter classroom rooms where we should be committed to ensure they are learning the full truth of history. What was happening in those classrooms is indoctrination (Rapoport's word) to a sanitized version of who we are as a nation and what we have done here and abroad. I do not approve of indiscrimination in any form. Neither do I approve of giving an incomplete and whitewashed history to our children. The 1619 Project is a necessary corrective to what we have been all too ready to accept as the truth because we want to believe that we always did the right thing.

I was taken aback by Mr. Rapoport's complaint that the project classified people according to skin color. When is the last time you filled out any form that did not ask your race? When is the last time you were anywhere and did not notice the color of the people around you? We are a colorblind society, nor should we be. We need to know our history and know how we have come to be racially divided. We need to know how race has been and continues to be used in government and social policies that provide whites with innumerable advantages while disadvantaging people of color. To deny this means it will continue. This is not just about past actions; this is also about what is happening today.

I'm not even certain how to respond to his comments about a forum on pedagogy. It is a false equivalency. History is not the same thing as a psychiatric disorder. I hope that he did not mean to make an equivalency between people who want to explore history and those who physically and emotionally damage and use children for their gratification.

I am grateful to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Library for its continuing excellence. The 1619 Project programs are a laudable proof of that excellence. Cynthia Lehman is a committed volunteer working on a number of issues, including racial equity, reducing gun violence, and education.

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, 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 one of 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 216-331-1433 or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

Articles to be considered for the April issue must be submitted by March 14. We publish some articles online only. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

Pedestrian Safety, a public forum will feature a panel of experts, including author Schmitt and Heights Librarian John Piche, who will discuss the social trends that are putting pedestrians at risk, and the impacts of systemic, structural and racial inequality on communities of pedestrians of color. Attendees will learn about pedestrian safety in the Heights, and have the opportunity to discuss the intersectionality of pedestrian safety with the panelists. For more information and to register, visit www.futureheights.org/intersectionality.

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Charter matters

Deborah Von Klee and Carla Rautenberg

Cleveland Heights’ new form of government, with Mayor Kahlil Seren at the helm and a city council of six (including three first-term members) is in its sixth week of existence as we write.

Council has just met its first major challenge by unanimously appointing Gil Larson to be its seventh member within the 45-day limit imposed by the charter amendment voters passed in November 2021. We congratulate Larson, who will fill Seren’s former seat as an appointee through the end of this year. The seat’s full term expires Dec. 31, 2023, and will be on the ballot this November.) Kudos as well to council for meeting its obligation in a timely manner.

City ballots feature charter amendments all the time, for a wide variety of reasons. Some are prompted by outside entities, like the county board of elections; others come from city councils, specially constituted charter review commissions (CRCs), or citizen initiatives.

Cleveland Heights has a mayor/council government now because of 2019 citizen initiative. Regardless of who initiates an amendment, council must pass legislation putting it on the ballot so voters can decide.

(Note: Ohio law dictates different requirements for citizen-initiated ordinances, such as the current People for the Park proposal and the 2013 Move to Amend petitions.)

On Jan. 31, Council Member Craig Cobb chaired the new council’s first Administrative Services Committee meeting, with Vice Chair Anthony Mattox, committee member Tony Cuda, and Council President Melody Hart in attendance. To our dismay, the broad topic of charter review was on the agenda. Most of the discussion, however, focused on Cuda’s introduction of a charter amendment changing clerk of council from the part-time responsibility of the finance director to a stand-alone position reporting directly to council. (The amendment as currently worded would also permit council to hire additional staff and/or consultants as needed.)

In our October 2021 column (“Change is coming to Cleveland Heights City Council”), we strongly advocated switching to a full-time clerk. Our reading of the charter led us to believe this change could be accomplished immediately by council ordinance, and later reinforced with a charter amendment if need be. Apparently, the law department disagreed. At any rate, the Administrative Services Committee decided that Cuda’s proposed charter amendment would receive a first reading by the full council, followed by discussion and possible placement on the May ballot. We hope this or a similar amendment will go forward promptly. As we pointed out previously, many area cities with mayor/council governments have full-time clerks. This change would help to strengthen council as an effective separate and co-equal branch of our city’s government. As a bonus, the mayor and finance director apparently support the move.

On the other hand, a charter review process initiated so early in our new government’s tenure would be a grievous misuse of time and effort. As a member of the most recent CRC, convened from 2017 to 2019, one of us had the dubious honor of serving on a commission formed for the wrong reasons in the wrong way. We implore council: Let us not do that again.

Cleveland Heights may want to consider ward representation and other important charter changes sometime in the future—but not now. Our government urgently needs to fill key positions at city hall, implement automated trash and recycling pickup, revamp housing and building programs, revive the Noble corridor, reinvent Severance Town Center, and focus on equity, safety and environmental sustainability. First things first.

Hot off the press: Friend, colleague, neighbor and democracy champion Greg Coletridge has a new book out. The Depth of Change (Selected Writings and Remarks on Social Change) is available at Mac’s Backs (216-312-2665).

Deborah Von Klee and Carla Rautenberg are writers, editors and long-time residents of Cleveland Heights. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.
**CH council infringes on landlords’ rights**

 Alan Rapoport

Almost the very last action taken in Cleveland Heights last year by city council was poorly conceived. It was an unwarranted infringement upon legal rights of private property owners. It was a misstep. It may prove a sign of worse yet to come.

In December, council enacted a “Tenant’s Right to Pay to Stay” ordinance. It was designed to benefit tenants with financial problems. It provided that, at any time prior to the filing of an action to evict for nonpayment of rent, a tenant shall have the right to pay the landlord all past due rent along with what it defined as “reasonable” late fees. If the tenant takes such action, or at least tenders money, the ordinance purports to give the tenant an affirmative defense against eviction. It claims to be justified by a public health crisis.

Some tenants may be suffering their financial obligations and their financial obligations do not disappear just because a tenant did not promptly pay rent. If council succeeds in postponing evictions for any length of time at all, a financial burden of delay will fall on landlords. Some tenants may be suffering because of a public health crisis, but so are many landlords. Tenants need places to live, but landlords need dependable income to make such places possible.

For council to step into the middle of the eviction process is virtue signaling at its very worst. Eviction matters should be left to private parties and the courts. The city has no interest in being seen as prejudiced against landlords—that only will discourage those very people necessary to provide quality low-income housing.

Speaking for the ordinance, then council member and now Mayor Khalil Seren stated that one of the tests of a society is, “Do we endeavor to protect the people who need protection, or do we abandon them? And I think this is a way we can add protection for people when they need it most.” He did not appear to believe landlords also are owed protection.

The landlord-tenant relationship is a matter of private contract. Seren and his colleagues apparently thought that their one-sided interference with free enterprise was justified. He and they were mistaken.

**The war on winter fun in the Heights**

 Joseph Houser

Wintertime is the best season, or at least it could be. With the cold and snow comes ice that is a terror on the roads, but a blessing on our ponds and lakes. One of the Heights’ great traditions in the winter could have been ice skating between trees and snowbanks. However, the local government will do everything in its power to prevent you from indulging in the graces of a winter wonderland.

In early January, my friends and I (recent college graduates) attempted to play hockey on Lower Shaker Lake. We measured the ice to be 4 inches deep, so we began to shovel and put on skates. A man started yelling at us from the edge of the ice. He called the cops on us, and we were forced to retire. We went to a flooded sheet of ice in Shaker, which was fine until a local father began to yell at us to find somewhere else to play.

As it was made relatively plain to us that we would be arrested should we play on any of the Shaker Lakes, and after repeatedly being kicked off of Wade Oval Lagoon, we decided to go to the Forest Hill pond in late January. We shaved off a large section of the pond by the gazebo, and found the ice to be 7 inches thick. We even flooded the ice to make the surface smoother. A few days after we played our last game, some younger kids and their parents played on the ice. The cops were called, and they were forced to leave.

Once again, law enforcement ruined the fun. The water could not have been more than 2.5 feet deep in the area we were playing in. Don’t get me wrong, I do not think anyone should go onto ice that is thin, even if it appears they can stand at first. However, in each of these cases, the police kicked people off of skateable, safe ice. Should our tax dollars really be spent preventing kids from playing hockey? The South Rink is still closed, and ice time is rare! There is no reason that residents should not be allowed to safely skate outdoors.
Heights High makes progress on equity

THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

It’s a new semester at Cleveland Heights High School, and enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses is holding strong. In 2015, there were 181 students who took one or more of the school’s 23 AP courses—about 12 percent of all students. This semester, 335 students signed up for at least one of the 23 courses now available. They account for about 24 percent of the 5,300 students who attend high school at the corner of Cedar and Lee roads.

According to Interim Administrative Principal Alisa McKinnie, while the COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive to much that feels normal at Heights, enrollment in these rigorous courses continues to grow, and students continue to achieve. Numbers are up, and performance levels are impressive.

The College Board designs the courses and trains and certifies the teachers who lead them. It also writes an end-of-course exam that is used nationwide. While taking the exam is optional in some districts, it is required in ours. A grade of three or higher on a five-point scale is evidence of high-level performance. Data was not collected last year because of the pandemic, but, the year before that, Heights students outperformed their peers nationwide with 58 percent earning at least a three, slightly above the national average of 56 percent.

When McKinnie joined the Heights High staff in 2013, she was excited to find that students had a plethora of AP opportunities. Though not surprised, she was disappointed by how few African-American students took advantage of them. Underrepresentation of African Americans is a nationwide problem.

Access to rigor is a widely accepted measure of equity, and equity is McKinnie’s passion. During the year that she came to Heights, she began work on her dissertation, “Leveling the Playing Field: Ensuring African-American Students Access to Advanced Placement Courses.”

In 2015 the district adopted a new strategic plan. Advancing equity was an overarching goal. Increasing African-American student enrollment in AP was a priority, and McKinnie volunteered to lead the effort. Thanks to her, and the teamwork of the school’s teachers, guidance staff and parents, subtle barriers to participation are gone, and many more African-American students are living up to their capacity.

Not every family is aware of Advanced Placement and its benefits, which include earning college credit and developing skills for college success, so the first job was to create awareness. That led to an annual AP Fair to showcase course offerings, and pep rallies, ice cream shakes, and T-shirts being used to promote AP.

The biggest challenge is helping students know they belong, that they have the ability, that they will benefit from the AP coursework, and that they will be welcomed. Counselors and teachers are critical to helping more students see themselves in these demanding classes. The school no longer requires the prospective student to ask for a teacher recommendation. Rather, teachers make a point of encouraging their students to enroll in higher level courses, and champion their efforts when they do.

The final ingredient for success is support. A summer boot camp helps students with study skills, test-taking strategies, time management and motivation. During the school year there is online help and an after-school check-in time.

Five years of problem-solving and success have changed the school culture. The result is a robust AP program that includes more students, and where racial disparities are shrinking. The story is great news for Heights High students, our community, and equity. It is evidence that we have talented leaders and teachers who are determined to remove barriers, and who want every student to benefit from the education that is available to them.

Equity is neither a vague idea nor something to fear. It makes equal opportunity a reality.

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

Meeting highlights

JANUARY 18, 2022

Present were Mayor Khalil Seren, and council members Malody Joy Hart [council president], Craig Cobb [vice president], Tony Cuda, Josee Moore, Davida Russell, and Anthony Mattox Jr. Also present were Susanna Niemann-O’Neil, city manager; Amy Helmleak, clerk of council and finance director; and William Hanna, law director.

Public comments

Fern March congratulated residents for the 4,619 signatures collected on the ballot initiative petition regarding a park at Lee/Meadowbrook/Tullamore, and said the park will attract people to the new apartments and existing residences. Another resident, speaking in opposition to the initiative, suggested that the proposed park would not provide the $2.5-million cost for building or maintenance, and could prevent the development.

Mayor’s report

Mayor Seren asked residents to use the service request on the city’s website https://www.clevelandheights.com/842/Service-Request and on the Access Cleveland Heights app to let the city know what is needed.

Park ballot initiative

Clerk of Council Himmelman certified the initiative petition, submitted by a committee of electors, for a public activity park on 1.07 acres of city-owned land at Lee/Meadowbrook/Tullamore. The Cuyahoga County Board of Elections validated enough signatures to exceed the required number. A council committee may call public hearings, and shall report and make recommendations no later than the second regular council meeting after this certification.

Law Director Hanna said the initiative could not negate the city’s agreement with Flaherty & Collins. Both the state and U.S. constitutions prohibit retroactive laws from impairing contracts.

Council committees

Council approved standing committees, including a new housing and building committee, and assigned general responsibilities and membership of each. The chairs are as follows:
• Administrative Services: Craig Cobb
• Community Relations and Recreation: Davida Russell
• Finance: Melody Joy Hart
• Housing and Building: Tony Cuda
• Municipal Services: Josee Moore
• Planning and Development: Anthony Mattox Jr.
• Public Safety and Health: Tony Cuda, vice chair [will preside until vacant council seat is filled]

Council member comments

Hart noted that, beginning in March, public comments that refer to legislation on the agenda will come at the beginning of the meeting; comments on other concerns will be made at the end.

LWV Observers: Blanche Valancy and Jill Tatem

JANUARY 18, 2022

The mayor and all six current council members were present, as were the city manager, clerk of council, and law director.

Public comments

One commenter urged council to put the initiative for creating a park at Lee/Meadowbrook/Tullamore on the May 3 ballot. Two other residents spoke in opposition to the park. Two of the petitioners said their group would try to raise funds to build the park, while the city would be responsible for maintaining it.

Council actions

As an emergency, on first reading, council amended the 2022 budget, transferring $290,000 from the general fund to the economic fund, and authorized the mayor to transfer budgeted amounts within each fund, so long as the total appropriated amount for each fund is not exceeded.

Council member comments

Council President Hart explained why legislation receives one or more readings, and what an emergency vote is. If passed on an emergency, a resolution or ordinance can go into effect immediately.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy

Meeting packets, legislation, and other information can be found at www.clevelandheights.com/1142/2021-Agendas-and-Minutes. Videos of council meetings can be viewed at www.youtube.com/user/Cleveland-HightsOH.

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

Mathias Neff built his farmhouse at what is now 2181 North Taylor Road in 1885, on what was then a five-acre property. Ten years later, John Henderson purchased the property, living there for more than 20 years. A prominent attorney, Henderson opened the Henderson and Quail law firm, helped found the Cleveland Bar Association, and served as a counselor to John D. Rockefeller.

In 1915, the house transferred to Henderson’s daughter Janet and Carl Adams, her husband. Adams served as president of the Robeson Preserve Company, which produced waterproof canvas for the maritime industry. The couple engaged noted local architect John William Cresswell Corbusier to design a large, Tudor Revival-style addition to the front of the home, as well as a new garage. Corbusier is well known for designing significant houses of worship, including Church of the Covenant in University Circle, and Church of the Savior in Cleveland Heights.

The history of 2181 North Taylor Road helps tell the story of Cleveland Heights as it changed from rural farmland to a growing city.

At the other end of Taylor Road, near what is now Fairmount Boulevard, small farms occupied most of the land until the 1910s, when developers began subdividing the land. They created the now familiar streets, including Bradford Road. However, due to the timing of the various developments, part of Bradford remained a foot path that connected the newly built Canterbury Elementary School to Taylor Road.

After years of failed attempts by Cleveland Heights’ Mayor Cain to extend the road, the city enlisted the help of the Works Progress Administration to construct the cinder path, complete with stone columns at the Queenston Road entrance. The stone columns at the other entrances most likely date to the 1950s or 1970s.

In recent years, the Friends of the Bradford Cinder Path have restored the columns, and replaced invasive plants with native species. The Bradford Cinder Path continues to serve as a pathway for children, families and community members.

The Neff-Henderson House at 2181 North Taylor Road.

The original farmhouse was incorporated into the expanded home at 2181 North Taylor Road.

The Cleveland Heights Landmark program celebrates the history of the community, and encourages the maintenance and preservation of its homes and commercial buildings. To learn more about the work of the Landmark Commission, or to nominate a property, contact Planning Technician BreAnna Kirk at bkirk@clvhts.com.

Mazie Adams is a lifelong resident of Cleveland Heights, a supporter of the Heights schools and chair of the city’s Landmark Commission.

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.
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ment in the school’s renovation.
Upgrades included improvements to streetscape conditions and aesthetics, as well as the housing stock.

The program has since expanded into the Noble neighborhood, and has its sights set on other target investment areas.

Bremer Fisher noted, “Program homes have, at purchase, been more than just vacant; they’ve been severely distressed or even slated for demolition, and weren’t safe or healthy places to live. FutureHomes’ goal is, in part, to remedy this.”

FutureHomes works directly with developers to create a scope-of-work plan, to ensure that each rehab is well executed, and reflects the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The housing stock in Cleveland Heights represents distinct, early 20th-century architectural styles. Preserving the design and integrity of each home is a cornerstone of the FutureHomes program. When possible, historic features, such as front porches, built-in cabinets and hardwood floors, are restored and refinished.

The rehabilitation process also includes adding modern amenities. Retrofitting homes to include first-floor bathrooms, open kitchens, more livable spaces, and 21st-century upgrades to plumbing and electrical systems has increased their appeal.

The program’s mission includes increasing homeownership and promoting owner occupancy of single-family homes and duplexes. Homeownership plays a vital role in asset-building for mortgage holders, while also fostering neighborhood stability.

Of the 20 homes in the program, 15 of them have sold, and all are owner-occupied. The others are under construction, due to be completed this spring.

To encourage resident involvement, FutureHeights offers exterior mini-grants of up to $500 to homes located within designated areas. Funds may be used for painting, landscaping, lighting, and other exterior improvements. Go to www.futureheights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FH-Model-Black-Mini-Grant-Program-Application.docx to access a mini-grant application.

To learn more about the FutureHomes program’s history and current

continued on page 12
Heights string-light recycling benefits zoo

Natalie Elwell

From Dec. 16 through Jan. 31, Heights residents were invited to recycle damaged holiday string lights and extension cords to benefit the Cleveland Zoo’s Lights for Lions conservation program.

“Our residents’ response was extraordinary,” said Joe Kickel, Cleveland Heights’ assistant public works director. “We collected close to 1,200 pounds of lights, far exceeding any expectations.”

The Cleveland Heights Green Team organized the collection drive in partnership with Heights Libraries and the Cleveland Heights Department of Public Works. Collection boxes were placed at all four libraries in Cleveland Heights and University Heights, and at the Cleveland Heights Service Center on Superior Road.

“We initially planned to empty the collection boxes once a week and study residents’ reactions to the program. We ended up emptying boxes every two or three days throughout the entire month. It was a bit overwhelming, but exciting at the same time,” said Catalina Wagers, co-founder of the Cleveland Heights Green Team.

On Feb. 9, Tony Torres, the city’s refuse and recycling coordinator, and Clay Hairston, foreman, loaded and dropped off at the zoo the two pallets filled with lights. “We are so grateful to all the residents of Cleveland Heights,” said Nancy Hughes, the zoo’s manager of sustainability. “This is our third year collecting lights for recycling. In our first year we collected 1,7 tons, last year it increased to approximately 4 tons, and we think this year we have doubled that number.”

The conservation program benefits lions and cheetahs in Tanzania, but also diverts thousands of pounds of lights and cords from the landfill. According to Hughes, the lights and cords are transported and sold to DeMilia Iron and Metal Recycling in Willoughby, where the materials are separated and recycled. “We are energized and inspired by the community’s response,” said Wagers. “We perceive it as a clear message that our residents embrace and support our vision for a greener, healthier Heights. It validates our belief in the idea that by working together we can take positive steps to ease our impact on the environment.”

“We are currently working with MedWish on our next drive. We will be collecting discarded medical supplies and equipment that will be repurposed to provide humanitarian aid to people in need.”

The MedWish drive is planned for April, as part of the Earth Month in the Heights initiative. For details, visit www.ohmedwish.com.

Natalie Elwell is director of gender equity practice at World Resources Institute in Washington, D.C. She lives in Cleveland Heights, and is co-founder of the Cleveland Heights Green Team.

On Feb. 9, Mayor Brennan delivered his fourth State of the City address to University Heights residents.

the current location, on the corner of Warrensville Center and Shihy roads. Additional property could be acquired for a comprehensive redevelopment, while the Service Department remains a candidate for relocation.

Residents want year-round senior and community programming, according to Brennan, and new facilities will allow that to happen. A new City Hall would be environmentally efficient and ADA-compliant, with community spaces. New buildings for fire and police will help serve the public more efficiently.

In response to residents’ demands, Brennan said, his budget will also modernize recycling in the city. “University Heights currently has one of the most inefficient recycling programs in Cuyahoga County,” said Brennan. “We aim to turn that around.”

Brennan’s budget provides for one 64-gallon recycling cart on wheels for every household in University Heights. “Residents may place their recyclables directly in the cart, loose, and without a blue bag,” he said. “The Service Department already has a cart flipper on hand for handling the carts.”

Brennan said the time to make this change is now. “We commissioned a solid waste study,” he said, “and have the expert opinion that this is the way forward. It is unlikely that future recycling bids will even offer the processing of bagged recycling.”

University Heights will host its first ever Juneteenth Celebration this summer, and the day will be recognized as an official holiday by the city government.

Working with local environmental activists, University Heights will sponsor a Sustainability Fair at Walter Stinson Community Park.

In keeping with the musical theme of his speech, Brennan played a video offering a preview of the city’s Summer Concert Series for 2022. The lineup will include returning favorites Old Skool, Back 2 The Future, and the University Heights Symphonic Band, plus bands that are new to the series, including the Michael Weber Show, Flannel Planet, Rubix Groove, Oregon Spice Trail of Doom, and One World Tribe.

Carlos Jones and the PLUS Band, as well as Diana Chittester, will return for Fall Fest on Oct. 2.

Brennan also hinted at new development partnerships. “Tonight, I cannot yet share more [details] about them,” he said. “You will learn about them soon. They will be transformative in this city.”

To view Mayor Brennan’s University Heights State of the City address, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxR9VXvyaag.

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

CH CITY COUNCIL, continued from page 1

Team that has studied housing conditions in the northern part of the city and advocated for the resolution of problem properties in the city.

Larson’s application and interview are posted online at www.clevelandheights.com.

In her application, Larson wrote, “As a member of the GCC Cleveland Heights Housing Team, I have attended or remotely observed GCC Trolley Tour of the neighborhoods, helping prepare and participate in the Trolley Tour of the neighborhoods, particularly in housing. We are happy to have her join us on council.”

Cobb said, “Unlike the year that it took the last city council to fill a vacancy, we did it in less than the 45 days as the charter requires.” If council had not appointed someone within the allotted time, the mayor then would have appointed someone.

Cuda also welcomed Larson and said, “It’s so great to have another ally on housing and to have somebody with a nice, gentle touch that you have. You are just always doing homework and thinking about this city—and I just couldn’t be more pleased that you are joining us.”

 Council President Melody Hart said, “We had a lot of excellent candidates, so it was really a hard decision to make. Gail is one of those excellent candidates, and we applaud her active community involvement over the years, particularly in housing. We are happy to have her join us on council.”

Larson was sworn in on Tuesday, Feb. 22.

Deonna Brenner Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.
Green Team seeks Earth Month ideas

Catalina Wagers

“Earth Month in the Heights” is a collaborative effort led by the Cleveland Heights Green Team (CHGT) in partnership with Heights Libraries to affirm that all have the responsibility and power to protect the environment, live healthier lives, and create an equitable, prosperous green economy for all.

CHGT is issuing an open call—a “community crowdsourcing” initiative—to Heights residents, businesses, schools, and government entities, inviting them to organize and participate in Earth Month events, aimed to engage, inform, and inspire transformational community action.

CHGT seeks to generate ideas and organize activities that promote environmental awareness and remind us that we can be advocates for the planet in our everyday lives.

The registration deadline is Sunday, March 13. It could be hands-on green space, or neighborhood beautification projects, nature walks, tree plantings, sprucing up neighborhood gardens, ‘how to’ seminars, or upcycle workshops for children.

The options are limitless,” said Suzanne Zilber, a member of CHGT.

“It is easy for everyone to join. Participants can record their initiative or event by completing a short and simple registration form that can be found on our website, www.chgreenteam.org.” Zilber explained. “The idea is to bring the community together and offer opportunities for everyone to join and connect.”

Maggie Kinney, the Coventry Village Library branch manager, stated, “The success of the Eco Fair last October, and the interest from the community on the various drives and events supporting the vision for a greener, healthier Heights, are good indicators that our residents have a positive mindset when it comes to taking sustainability-focused action.”

In addition to co-sponsoring last October’s Eco Fair, Heights Libraries has partnered with CHGT on several other initiatives, such as the campaign yard sign and holiday string light collection drives.

“We wanted to continue to build on the momentum we are seeing,” said Kinney, “so we reached out to the Cleveland Heights Green Team to explore ideas for Earth Day. This is how the idea of ‘Earth Month in the Heights’ came to be.”

“The isolating nature of the pandemic has taken a toll on our collective psyche,” said Isabelle Rew, community engagement associate at Heights Libraries. “We see ‘Earth Month in the Heights’ as an opportunity for community members to reconnect and engage in conversations about positive actions we can all take to live more sustainably in the Heights.”

April offers plenty of opportunities for action and reflection, as National Walking Day, World Health Day, Earth Day, and Arbor Day are celebrated throughout the month.

All events and activities registered by the March 15 deadline will be added to the “Earth Month in the Heights” master calendar, for all to reference.

The master calendar will be published through several different media outlets starting March 25, to give residents time to decide what events they want to join, and plan ahead.

“This is a great opportunity for our community to learn from and support each other. We think that the positive results from everyone’s efforts will continue way beyond April,” said Zilber.

Visit www.chgreenteam.org for details and to register. Questions can be directed to greenteam@chgreen-team.org.

Catalina Wagers, a Fairfax neighborhood resident, is actively involved with several local organizations supporting causes and programs focused on the advancement of Northeast Ohio through better access to education, policy advocacy and environmental protection. She is co-founder of Cleveland Heights Green Team.

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Carter is new adult services manager

Sheryl Banks

Heights Libraries welcomes the newest member of its management team, Tiffani Carter. As the new Adult Services Department manager, Carter oversees the adult services staff of the four-branch Heights Libraries system. While her primary focus will be on the staff at the Lee Road branch, she will oversee the programs, services, and overall vision for the department at all library branches.

“I am looking forward to connecting with the adult services team and supporting their professional development,” said Carter, who joined the library in late November. “That’s the best way to provide great customer service to the Heights community—when we support our staff, and provide them with the resources they need to thrive, everybody benefits.”

Carter, who is originally from Cincinnati, noted, “My personal values align with Cleveland Heights University Libraries library values—a commitment to equitable public services and supporting the aspirations of all. I can’t wait to be involved in that grassroots mission, to create and support programs and services that transform people’s lives.”

Carter most recently worked at the Columbus Metropolitan Library System as a branch manager, and at the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library as a librarian and branch manager. She is an executive board member of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and an adjunct lecturer at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis’ Library and Information Science Department, where she currently teaches public library management.

Chuck Collins, the previous head of the Adult Services Department, was tapped to head Heights Libraries newly created Collections Services Department, which is responsible for selecting and purchasing materials for the library system. Collins brings more than 30 years of public library experience to his new position as collections services manager.

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

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board

Meeting highlights

JANUARY 18, 2022

Board members present were President Dana Flaxelle, Vice President Gabie Cresnow, Pati Cashley, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto, Tyler McTague, and Vikas Tambhia.

Board resolutions

[At a special board meeting on Dec. 22, 2021, the board decided not to renew the lease of tenants at 2843 Washington Blvd.] At this meeting, the board:

• Approved the slate of officers for the 2022 Board of Trustees: Gabie Cresnow, presi- dent; Max Gerboc, vice president; and Vikas Tambhia, secretary.

• Adopted the 2022 planning calendar. Regular meetings of the Heights Libraries board are held on the third Monday of each month (except January, which is held on the third Tuesday) at 6:30 p.m. All board meetings will be held at the Lee Road Library, except the following: Sept. 19 at Coventry Village Library, Oct. 17 at Noble Neighborhood Li- brary (assuming no construction), and Nov. 21 at the University Heights Library.

• Approved additional operational changes due to COVID. All programs for the public will remain on Zoom, or be cancelled, until further notice. Meeting rooms will remain closed until further notice. In addition to providing curbside services when requested, in-person services for reference, circula- tion, and use of study rooms are resumed, while strictly enforcing a masking mandate, as of Jan. 19. The reduced hours for all buildings are Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sunday, 1–5 p.m.

Directors’ report

The Ohio Department of Health is temporarily adjusting its allocation strategy to ensure schools receive an adequate supply of at-home COVID test kits. As a result, the state is pausing shipments to other community partners, including libraries and local health departments, until inventory and the supply chain have stabilized.

The director thanked the whole staff for assisting with curbside delivery and phone reference during the end of December and early January, in response to staffing short- ages and the COVID surge. Coventry Village Library construction began on Jan. 5.

To better support staff participation in the tuition reimbursement program this year, the library increased the annual maximum amount staff can request to $4,000, up from $2,000, for full-time employees; and to $3,500, up from $1,500, for part-time employees. These new reimbursement amounts are more in line with current tuition costs.

Public service report highlights

The Adopt a Reading Buddy program was launched. Children adopted a plush buddy that they promised to love and read to every day. Each buddy went to its forever home along with a list of its favorite books and a reading log. When reading logs were completed and returned to the library, partici- pants were entered in a drawing to receive a free book. This was a very popular event.

Take and Make kits for children continued to be popular, and the library debuted Take and Make kits for adults for the first time. University Heights Branch Manager Sara Phillips’ DIY Winter Centerpiece Kits attracted much interest, with registration filling up within 24 hours of opening.

Youth services staff handed out 196 snacks to children and teens after school in December.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy

Information about the board, board meeting minutes and audio recordings of board meet- ings can be found at https://heightslibrary.org/locations/heights-libraries-board

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Volunteer one project at a time with ‘One And Done’

Krista Hawthorne

Reaching Heights’ new program, One And Done, provides information about volunteer opportunities with the school district. It’s for any-one willing to volunteer for projects that support Heights public schools, who can’t make a weekly or monthly commitment.

Volunteers choose which projects interest them, and the days and times that work with their schedules. These are “one and done” commitments, with no pressure to take on future volunteer work.

Once one joins the One And Done Volunteer Group, the volunteer will receive e-mails about upcoming volunteer opportunities. Projects include helping connect young readers with books at an elementary school book fair, and loading boxes of food into the trunks of people’s cars at one of the district’s Cleveland Food Bank Market Days.

Here is how it works:
1. Register as a One and Done Volunteer at https://forms.gle/JTD-wYRCMPYvock6m.
2. Receive e-mails from Reaching Heights about volunteer opportunities.
3. If an opportunity is a good match for you, respond directly to the project coordinator, or use the sign-up link.

Volunteers can continue to receive the e-mail alerts indefinitely, or can unsubscribe from the list at any time. This is a great way to help Heights students, meet new people, and support Heights public schools.

Krista Hawthorne is the executive director of Reaching Heights.

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights

JANUARY 18, 2022 – work session

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

State funding discussion

James Posch discussed data from the CH-UH and Shaker Heights school districts that show Shaker will be receiving $15.6 million (in state funding) compared to CH-UH’s $9.3 million. Treasurer Gainer explained that CH-UH’s status derives from past voucher deductions. He explained that the legislature guaranteed that no district would receive less this year than it did last year; Shaker received a greater amount previously, and thus had to receive at least that amount this year. CH-UH received nearly the same amount last year after the voucher deduction. Through the next six years, funding should increase for CH-UH, whereas districts like Shaker will receive less. No district received disadvantaged student funding this year.

Dan Heintz expressed concern that, for the district to receive the benefits promised in the next two biennial budgets, two future legislative assemblies will need to fund those increases.

Early Learning Collaborative

[Early Learning] Collaborative members said that the assessment and progress-monitoring process describes K-3 students as being either “on track” or “off track.” Students found to be off track will receive targeted instruction. Focusing on children up to 5 years of age, the collaborative is identifying and building collaborations with early-learning providers, including day cares, preschools, and libraries.

The collaborative is also developing workshops on topics that include conscious discipline, identifying and addressing positive mental health behaviors, and physical health and wellness.

LWV Observer: Robin Kuslen

FEBRUARY 1, 2022

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

MLK essay contest winners

The Three Heights High Winners of the East View United Church of Christ MLK essay contest read their award-winning essays written in response to the question, “What challenges have I had to face in the pandemic as a student?” Their essays covered the new situations and learning environments with which they had to cope: isolation, difficulties with online learning, and the sense of being trapped in thoughts. On the positive side, they mentioned persistence and learning to believe in oneself.

OSBA’s resignation from NSBA

The Shaker Heights Board of Education members discussed their board’s resignation from the National School Boards Association (NSBA) in a discussion with Rick Lewis, CEO, and Robert Heard, president, of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA). The purpose was to clarify OSBA’s rationale for resigning from the National School Boards Association (NSBA), which led to the CH-UH board choosing not to renew its OSBA membership.

OSBA represents public school board members in Ohio, whereas NSBA represents public school board members throughout the country. Lewis detailed a number of concerns OSBA had with NSBA, including mismanagement, increased dues, lack of transparency, and other issues. OSBA’s “last straw” was NSBA’s letter to President Biden regarding the possibility that local law enforcement may need federal assistance in regard to attempts by the public to intimidate school personnel, board members, students, and citizens. The OSBA decided to leave the NSBA and work with other state school boards associations to form a new national group.

At the heart of the matter were two letters: the NSBA letter mentioned above, and an OSBA letter, which terminated its affiliation with NSBA and claimed that its change was consistent with NSBA’s policy of not labeling parents as domestic terrorists. Both letters implied that the organizations spoke for their membership. The letters can be found online:


OSBA’s letter is at https://links.chuhschools.org/BOARD/nofollow.

The discussion and comments from both the CH-UH and Shaker Heights school boards showed dissatisfaction that OSBA had not polled its member school boards to determine their response to OSBA’s intended action. Board members emphasized that OSBA had not communicated to its members any dissatisfaction with NSBA, including concerns that Lewis and Heard cited this evening, and that to include CH-UH and other school boards as participants in OSBA’s action against NSBA was wrong.

Board members were also uneasy about the creation of a new national school board group, expressing worry that the new group would compete states with very conservative political agendas, which would not reflect the concerns of the Shaker Heights and CH-UH communities.

Superintendent’s and treasurer’s reports

A $200,000 scholarship fund has been endowed by Dr. Kaserman-Abramof in memory of Sergio Abramof. The scholarship will be serviced by the Heights Schools Foundation.

The district received the Auditor of State Award with Distinction after completing the previous six-month audit.

LWV Observers: Robin Kuslen and Rosemarie Faraman

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed at www.chuhschools.org/BoardOfEducation.aspx. Board meetings are livestreamed on the district’s YouTube channel (youtube.com/CHUHSchools) and recorded for later viewing.

Going shopping?

Here are 4 reasons to buy from local small businesses:
1. They’re part of the community’s character
2. They recirculate more of your money locally
3. They support local causes and institutions
4. If you don’t support them now, they may not be around later

To see the visual transformation of homes in the program, follow FutureHeights on Facebook and Instagram.

Abby Laudes is the director of real estate development at FutureHeights.

For more information about FutureHeights, visit www.futureheights.org/programs/futurehomes-program, or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

To view the visual transformation of homes in the program, follow FutureHeights on Facebook and Instagram.

Abby Laudes is the director of real estate development at FutureHeights.
Simna to lead ‘22 Music Hop Team

Sarah Wolf

FutureHeights has announced the selection of a new manager for its 2022 Heights Music Hop festival. Eric Simna, principal of A440 Sound, will lead this year’s planning committee.

As the primary sound provider for the festival over the last six years, Simna brings an intimate knowledge of the event to the position. “Whether it comes to connecting with business owners, making sure performers are comfortable, or ensuring that the patron experience is top-notch, Eric has had a hand in every aspect of the festival,” said FutureHeights Executive Director Deanna Bremer Fisher. “His passion and dedication were evident as he worked to help put together the best festival possible during the COVID-19 pandemic last year.”

Simna said he is excited to begin preparations for the 2022 festival, which will take place in September, and would love feedback from Cleveland Heights business owners. “This festival means so much to the businesses, performers, and residents of Cleveland Heights,” he said. “Despite the ongoing pandemic, the festival has to happen, in at least some way, to help everyone in the area.”

Simna welcomes questions or comments, and invites those who want to get involved to contact him at hmsmusichop@gmail.com.

Sarah Wolf is the community building programs manager at FutureHeights.

Heights Arts figures out abstract

Tom Masaveg

In a new exhibition running March 18 to May 15 in the Heights Arts exhibition space, artists Peter Christian Johnson, Karin Djikjer, Corrine Slawson, Claudio Orso, and Carmen Romine test where boundaries lie between representational study and abstract expression. **FIGURATIVE/ABSTRACT** explores the familiar in unfamiliar ways, referring to the recognizable as a foundation from which new ideas are born. For the artists in the show, reality has rapidly changed over the past few years, and subjects from daily life hold new context now.

Portraying subjects as they meet the eye doesn’t satisfy the intentions of artist Peter Christian Johnson, who said, “My work explores the tension between balance and collapse, between precision and failure.” It’s a meditation on entropy that slumps, between presence and absence.

I am interested in transformation, the dichotomy of beauty and loss. It’s a meditation on entropy that slumps, between precision and failure. Said Romine, “I make abstract landscapes that investigate ideas behind technology advancing and transitioning from paper to digital devices. By using paper as a material, I intend to draw from its symbolism to create a sense of touch and human presence for what could become an ancient tool for culture and communication.” The work is fabricated through heavily process-driven steps of repetition—cutting, crumpling, piecing and gluing.

The exhibition’s viewers can expect color, form, scale, and any other tool at an artist’s disposal being used to distort clarity, provoking the senses to seek new answers. Questions one may not normally consider are posed in these abstract works tangled with figure.

Regarding the purpose for mingling figurative reference with abstraction, the show’s curator, Helen Liggett, explained, “In this exhibition, we assume figurative and abstract art are porous categories and ask how contemporary artists navigate the territory.”

Also opening on March 18 is an exhibition of Jane Alexander’s work, showcased in Heights Arts’ Spotlight Gallery. Alexander is the chief digital information officer for the Cleveland Museum of Art, where she leads digital projects such as ArtLens and Open Access—both innovative ways to virtually access and interact with the museum catalog. Her work at Heights Arts presents a single point of reference in space, along the Cleveland waterfront, in a striking collection of iterations. The static images—sometimes subtle, other times surprisingly dramatic—tell a story of nature’s dynamism; easily overlooked as one perspective grows increasingly familiar.

For more information on Heights Arts’ community programs and events, including house concerts, gallery performances and outreach, visit www.heightsarts.org.

Tom Masaveg is a local public artist specializing in augmented reality installation and graphic works on paper. He’s also the programs manager at Heights Arts. He can be reached at program@heightsarts.org.

**Bustling with activity. That’s how Pat Mallik and her husband Singh describe the newest 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. “We’re so happy! Just because we are retired doesn’t mean we’re doing nothing,” Singh says. The exercise options are great, people are friendly, and help is here if you need it.”**

Pat and Singh Mallik

Read the full story at judsonsmartliving.org/blog

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www.heightsobserver.org
Liza Grossman goes Kaboom (collectively)

David Budin

When Liza Grossman directed the Contemporary Youth Orchestra (CYO), she showed her young musicians many other ways in which they could use their talents in the musical world, beyond playing in orchestras and pit bands, and teaching. Those included playing for recording sessions; playing in studio orchestras for movie, TV, cartoon and game soundtracks; and playing behind rock (and other) musicians in concerts.

Grossman, who has lived in Cleveland Heights since 1992, stepped down as head of CYO in 2020 and, soon after, launched Kaboom Collective. Kaboom maintains a studio orchestra of about 40 members—the size of a standard Hollywood recording orchestra—which meets in person. And, small groups of students from all over the world, aged 15 to 25, can participate in online classes in a wide variety of music-related subjects, taught by industry experts.

“Hub of what we’re doing,” Grossman said, “is whatever the production is. And the spokes are all of the arms of the industry that would make that production happen. So, for example, with the animation we’re producing right now, we have a script writing team that worked with an award-winning script writer and voiceover actor out of L.A., Paul Rugg, who taught them how to write a cartoon from scratch. And not just the script, but also things like camera angles, and depth, and, when someone is talking, what else is happening in the scene.

“Once the script is completed, there’s the voiceover class. Then they’ll record the voices. Then it moves to the animation team, who will work with another award-winning animator (not announced yet). Then it’ll go to the composition team who will work with Julie and Steve Bernstein [Emmy Award-winning composers, known for such shows as “The Animaniacs”]. Then it comes to me, and the studio orchestra records it. Then it will be released.”

So, she said, all the young people who worked on it will then have professional credits, and not only will they have started to build their professional portfolios, but they will have made professional connections, who might hire them for future projects or whom they can contact later. And they’ll also have professional peers for when they start their own companies.

The idea for Kaboom Collective came from discussions Grossman had, over several months, with one of her CYO colleagues, Joe Weagraff, a marketing strategist who is now Kaboom Collective’s brand manager. Though she was introducing her students to “different ideas about what can be done with performance music,” Grossman said, “Joe and I realized that what was missing was focused training”—how they could actually do those other things.

Kaboom Collective established a relationship with Baldwin Wallace University, where the organization is now in residence.

Thirty orchestra members are going on tour to several cities this summer with the nationally known indie rock trio the Accidentals, with whom the musicians are also recording an album. Grossman said of the tour, “We’re taking applications for students who want to learn how to be a tour manager, or a sound engineer, or a manager. And we’re going to film it, so we’re taking people who want to learn how to make a documentary.”

They’re also recording an album of West African percussion with Valerie Naranjo, who plays percussion for NBC’s “Saturday Night Live” band and performs in Broadway’s “The Lion King.”

Information about studio orchestra auditions, and applications for classes, can be found at https://kaboom-collective.org.

Unlike CYO, Grossman said, Kaboom Collective is production-based, not performance-based. “This is a place,” Grossman said, “where all of these teachers, artists, performers, writers, managers, lighting designers, photographers—everyone—where all those atoms and molecules between us are churning with all of our thoughts and all of our ideas, and through conversation it’s just such an incredible atmosphere of collaboration, and all of a sudden, with all of those atoms and molecules churning—kaboom! there’s a production.”

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.
And then I went Kaboom!

Kaboom! That’s “Kaboom” on a few different levels. The most immediate one is Kaboom Collective. But we’ll get back to that.

The Kaboom story—wait, not the Kaboom story, my Kaboom story—starts in the late 60s. I was a 20-year-old singer-songwriter signed to Sire Records in New York. I became friends with the company’s publishing director, Bart Friedman, and we became roommates and business partners. Among other things, we managed a magician named Ricky Jay and got him booked on “The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.” Jay became one of the top magicians in the world, plus a movie and TV actor and an author. And he wrote and performed a one-man show on Broadway, directed by David Mamet, which he then took to an HBO special.

The Kaboom story—wait, not that one is Kaboom Collective. But we’ll get back to that.

I left New York in 1970 and moved to L.A. But it all came together after 25 years, Liza stepped down as head of the orchestra, in 2020, to launch a brand-new venture, Kaboom Collective. Headquartered in Cleveland Heights, where she still lives, Kaboom Collective has continued and greatly expanded on all that CYO did, and much more, offering online classes to young people taught by industry experts, on all aspects of the music business and its tangents, and an in-person studio orchestra.

Kaboom Collective is a unique music-industry educational organization (which I write about in more detail on page 14).

So, Liza, Linda and Nancy are all from Michigan; Bart and Paul are from Brooklyn; Ricky was from Elizabethtown, N.J., and I’m from Cleveland Heights; though some of us met in New York City; and some eventually moved to L.A. But it all came together here in Cleveland Heights. As it so often does.

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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Dobama presents ‘Kill Move Paradise’

Anthony Zicari

Dobama Theatre’s 2021-22 season continues with “Kill Move Paradise,” winner of the 2018 Kesselring Prize, March 4 through March 27.

“Kill Move Paradise,” by acclaimed playwright, actor, and director James Ijames, is a biting, funny, and hopeful requiem for Black lives that takes place in a waiting room to the afterlife. In this space, four Black men—Isa, Grif, Daz, and Tiny—search for peace and hope in the lives they leave behind.

Ijames likens it to the Bardo, a Tibetan Buddhist concept of the void between death and rebirth through which everyone must pass. As the men struggle to remember their past lives, Tiny recalls playing with a toy gun in a park, a story that echoes the 2014 murder of Tamir Rice by a Cleveland police officer. The other men’s stories are also emblematic of the growing number of Black lives cut short by violence. In response, the play focuses on the possibilities of collective transformation and radical acts of joy.

Ijames said that, in writing this play, he tried “to create a space in which the humanity of the people on stage is undeniable. These characters embody all the ways in which we try to be human. They are jealous, they are kind, they are maternal and paternal, they are pushed physically to the edge of something and then fall. You can’t deny their humanity. And they are all Black. So, the audience has to see them as they are.”

“If someone walks out of ‘Kill Move Paradise,’ and they think there is no such thing as police brutality,” said Ijames, “I’ve probably done something wrong. But if they walk out thinking, ‘Can I talk to you about this?’ That’s a step, and that’s all I want.”

Ijames currently serves as co-artistic director of the Wilma Theater in Missoula, Mont., and is an assistant professor of theater at Villanova University.

Dobama’s production of “Kill Move Paradise” is directed by Nathan Henry and features Mell-Vonti Bowens Jr., Aamar-Malik Culbreth, Ananias J. Dixon, and Dariuss Stubble.

Performances are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons. For a complete schedule, ticket prices, and reservations, call the Dobama Theatre box office at 216-912-3396. Ask about the “pay-as-you-can” performance on Sunday, March 6. On other nights, all tickets remaining when the box office opens—one hour before curtain—are available at the pay-as-you-can rate of $1 or more.

Anthony Zicari is a local stage manager and the current production intern at Dobama Theatre. He studied music at Oberlin College and previously worked with Mercury Theatre Company.

Registration is open for 10th LEI Kids’ Comic Con

In 2013, shortly after Lake Erie Ink (LEI) opened its doors, co-founders Cynthia Larsen and Amy Rosenbluth set out to build a new creative expression community for youth. They knew Cleveland’s young people loved the rich comic culture in Northeast Ohio, and enjoyed creating their own comics.

What if the robust comic talent in Cleveland could work directly with the next generation of comic creators? Several phone calls later, the LEI Kids’ Comic Con was scheduled, featuring workshops by Marc Sumerak, Derf Backderf, Martinez E-B, Karen Sandstrom, and more.

This year, as the Kids’ Comic Con celebrates its 10th birthday, Larsen reflects on its growth: “When we started, we had like 40 kids … not as many workshops, not as many artists. We pretty quickly doubled the number of kids participating in Comic Con.”

Many of these kids found their voice through the comic workshops. “I was never confident in speaking to begin with, so expressing stuff by drawing and writing is better for me,” said Charlotte, a fifth grader.

As the event grew in size and popularity, so did the number of local artists who participate. As artist/teacher Gary Dunn explained, “I enjoy encouraging young artists, and wish that I’d had more encouragement when I was young.”

This year, the Comic Con will incorporate both in-person and virtual events. “I’m most excited that we get to keep the best part of being in-person, but also get to have Justin Reynolds, Liz Montague, and Nickelodeon Studios as part of the event.” Larsen explained. “It’s the best of local artists, with new excitement and new people.”

With over 20 workshops led by professionals in the field, including Terri Libenson and Juan J. Fernandez, the 10th Annual Kids’ Comic Con builds the Cleveland comic community one panel at a time.

The 10th Annual Kids’ Comic Con will run March 3-5. Registration opened on Feb. 17. Lake Erie Ink will also be offering comic summer camps starting in June. To learn more about Comic Con, go to lakeerieink.org/kids-comic-con.

Eli Millette is the communications and outreach director at Lake Erie Ink. He lives in Cleveland Heights.
Women entrepreneurs choose Cleveland Heights

Belle Espinal

Last month, the Heights Observer featured owners of Black-owned businesses that new FutureHeights Business Outreach Manager Belle Espinal met during her first month on the job. Now, for Women’s History Month, Espinal has put together a recap, and a series of photos, of some of the women who own Cleveland Heights businesses, whom she has met since beginning her job in January.

Josefita Fehn is an independent representative of Beautycounter, offering cosmetic products made using fair-trade business practices, such as prohibiting the use of child labor and toxic chemicals, and offering fair wages to its employees. Fehn characterizes Black and Latina women as using makeup in high quantities, and wants them to know that Beautycounter is an option. She is proud that the company offers 25 scholarships for minorities to start their own Beautycounter business. “All you need is a passion and a desire to work to get started,” said Fehn. In April, she hopes to participate in an initiative to increase federal regulations on beauty products. Contact Fehn at achyfehn@gmail.com.

Chef Dana Chandler is the owner of Smoke Dee’s Kitchen, 1433 Warrensville Center Road.

continued on page 18
Asma Mujib of Momma’s Bowl. April Bimbo of Lavish Decors.

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“I offer good soul food at a reasonable price with excellent customer service. Cooking is my passion, that’s why I have this business,” said Chandler. “I am a small, Black woman-owned business here in the Heights. I am a one-woman show.”

LaDosha Wright has owned Reverence Design Team salon, at 2062 S. Taylor Road, since 2000. Wright started her career as an outreach manager, visiting homes and teaching classes on parenting and anger management, and was surprised to discover that many of the issues her clients faced were because they did not like themselves, especially their hair. She created a course, How to Have a Good Hair Day, that focused on the same client issues, but related them to the cultural importance of having a good hair day. That led her to start her own hair-styling business. She is continuing her activism, and hoping to bring the discipline of Afro-hair to a local college.

Asma Mujib, owner of Momma’s Bowl, a soul food restaurant at 3077 Mayfield Road, grew up cooking with her mother. “To this day, my momma is the only other person who can fry my chicken,” she said. Soul food cooking is her passion. Even after working full time at a childcare center, she would come home to cook and bake. Last year, Mujib felt it was finally time to open her own restaurant, where many of the recipes she prepares are those passed down from her mother. “Here, you will get a fresh, home-cooked meal that you do not have to cook, and it’s not too expensive,” said Mujib. “People want home-cooked meals, and nothing here is from the can.” In addition to cooking all of the restaurant’s continued on page 19

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS cont from page 17

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Licensed cosmetologist Shawnell Thomas, and her daughters Shaniya and Heaven, own and operate two full-service beauty salons in Cleveland Heights: Polish Me Pretty, at 2550 Noble Road, and Polish Me Pretty 2.0, at 3964 Mayfield Road. Serial entrepreneurs, over the years the Thomases have owned beauty shops, ice cream parlors, and a dollar store in Cleveland Heights. When Shawnell opened Polish Me Pretty in 2011, her aunt, Germaine Monroe, a beautician from Georgia, came to help run the business. “I am one of the few black-owned nail salons owned and operated in Cleveland,” she said. Heaven and Shaniya both graduated from cosmetology school. “It’s exciting and hard to run a successful business as a young entrepreneur,” said Shaniya, 19. “We are still building and learning, and always open to learning more,” added Heaven. “We are loyal to our clients and loyal to the city,” said Shawnell, who has been a licensed cosmetologist for 23 years. “We want people to leave our doors feeling and looking good. We are really genuine and passionate about our craft. We love what we do, and are good at it. We are a Black woman, family-run business.” Heaven also runs Hair Bullies LLC, a business that offers three-day hair-braiding training, and Shaniya makes and markets her own organic, homemade line of cosmetics, the Homemade Cosmetics, the homemade line of cosmetics.

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Donell Manning are the owners of the American dream as minorities.”

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This is a business that welcomes everyone,” she said. “We celebrate being a woman-owned business.” Manning agreed, adding, “We offer an affordable lifestyle and it’s an honest lifestyle. We are trying to achieve the American dream as minorities.”

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