Dave’s Markets acquires Zagara’s Marketplace

Bruce Hennes

Dave’s Markets has acquired Zagara’s Marketplace on Lee Road in Cleveland Heights.


Dave’s Market in the Cedar Fairmount Business District closed on Oct. 25.

Dave’s is a fifth-generation family-owned and operated business, with three generations of the Saltzman family currently active in Dave’s Markets. David Saltzman, a fifth-generation member of the family said, “We continue to believe in Cleveland Heights and we’re ready to deepen our investment in the city. We’re going to rebrand the new location as Dave’s Market and Eatery.”

“Moving our operation from Cedar Fairmount to the Zagara’s location on Lee Road will allow us to continue providing customers with the best possible service, selection and prices in a large location with amazing potential,” said Saltzman. “The Lee Road store was built to be a family-owned operation, and I’m happy to say it will stay that way.”

Zagara’s, one of the last independent grocers in Cuyahoga County, opened in the city of Cleveland, moving to Cleveland Heights in 1988.

John Zagara, owner and operator of Zagara’s Marketplace, offered thanks to his customers and employees for their support over the past three decades.

“There are very few large, single-location independent grocery stores left in the U.S. With limited buying power and the inability to scale up operations...”

continued on page 2

Walter Stinson was University Heights

Mike Cook

Walter J. Stinson, 94, who served the city of University Heights for more than four decades as its community coordinator and senior services manager, died on Oct. 7. He is survived by Sara, his wife of 47 years, son Paul, and two grandchildren.

“Walter Stinson was a good man, and a great man. He loved this community, and he served this community like no other,” said Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan. “He is an inspiration, and an example for us all.”

Stinson, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., moved to University Heights in 1973. Three years later, Mayor Irving Konigsberg hired him to become the city’s first community coordinator, where he promoted fair housing opportunities, welcomed new homeowners, encouraged neighborhood activities and planned senior citizen programs. Stinson handled the city’s communications and became known as “the voice of the city” as host of its cable television program, “University Heights Today.”

Stinson served in this capacity for more than 34 years, serving under Mayor Beryl Rothschild and Mayor Susan Infeld. He retired in 2010.

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FH rehabs 22 homes over three-plus years

Robert Brown

“I was looking for a move-in-ready house on a quiet tree-lined street located close to my medical school job in University Circle,” said first-time homeowner Thomas Rafford, who previously lived in Solon and Bainbridge. “This house checked all the boxes for me.”

Rafford’s house, on Elbon Road in Cleveland Heights’ Noble neighborhood, is one of 22 vacant and foreclosed homes rehabilitated so far through work led by FutureHeights, the city’s community development corporation (CDC). Each had fallen into disrepair, and some were facing possible demolition.

Until this year, FutureHeights sold each vacant house, prior to renovation, to a developer who then carried out the work and sold the renovated house to an owner-occupant. (One such renovation project was completed in May; just two doors down from Rafford’s home, in keeping with FutureHeights’ targeted approach to neighborhood investment and redevelopment.)

For Rafford’s home, FutureHeights itself acted as the developer, hiring and supervising the work of construction contractors.

“It’s another way for FutureHeights, and CDCs in general, to rehab houses and improve the community,” explained Micah Kirman, FutureHeights’ interim director. “We, as a CDC, are able to keep the sales...”

continued on page 8

Heights art students upcycle trash into treasure

Natalie Elwell

Visitors to the Heights Eco Fair on Oct. 8 had the opportunity to view more than 100 works of art created by 10th- and 12th-grade Heights High students, and vote for their favorite pieces.

With the exhibit, From Trash to Treasure, art teachers Sarah Cooper and Nancy Rich-Drehs saw an opportunity to channel their students’ creativity through an awareness of the environment.

“We had already done some upcycled artwork in previous years,” Cooper explained, “but a meeting with members of the Cleveland Heights Green Team helped give context to the work and inspired a movement that impacted the [school] building as a whole.”

“Instead of just utilizing found materials, we tasked students with developing systems for acquiring items we could use. Our artists made phone calls, sent e-mails, and created collection bins that we plan to continue using for future upcycled projects. With this approach we were able to...”

continued on page 9

Dave’s Market in the Cedar Fairmount Business District...www.heightsobserver.org

A Snowy Day...www.heightsobserver.org

The bead-in-show winning piece was inspired by A Snowy Day...www.heightsobserver.org

Dave’s Markets acquires Zagara’s Marketplace...www.heightsobserver.org

A public servant, a gentleman, a family man, and a legend, Walter Stinson was laid to rest on Oct. 14. Mike Cook
12 reasons to shop local for the holidays

Bob Rosbaum

At this time of year, we typically run a local holiday shopping guide. I’d like to say it’s a reader favorite, but the truth is we’re understimating feedback and are missing the boat on readers and businesses alike.

We hope to replace it next month with a guide to holiday events and programs that will take place in the community throughout December.

But our message about supporting neighborhood businesses is as relevant as ever: Please shop local for the holidays.

Here are 12 reasons why:

1. It’s personal. The people who run local independent businesses tend to be deeply embedded in the community. They’re friends and neighbors. So who manages the nearby big box stores? Have you ever met them? Where do they live, shop, send their kids to school, shop for and more deli offerings.”

2. Small businesses have invested everything specifically to serve the people who live nearby. Simply put, they care more about us.

3. In the trade-off between the services used and the tax revenue delivered, specialty retailers bring in more than they cost for communities like ours, according to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. Big boxes cost more than they bring in.

4. Local businesses carry unique, curated merchandise—often from other local businesses and artisans—for gifts you won’t find anywhere else.

5. A larger portion of the money spent at local shops gets recycled within the community, creating a multiplier effect. Most of the money spent at a big box gets sent back to headquarters.

6. Local businesses carry unique, curated merchandise—often from other local businesses and artisans—for gifts you won’t find anywhere else.

7. Small-business owners worry most about their customers. Corporate CEOs are chiefly concerned with investor returns, and will likely never set foot in the stores they operate here.

8. The Heights Observer is supported almost entirely through advertising from local businesses and organizations. Without them, this and other community assets couldn’t exist.

9. Small businesses don’t get tax abatements, open overseas hold companies to avoid taxes, or offshore labor to low-cost countries. They also pay proportionally more in taxes than large corporate stores.

10. Small businesses don’t hire corporate lobbyists or make dark-money donations to influence elections.

11. We are what we do. If you’re like living in a community with lively business districts, the most impactful thing you can do is keep them to spend money in them—during the holidays and also year round.

Cleveland Heights resident Bob Rosbaum is co-chair of the Heights Observer Advertising Committee, and is responsible for its advertising sales and market development.

CH mayor’s micromanaging impedes progress

Steve Roseway

While I do not present myself as an expert in city management, I do find it my civic duty to keep well informed on local issues.

Viewing the Committee of the Whole meetings of Cleveland Heights City Council on YouTube is an excellent method to educate oneself as regards the interactions between our current elected officials.

The meeting of Oct. 3 displayed the discord that obviously exists within council, as well as between council and the administration.

At the heart of this conflict is council’s direct access to information from administration department heads.

Article III, Section 6, of the Cleveland Heights City Charter states in part, “Except for the purpose of inquiry, the Council and its members shall have direct access to information we receive of and built at its Lee Road location. I’d like to see it my civic duty to keep well informed on local issues.

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Jury duty is both a right and a privilege

J.J. Costello

I suspect that most people’s first response when getting a jury summons in the mail is, how am I going to get out of this? If that is you, read on...

You were selected randomly from the voter rolls or a list of licensed drivers. Your employer cannot penalize you for being called to jury duty, and cannot require or request that you use vacation or sick leave for time spent while being called to jury duty.

You do not need to worry about not knowing anything about the law. It is the judge’s job to provide you with the law. Your role is to decide the disputed facts.

Nearly every resident at least 18 years of age can serve on a jury. Certain persons may be excused, such as members of cloistered religious orders, someone whose jury service would cause them or someone in their care extreme physical or financial hardship, or those older than 75 years of age. However, the court must approve your excuse if you fall within one of these categories.

Most are undoubtedly qualified to serve as a juror, but there may be something that could disqualify them in a particular case. Everyone has predetermined ideas about some matters, but the American jury system is based on the principle that those jurors who decide a particular case will decide it with an open mind. Everyone, including me, has feelings, assumptions, perceptions, fears, and stereotypes—that is, “implicit biases”—of which we may be unaware.

When instructing jurors, I ask that they resist relying on conclusions based on personal likes or dislikes, generalizations, gut feelings, prejudices, sympathies, stereotypes, or biases, and instead carefully evaluate the evidence presented.

When a group of prospective jurors is summoned for a trial here at Cleveland Heights Municipal Court, I recognize they have mixed emotions about being there. I can appreciate that. However, our Constitution contains several protections for defendants in criminal cases, and key among them is the right to a fair trial by a jury. By serving on a jury, you help preserve this right for your fellow citizens and ensure that our justice system works with integrity, fairness, and transparency. While it is no doubt a sacrifice to be there, it is a sacrifice that our democracy requires.

At our last scheduled jury trial, that is just what I told the jurors. Unfortunately, of the 65 jurors summoned, only 15 appeared. I was certainly disappointed in the turnout. If someone receives a jury summons and ignores it, I can issue a warrant for their arrest and punish them with contempt of court. I have high regard for the citizens of Cleveland Heights, and I hope and believe that the low turnout was an anomaly.

As we approach an election, we should all be reminded of the importance of both voting and jury service—two acts that are our duty and privilege as citizens.

For far too long, individuals were denied those acts, and people fought and continue to fight to ensure everyone has those rights. As you head to the polls, or if you receive a jury summons, remember how important it is. When you get that jury summons, instead of wondering how to get out of it, be honored and excited that you get to play an active role in our justice system.

J.J. Costello, a lifelong Cleveland Heights resident, is judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court.
A pro-Horseshoe Lake summary of the issues

Peter Zicari

Between formal public statements and social media, the debate over Horseshoe Lake has become a tangle of ideas and responses. The following is an attempt to organize them.

There is no apology here for being partisan [pro-lake]; those who want to remove the lake speak pretty well for themselves.

The neglected spillway of Horseshoe Lake was found in 2018 to have seriously deteriorated. The state ordered Shaker Heights to drain the lake in 2019. Shaker Heights turned to the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. The sewer district [replied with] a hard “no,” but offered to remove Horseshoe Lake forever. Everything after that is subject to dispute. The debate rages in the following areas:

The practical:

Anti-lake: The dam is unsafe. If it broke, the water would endanger people in University Circle. It would be more cost-effective to enlarge only the lower lake dam. The upper lake has outlived its usefulness.

Pro-lake rebuttal: Horseshoe Lake is not the cause of University Circle flooding—that neighborhood flooded in 2020, after the lake was drained. The lake is valuable as an asset in an urban park, like the art museum lagoon—and it supported the value of millions of dollars in real estate.

Pro-lake: The lake can be modified to improve its flood-control ability and lift some of the load from Lower Shaker Lake. Removing the lake because the dam is damaged is like removing a road because of potholes.

The environment:

Anti-lake: Doan Brook should be restored to its “natural” state.

Pro-lake rebuttal: People have been messing with the brook for more than 170 years, and the watershed has radically changed. The stream will never be the same. The diversity being promised comprises tiny minnows and bags under stones; Lake Erie fish aren’t going to migrate past University Circle and the Lower Lake dam. Critics don’t seem to have a problem with the other dams on Doan Brook.

Pro-lake: The lake harbored quite a bit of life. Water birds returned every year. The Audubon Society said the lake was part of a significant bird area. The lake filters out silt and has a cooling effect in summer.

Legal and equity issues:

Anti-lake: The state says the dam is out of compliance with strict safety regulations. The sewer district says it will not spend money to keep the lake.

Pro-lake rebuttal: The Friends of the Horseshoe Lake’s engineer says the dam can be made to comply with the regulations for less than what the sewer district plans to spend. The district is inconsistent; it’s helping restore a lake in Garfield Heights, and didn’t have a problem rebuilding the Green Lake dam. It must not be forgotten that the sewer district will not pay to develop park features. They will do what they want and blame it on cost control.

Pro-lake: Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights agreed to maintain the lakes when they signed a lease with Cleveland. They are still responsible.

Emotional, historic and aesthetic issues:

Anti-lake: Supporters tend to dismiss the lake’s beauty and historic value, and say the lakes are for the wealthy.

Pro-lake rebuttal: Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights are continuing the struggle. To help out, go to savehorselake.com.

Peter Zicari is a former newspaper writer and editor, a longtime resident of the Heights, and passionate supporter of Horseshoe Lake. While he supports the Friends of Horseshoe Lake, he does not speak for them here.
Democracy does not begin or end with Election Day

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

In our June 2020 column, we wrote that citizen participation in a democracy requires effort beyond merely voting. Now, we approach this theme from a different angle: local government’s responsibility to facilitate resident access and involvement. We consider a few practices—some recent, others longstanding—at our own Cleveland Heights City Hall.

For years, council members and the public complained about city manager Tanisha Briley’s habitual insistence that council pass legislation “declaring an emergency,” even when it did not address an urgent matter. Under Mayor Seren, this practice has continued, although the full text of the proposed legislation now includes the reason for emergency status.

In addition to projecting urgency where none may exist, laws passed as emergencies cannot be overturned by citizen initiative. Passing certain ordinances as emergencies specifically to protect them from future reivation may be justifiable—those concerned with contracts, for instance. If an agreement executed in good faith can later be broken by popular vote, few individuals or corporations would choose to sign contracts with municipalities.

When used frequently or indiscriminately, the “emergency” designation can be profoundly undemocratic. In 1912, our state constitution gave Ohioans the right of initiative and referendum as a corrective to the machine politics of the Gilded Age. One hundred ten years later, we do not want our local government to contravene the intent of our state constitution. We urge the mayor and city council to reverse this trend.

As we pointed out in June 2020, boards and commissions provide important opportunities for citizens to participate in local government and contribute to their communities. Sometime during Briley’s tenure, board members’ and commissioners’ names and contact information disappeared from the city website. To date they have not been restored. Membership on a city board or commission is a public role. Although not elected, these appointees are charged with representing residents and our interests. Not only should we know their identities and be able to contact them, they need our input.

Early in his term, Mayor Seren abruptly eliminated staff assignments to boards and commissions. This may have been necessary to prevent unreasonable workloads for city employees, especially given perennial understaffing. But if that is the case, it behooves the administration to come up with an alternative. Citizen oversight and advice are essential to local democracy. Appointees are volunteers and need professional support to function properly and effectively.

A recent incident exemplifies further constraints on both appointed bodies and city staff. When the city’s Commission on Aging planned a “listening forum” for seniors, they were stymied by staff’s refusal to schedule it without the mayor’s approval. This is not the first hint we have heard of a repressive atmosphere at City Hall. We hope the administration realizes that secrecy and fear are antithetical to the transparent, accountable city government CH residents voted for and deserve.

A final note: Will wonders never cease? For the first time ever, we agreed with and endorse the content of Alan Rapoport’s opinion, “CH council members have the right to inquire,” published in last month’s Heights Observer. He wrote, “The CH City Charter grants council members a right of inquiry. They cannot order city employees to take action, but they can approach any city employee privately to ask questions.

Rapoport did an excellent job of explaining council’s rights and the administration’s responsibilities under the current charter. If you missed his take on this issue, we hope you will give it a read.

Postscript: If you have not yet voted, please remember these three words: Ohio Supreme Court.

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

OPINION

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State school report card inadequate as quality measure

Susie Kaeser

In September, the Ohio Department of Education issued its annual report cards for each school in the state’s 610 districts. The reports are based on state-mandated tests taken last spring by students in grades 3-12. Calling these annual data dumps a report card is a stretch; that would suggest depth, thought about the complex components of quality education, and qualitative, as well as quantitative, information.

A summary of results for the Cleveland Heights–University Heights City School District is posted on the district’s website (www.chuh.org) under the headline “District makes strides in closing education gaps.” According to last year’s test data, several of our schools have done a great job reducing test performance differences among children by race, income and other categories. That’s something to be proud of when your goal is equity.

The summary includes this comment from Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby: “While the report card provides information about performance on state assessments, our strategic plan is our blueprint towards realizing our mission for our students. We monitor our progress towards our strategic plan goals through a robust performance management structure that guides the work of our teacher teams, building leadership teams and district departments.”

Test scores are not robust measures.

I’m impressed by Kirby’s response. She articulated that the report card summarizes state test performance—that’s all. She then went on to define what the school district aspires to, and the variety of metrics needed to evaluate whether it has achieved its vision.

This is a refreshing departure from the past when, out of fear of looking unconcerned, our leaders had to promise to do better. They inadvertently validated a system failing. These high-stakes consequences are inappropriate, but they prevail. They create fear among educators, trapping them in an endless quest for high scores.

Ohio spends millions each year on testing, only to confirm what researchers have proven over and over: Test results reflect the family income of the students who attend our schools, rather than the quality of education they receive.

People are hungry for good information about their kids and their schools, but this (report card) data doesn’t provide insight into authentic learning, effective teaching, character development, or the conditions that support engagement and success.

We want more for our kids than what the state has decided is important.

I’m grateful that Kirby did not fall for the false claims and limited vision offered by its report card. We shouldn’t either.

Standardized tests can provide useful data, but for them to be legitimate, we need to stop attaching high-stakes consequences to them.

Susie Kaeser moved to Cleveland Heights in 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. A community booster, she is the author of Rezoning Segregation, a book about local activism.

THE COMMON GOOD

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UH breaks ground on long-planned South Taylor townhomes

In an Oct. 14 ceremony, the city of University Heights and Knez Homes broke ground on the South Taylor Place townhomes.

When the project is completed, 30 new “luxury” townhomes will have been built, in clusters of three or four homes. Each will have a two-car garage, and some will feature rooftop decks with views of the Cleveland skyline.

“This progress has been a long time coming,” said University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan.

“It began in 2018, my first year in office as mayor. This administration began the process of creating this project, creating this situation, creating the structures through which this project was not only possible, but would one day happen. That day is here.”

South Taylor Place will be the first new housing development built in University Heights since the 1970s.

Brennan said the project would not have happened without the strong and persistent work of many.

The mayor gave credit to the city’s Economic Development Director Susan Drucker, former Housing and Community Development Director Patrick Grogan-Myers, City Engineer Joe Ciuni, City Law Director Luke McConville, past and present city building officials, housing officials, and past and present members of UH City Council.

The mayor also gave credit to the CH-UH school board—Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, Jim Posch, Jodi Sourini, and Beverly Wright—together with school Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

“This land was assembled and this project is happening because school officials and city officials came together and shared a common vision for what will be,” Brennan said.

Brennan also thanked developer Bo Knez and his team for “sharing in our vision of what will be.”

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement director for University Heights.
Private developers and rehabbers do not necessarily share the same motivation of affordability.”

During its first three years, FutureHeights’ housing rehabilitation program, FutureHomes, produced almost $2.7 million in increased property valuation, generating $107,000 in additional taxes for the city. The houses are all located in areas targeted by the city for re-investment activities.

For each house it acquires, FutureHeights develops a comprehensive scope of work and design standards. The CDC then oversees the work, ensuring it meets those standards. The renovated houses are then sold to owner-occupants.

“We may act as developer for one house per year; no more than that,” Kirman noted. “It’s another tool in our toolbox, expanding the ways in which we can rehab houses to improve the community and accomplish our goals. We’ll continue to sell homes to developers/rehabbers, so long as they agree to our standards and work scope.”

The average pre-rehab value of the 22 homes was approximately $8,000 each. Following the rehabilitation work, the average sale price was $177,000.

The first 22 houses rehabilitated through the FutureHomes program are located in Cleveland Heights’ “mid-city” target area, near the high school, in the Noble-Monticello-Caledonia target area; and in the Desota-Altamont target area.

“FutureHeights remains committed and eager to continue real estate work within our target areas, and we are especially motivated to help correct the problems caused by residential vacancies, out-of-town bulk buyers, mortgage and tax foreclosures, and nuisance properties,” said Kirman.

FutureHeights acquires most of the homes it rehabs from the city of Cleveland Heights’ land bank, with some purchased from the county’s land bank.

“We pay a nominal fee,” said Kirman, “[with the] understanding that we are motivated to complete quality renovations and secure a new owner-occupant for the community’s sake, rather than just earn a profit, like many house flippers tend to do. This is a partnership with our local government.”

Robert Brown is a city planner with 47 years of experience, including nine as Cleveland’s City Planning Director. A Cleveland Heights resident for more than 40 years, he serves on the board of FutureHeights.

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FutureHomes continued from page 1
Cleveland Heights City Council
Meeting highlights
5 SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

Present were Mayor Khalil Seren, Council President Melody Joy Hart, Council Vice President Craig Cobb, and council members Tony Gidea, Gail Larson, Anthony Mattox Jr., Josie Moore, and Davida Russell. Also present were Addie Baker, clerk of council, and William Hanna, law director.

Public comments
A resident expressed support for the proposed lead safety legislation receiving a third reading after the public comment.

A parent/youth hockey coach pleased for the community to resume making ice on both rinks during this five-month season. He supported his request with documentation for cost savings.

Three young people asked that the city intervene in the practice of some in the Orthodox Jewish community of killing live chickens as part of their preparation for the Day of Atonement.

Council actions
On first reading council:
• Made a routine 2022 budget adjustment to appropriations and expenditures.
• Approved funds for operating expenses, specifically to obtain software for the clerk of council.
• Amended the dates of the lease agreement with WMX CPV LLC for the Taylor-Todor buildings.
• Authorized the Ohio Department of Transportation to provide bridge and culvert inspection services within the city.

On second reading, council:
• Accepted property tax rates from the county commission.
• Approved a request to the county fiscal officer to advance taxes for 2022 to the city, and to enable receipt of the funds more often than the usual two payments to make budgeting easier for the city.
• Authorized the switch in recycling service provider to Waste Management of Ohio. Josie Moore noted that the new contractor will accept a broader list of items to recycle.

Lead safe legislation
Council heard a third reading of, but did not vote on, legislation to add a lead hazards provision to the certificate of occupancy for rental properties. During the committee of the whole meeting, council discussed the time needed before implementation, as the housing department is inadequately staffed. ARFA funds may be used, but these are limited. Real estate agents have questions about their accountability.

Committee of the whole
The Administrative Services Committee will draft charter review legislation, beginning at its meeting on Sept. 28.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy

Among the Heights High artists who showed work at the Eco Fair were (clockwise, from back row, left) Johanna Carlyle (best in show winner), Joseph Putnam, Riley Mann, Antonio Caucci, Isabella Villanueva (best 2-D art), Natalie Eis, Emma Neyerova.

“I love working with the female form,” said Carlyle, “and try to incorporate it into most of my art. Using recycled materials was an interesting experience because my main media is oven-bake clay. I enjoyed the challenge of working with something so unpredictable. I used a book that had been sitting in my mom’s attic for over a decade, so I’m really pleased that I was able to turn it into something special to me.”

West commented, “Using recycled stuff was really new for me. It was definitely out of my comfort zone; however, I’m glad that I still went through with it. If I were given a chance to do what I did again, I would. It’s something I’m willing to get better at.”

“It was impressive to see students think creatively and use available materials to make something meaningful,” said Cooper. “Even more importantly, they were able to quantify a small portion of the waste we produce as a school community and find ways we could use it to beautify shared spaces. It is empowering to feel your impact, as a single person’s efforts can sometimes feel futile. Working together on this project connected us to each other, our neighbors, and our environment. I am thankful for that.”

Natalie Eiswell is director of Gender Equity Practice at World Resources Institute in Washington, D.C., and is co-founder of the Cleveland Heights Green Team. She works remotely, and delivers her free time to advocate for environmental protection and activism.

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The Warner-Racca House

Ken Goldberg

The Warner-Racca house, one of Cleveland Heights’ most picturesque, is known for the projecting circular staircase that forms a major component of its façade.

Designed by architects Meade and Garfield, the East Overlook home was completed in 1898. It was designated a Cleveland Heights Landmark in 1996.

The architect may have modeled the distinctive stairway appendage after the 16th-century spiral staircase tower at the Chateau of Blois, in France; in any case, he was certainly inspired by the romantic chateaux along the Loire River.

Half-timbering and ornate chimneys add to the eclectic décor of the home. Its interior boasts artfully carved woodwork and leaded glass, including around the graceful staircase.

The home’s original owner, William Henry Warner, was president of seven coal mining companies, including the W.H. Warner Company; and was director of six manufacturing and real estate businesses—all in Cleveland.

Concrete contractor Peter Racca and his wife, Dolores, owned the home from 1955 to 1996, and raised five children there.

Ken Goldberg is a member of the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission, which preserves and protects buildings, works of art and other objects of historical or architectural value to the community. The commission’s seven members are appointed to three-year terms by CH City Council.


The distinctive staircase of the Chateau of Blois, located in Blois, France, may have inspired the Warner-Racca House.

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS LANDMARKS

Ken Goldberg

The Warner-Racca house, one of Cleveland Heights’ most picturesque, is known for the projecting circular staircase that forms a major component of its façade.

Designed by architects Meade and Garfield, the East Overlook home was completed in 1898. It was designated a Cleveland Heights Landmark in 1996.

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FutureHeights awards mini-grants to three Heights projects

Sarah Wolf

The FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grant program has awarded grant funding to three Heights groups in the fall 2022 round of funding—Oxford Community Garden, Roxboro Elementary School, and the Cleveland Heights Green Team.

Oxford Community Garden, established in 1934 as a Victory Garden, was awarded $1,000 for its Raised to Grow project, which will install raised garden beds to help conserve water and to make it easier for older gardeners to participate. The garden’s organizers also plan to plant shrubs, to try to prevent deer from infiltrating the garden space. Their hope is to continue to engage the whole community—everyone from the children in the neighborhood to the elderly—through these gardening enhancements.

Roxboro Elementary School was also awarded $1,000 toward funding its project—Pivot: Hydroponic Sowing and Growing in an Urban School Library—which will bring the capacity for year-round gardening to the students. The hydroponic gardening system, made by Fork Farms, will enable Roxboro students to try their hand at farming, and even take home the vegetables they grow. Roxboro Elementary School is still in the process of raising all of the funds necessary to purchase this system from Fork Farms.

The Cleveland Heights Green Team (CHGT) received $750 for its Sustainability Awareness and Activism project. These grant dollars will be used to support CHGT’s 2023 programming and educational materials. CHGT offers sustainability-awareness programming for all ages, citywide.

FutureHeights’ Mini-Grant program offers up to $1,000 in funding for Cleveland Heights- and University Heights-based projects undertaken by Heights community members.

In 2022, the FutureHeights Mini-Grant program awarded a total of $9,700 to 13 Cleveland Heights projects.

The twice-yearly application deadlines are March 15 and Sept. 15. To learn more, send an e-mail to swolf@futureheights.org, or visit www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-programs/minigrants.

Sarah Wolf is the community-building programs manager at FutureHeights.

UH band performs free concert Nov. 6

Edward Siess

The University Heights Symphonic Band (UHSB) will perform its annual fall concert on Sunday, Nov. 6, 3:30 p.m., at John Carroll University’s Dolan Science Atrium.

As always, admission to the concert and parking will be free. UHSB will perform concert-band classics from Holst, Reed and Sousa, as well as new music from Reineke and Mackey.

This concert will also mark the premier performance of a new piece, “Doylestown March,” by Jay Westfield, a member of UHSB. UHSB is in its 53rd season, and now under the direction of its fourth music director, Devlin Pope.

The atrium is in the university building that is closest to Fairmount Circle—the building directly behind where the band performs its outdoor summer concerts. Seating will be available in the lower and upper concourses.

Edward Siess is the University Heights Symphonic Band’s president and business manager.
Walter Stinson Community Park on Fenwick Road in University Heights.

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Board of Education Meeting highlights

SEPTEMBER 20, 2022 - work session

Board members present were Malia Lewis (president), Dan Heinze, James Fosch, Judy Savino, and Beverly Wright. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

Progress on strategic plan goals

The strategic plan goals were discussed in broad, long-term terms that reflect the district’s mission and vision. Staff members Felicia Gould, Leashorna Abdus-Salaam, Allison Byrd, Christine Baylor, Karen Liddell-Anderson, and Robert Svag gravid explained in detail the action steps the district is taking to achieve goal one: “Every student graduates ready to succeed in college and career” and goal two: “Excellent education is provided to each student in every District school and classroom through multiple pathways.” The board and district administration (say they are) very cognizant of and focused on data that will track achievement of these goals.

GEAR UP update

The board approved a proclamation in support of National GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program) week. The district has received two federal GEAR UP grants, and a district student was named federal GEAR UP student of the year. GEAR UP grants provide low-income, minority, and underserved students with support and resources they need to go to college, despite the challenges they may face.

LWV Observer: Robin Kasien.

OCTOBER 11, 2022 - regular meeting

Judy Savino was not present. All other board members were present, as were the superintendent and treasurer.

Public comments

Cleveland Heights resident and former school board member Eric Silverman asked for clarification regarding the pending lawsuit the district would receive from the Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook development project, and other projects initiated by the city of Cleveland Heights.

Recognition and awards

Superintendent Kirby announced that 1,329 students (had) perfect attendance during the first month of the 2022-23 school year. She will continue to recognize students with perfect attendance at board meetings every month.

The IT department has a new coordinator. The department is continuing the newest board upgrades, spending the Curriculum and Instruction department in piloting new ELA (English Language Arts) applications, and working to coordinate with the new MetroHealth clinic at the school.

A teacher or staff member from each of the schools was recognized for outstanding commitment and awarded a Tiger Team celebration plaque.

Sims has been offered 15 full scholarships to college. Heintz recognized and celebrated the achievements of the various sports teams and other school districts.

Ohio House Bill 290, the “Backpack Bill,” so that he could explain the impacts of the bill on Heights schools and on public education. (Addison, appointed last spring to complete James Boyd’s term, represents Cleveland Heights, University Heights, Shaker Heights, and parts of Cleveland.)

As part of his (ongoing) “three things,” James Fosch requested a presentation on how tax collections differ between residential and commercial properties. Also, he said he would like to hear more about state laws on TIFs (Tax Increment Financing) and what the city can do without school district approval. He said he felt that many citizens are unaware of this information.

State board resolution

Malia Lewis read a prepared response opposing the state board of education’s (BOE) resolution, “A Resolution to Support Parents, Schools and Districts in Rejecting Harmful, Coercive and Gender Identity Policies,” written by state BOE member Brendan Shaw. The resolution, scheduled for a vote on Oct. 12, has been returned to committee. Shaw’s resolution has been opposed by several other state BOE members and by several Ohio school boards. The board responded favorably to Lewis’s response, but James Fosch proposed a few amendments, which the board approved.

Lewis agreed to rewrite and update her statement. (Shaw was elected in November 2020 to represent state BOE District 5.)

LWV Observer: Roseanna Fairman.

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed at www.chh.org/BoardFormation.aspx. Board meetings are livestreamed at www.youtube.com/CHHSchools, and recorded for later viewing.

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Nicole Levine is Mike Pellechia’s daughter, and an avid tennis lover. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Ohio University’s E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, and currently resides in Columbus.

Each year, the Beaumont School and Cleveland Heights High School varsity girls’ tennis teams compete to bring home the “golden racquet.”

The tenth annual matchup took place at Cain Park on Oct. 4, with the Beaumont Blue Streaks beating out the Cleveland Heights Tigers 4-1.

The trophy, a tennis racquet painted gold, will reside in the Beaumont trophy case until the teams meet next year.

Beaumont head coach Mike Pellechia was feeling uneasy the entire match, even after Beaumont took a 2-0 early lead, thanks to Maggie Brady taking first singles, and Lilly Dixon winning a hard-fought match at second singles.

“We had the early lead last year, and Heights came back and took the match,” said Pellechia.

Beaumont secured the victory when the second doubles team of Sarah Wolf and Payge Dague defeated Jose Naypaver and Leslie Villeda, followed by a third singles win from Haley Scott.

The Heights first doubles team of Libby Warren and Leela Manne edged out Beaumont in two sets, 7-6, 7-6, to score the lone point for Heights High.

“It’s always exciting to bring the golden racquet home for the year,” said Pellechia. “I am proud of how the girls played, and can’t wait for next year’s match.”

Nicole Levine is Mike Pellechia’s daughter, and an avid tennis lover. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Ohio University’s E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, and currently resides in Columbus.
Library chooses CMAR for Noble branch renovation

Sheryl Banks

After a competitive RFP (request for proposal) process, Heights Libraries has hired the Independence Construction-DeGeronimo Companies as the construction manager at risk (CMAR) for the Noble Neighborhood branch renovation project. The decision was announced at the library’s Oct. 17 board of trustees meeting.

The Independence-based company has extensive experience with both for-profit and nonprofit projects. They include Pinecrest in Orange Village, the Greater Cleveland Food Bank’s new distribution center in Cleveland, and several libraries—most recently the new Bay Village Library.

“All the applicants had great portfolios and experience, so it wasn’t an easy decision,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “But DeGeronimo had a combination of supply-chain solutions, budget-reducing strategies, and a focus on community needs, which made them the right choice.”

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board Meeting highlights

SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

Board member present were President Gaba Crenshaw, Patt Carlyle, Dana Fuehler, Annette Iwamoto, Tyler McTigue, and Vikas Turakhia. Vice President Max Gerboc was not present.

Public comments

Bowmaster Design Architects gave a presentation to the board about updated plans for the Noble Neighborhood Library renovation and addition. Floor plans, interior planning, exterior design, and landscaping were discussed.

The Hodge Group gave a presentation via Zoom, updating the board on progress made to date in setting up a donor base, preparing documents for donor meetings, and training volunteers for donor meetings.

There was a comment relating to the tenants of the Coventry Peace Campus (CPC).

Board resolutions

The board approved a construction manager at risk for the renovations and additions to the Noble Neighborhood Library.

The board approved a second phase of work with the Hodge Group to facilitate donor visits, help prepare grant applications, and coordinate fundraising teams and campaign management.

The board authorized the construction of a new door for the food pantry and delivery area. This will replace the book lockers on the south side of the Lee Road branch, which were little used.

The board approved repairs needed due to flooding in the University Heights branch. Expenditures will be reported to the insurance company and the board.

Director’s report

Library Director Nancy Levin updated the board on the current relationship with CPC. Lease agreements have not been sent to all tenants. So far, no tenants have indicated they intend to move out of the Washington Boulevard building. There still remain a number of unresolved issues between the library and CPC, mainly around outstanding bills and repairs. Broken glass in a window needs repair, and lights in the gym need needed.

Levin reiterated the policy regarding services that do not discriminate against people in poverty, who have chosen to be unhoused, or who have challenges in their lives forcing them to be unhoused. There is no rule against sleeping in the library as long as the person remains upright in a chair and doesn’t cause a disturbance. In the past month, the library received a number of complaints from customers challenging the rules. Libraries are bound by U.S. law to provide services to people experiencing homelessness. A further refinement of policies will be discussed at an October committee meeting.

Public service report highlights

Summer reading programs participants numbered 1,669 adults. Youth services summer reading programs had a total of 1,475 registrations.

Circulation continued to increase over the summer, nearing pre-pandemic levels.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy

Information about the board, board meetings, and audio recordings of board meetings can be found at https://heightslibrary.org/locations/heights-libraries-board/
Lee Road Library security guard de-escalates toy gun incident

Sheryl Banks

On the afternoon of Oct. 6, at Heights Libraries’ Lee Road branch, a young teen “under eviction” from the library tried to enter the building with what appeared to be a handgun protruding from the waistband of his pants. It was later determined to be a toy “splatter gun.”

The security guard in the lobby was alerted to the teen’s presence by several children as they entered the building. He took swift action to secure the safety of customers in the building by immediately calling 911, then calmly confronting the teen and preventing him from entering the building.

Cleveland Heights police arrived quickly and took the teen into custody. According to police, the weapon was not a handgun, but a realistic-looking toy gun—an Orbeez, or water pellet gun.

Heights Libraries is grateful for the swift action of the guard and the Cleveland Heights police, who prevented the situation from escalating.

“Incidents like this are thankfully extremely rare,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “But with the rise of gun violence, we understand that we need to be ready for anything, and must take threats seriously. That’s why we have our own security staff who are skilled at handling and de-escalating a wide variety of potential crisis situations, including those involving young customers.”

Levin continued, “It’s also why we engage in staff safety trainings on a regular basis, such as active-shooter trainings and first aid and CPR. We care deeply about the safety of our community and our staff.”

The security guard [whose name has been removed from this article at the library’s request] is known in the library system for his warmth and approachability, and already had a relationship with the children who alerted him to the potential danger.

“I’m just glad that everyone is safe, including the young teen with the toy gun,” commented the guard.

The teen had previously caused property damage at the Lee Road branch.

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

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MetroHealth’s new hospital opens at Severance

Angela Townsend

A dedication ceremony to mark the opening of the MetroHealth Cleveland Heights Behavioral Health Hospital was held on Oct. 4.

The new three-story, 100,000-square-foot hospital at 10 Severance Circle is believed to be the largest investment in behavioral health in Northeast Ohio in at least 30 years. The 112-bed hospital facility is designed for short-term stays for adolescents, adults and seniors with mood disorders, addiction, and other behavioral health needs.

“We’re setting a new standard in relation to care in Northeast Ohio,” said Julia Bruner, M.D., MetroHealth’s senior vice president for Behavioral Health and Correctional Medicine.

“We want to do the best for our patients and our families and the community.” The new hospital, she said, is “designed to be a place of calm, of welcoming and of light.”

The hospital, on the campus of the MetroHealth Cleveland Heights Medical Center, will add 245 jobs and generate an estimated $350,000 in additional tax revenue for Cleveland Heights.

The behavioral health expansion will help reduce Cuyahoga County’s critical shortage of care and treatment capacity.

In 2019, nearly half of the residents who required behavioral health inpatient care received it outside of Cuyahoga County.

In addition to behavioral health, MetroHealth will continue to offer inpatient services, specialty care, emergency services, pharmacy services and other care in Cleveland Heights.

Angela Townsend is a senior writer in the department of marketing and communications at The MetroHealth System.
Peter has always been passionate about living, working, and volunteering in University Circle.

From his lifelong work as an astronomer to his recent work in pottery and everything in between, Peter is always searching for new things to explore.

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Raymond DeForest was inducted into the Cleveland Blues Society Hall of Fame on Oct. 30. The long-time Cleveland Heights resident has been playing music professionally for 50 years.

The Cleveland Blues Society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving blues music in this region. It sponsors jam sessions, and holds an annual Blues Cruise on the Goodtime III as a benefit to raise funds, with which it provides scholarships to high school students who are interested in blues performance or related fields.

I had a ‘60s-style folk music group, Long Road, for about 10 years, from 2007 till 2017. Ray was our bass player. He was the rock-solid foundation of the group. We didn’t have a percussionist, and if any of us ever lost the beat—which happens sometimes to every musician—we’d just listen to Ray playing and pick it right back up.

He always played the right notes. It was never fancy; it was just right for what we were playing. We all sang in that group, though Ray probably a little less than the rest of us. And often, when he would sing something for the first time during a show, a few people would laugh a little; not because Ray is a bad singer—he’s a good singer—but because he’s a bass singer. And you don’t hear many bass singers in anything other than classical music. Plus, some people found it funny that the guy who played bass could also sing bass.

Ray was the only Black person among the six members of Long Road. I sometimes made references to that in my between-song humor. I could hear Ray laughing from across the stage. I always listened for his laugh during my bits in our shows—to know if I was on the right track.

The thing I found most remarkable was this: Over the course of that decade, every few months I would meet some other local musician, we’d talk about our experiences and, at some point, he or she would say, “The guy who plays bass in my band, Ray DeForest . . .” What? How many bands is this guy in?

I asked him, not long ago. He said that because of the pandemic, which put almost every musician’s career on hold, he’s down to only three at the moment: Blue Lunch (swing), the Spider Stompers (roots and Americana), and Bent String (eclectic). Among his many bands and accompanist gigs, he has also played with nationally known jazz artists, including Clark Terry. Ray also teaches bass.

So, he plays all kinds of music. He has played, professionally, in bands performing blues, jazz, R&B, rock, folk, roots, bluegrass, swing, and probably other genres I can’t think of.

When I asked him how someone gets interested in playing every kind of music, he turned it around, saying, “I never understood how people could restrict themselves to playing just one kind of music. If I like it and have the opportunity to play it, why not do it? I enjoy it all.”

Not everyone is as open-minded about it. “When I was growing up,” he added, “I kind of had to keep my interest in anything other than R&B and soul music to myself, rather than have...”
The next phase of the Noble branch renovation will be the creation of an accurate budget and preparing to go out to bid for the actual construction. The planned addition to the library building will be approximately 9,000 square feet, almost doubling its current size. Heights Libraries plans to break ground on the project in spring 2023.

Because the branch will have to close during the construction phase, the library will rent a small satellite space on the first floor of the BNH Building, located near the corner of Mayfield and Noble roads. It will be open limited hours, and will contain public computers, holds shelves, circulation and reference services, and a small collection of books to check out.

The project’s architectural design firm, Botwick Design, held its third community meeting at the Noble branch on Oct. 4, to share up-to-date design plans with the community, including interior and exteriors of the new addition. Thirty-six community members and neighbors attended the event and offered feedback on the most recent renovation designs.

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