Severance’s owner has history of violations

W. Dennis Keating

Much of Severance Town Center (STC) is owned by Namdar Realty (namdarrealtygroup.com) and is managed by its partner, Mason Asset Management. Namdar bought STC at auction for $70.4 million in 2016.

Namdar, based in Great Neck, N.Y., is family-owned. Founded in 1999, it owns several hundred shopping malls across the United States. Igal Namdar heads Namdar Realty, and Elliot Nassim, the cousin of Namdar’s wife, heads Mason Asset Management.

Namdar Realty is known for buying “B” and “C” level malls that are “distressed” and “struggling.” Many lost their anchor stores as national chains (e.g., Sears, J.C. Penney, Macy’s) reduced their number of locations or went out of business.

Namdar’s business model is to buy malls at bargain prices, often as a result of court-ordered auctions following foreclosure, and then spend as little as possible on their maintenance. A June 26, 2018, Reuters profile of Namdar Realty and Mason Asset (“Who is Making Money from Struggling U.S. Malls?”) described their strategy as: “invest, maintain them. Namdar’s business model is to buy malls at bargain prices, often as a result of court-ordered auctions following foreclosure, and then spend as little as possible on their maintenance. A June 26, 2018, Reuters profile of Namdar Realty and Mason Asset (“Who is Making Money from Struggling U.S. Malls?”) described their strategy as: “invest, maintain them.

Beginning Feb. 1, Heights residents can show their appreciation for locally owned, independent businesses by voting for their favorites in the FutureHeights 2023 Best of the Heights awards.

Since 2009, FutureHeights has conducted the Best of the Heights awards as a way to recognize the unique attributes of Heights businesses, and their contributions to the local economy.

“FutureHeights is always proud to support and celebrate our local merchants with the ‘Best of the Heights’ awards,” said Micah Kirman, FutureHeights’ interim executive director. “Our quality independent businesses add so much to the health and vitality of our community, and the incredible merchants, who operate them so well, deserve to be recognized.”

Each year, Heights residents are invited to cast their votes for their favorite businesses by nominating them for awards in a variety of categories.

Library welcomes new board member Soto-Schwartz

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest board member, Melissa M. Soto-Schwartz. Her term began in January.

Soto-Schwartz, a professor of history and women’s and gender studies at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), has lived in Cleveland Heights for 27 years.

Her seven-year term on the library board will end in 2029.

Soto-Schwartz replaces outgoing board president Gabe Crenshaw, whose service ended in December 2022.

“Melissa brings years of knowledge and experience to our board, including time serving as the faculty chair of Tri-C’s Racial Justice Initiative Advisory Committee,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “She also is a passionate fan of public libraries, and a champion of free access to information.”

“I am both honored and humbled to be appointed to the board of trustees,” said Soto-Schwartz. “I’m thrilled to serve my community and the incredible merchants, who operate them so well, deserve to be recognized.”

Each year, Heights residents are invited to cast their votes for their favorite businesses by nominating them for awards in a variety of categories.

CH artist unspools time and motion

Kim Sergio Inglis

In announcing a new exhibition of work by artist Greg Donley, Foothill Galleries owner Michael Weil wrote, “We get the sense [Greg] often is looking down and up and side to side, smiling, looking closely, historically, conscientiously, joyfully, photographically. That is the genesis of his ‘still films,’ as he calls them.”

Still Moving, G.M. Donley’s third exhibition at Foothill Galleries, will run through the month of February, and into at least mid-March. (A closing date has not been set.)

Foothill Galleries is located at 2450 Fairmount Blvd., Suite M291.

Donley, a Cleveland Heights native, is a graduate of Tri-C’s Visual and Performing Arts Program and has studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Donley’s show will display his work, both monochromatic and full color, as a series of time-based images that capture fleeting moments of life. The show is open to the public and will close in mid-March.

Inglis is a volunteer and board member of the Heights Art Society, Inc., and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Cleveland Institute of Art. She is a featured artist in the Society’s annual exhibition, “Expressions 2023: The Best of the Heights.”

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Why the Observer isn’t a traditional newspaper

Bob Rosenbaum

The Heights Observer’s strength—and its greatest weakness—is the way we come by the information that fills its pages. Every word is an unpaid contribution, uploaded directly to our publishing system by people from the CH-UH area we serve.

It’s a strength because it results in a publication people recognize as authentically reflecting the community. It’s a weakness because we can’t operate the way a traditional newspaper would—as signing reporters to cover important issues and events. There are a lot of goings-on people need or want to know about that we never publish, simply because nobody stepped up to gather the information and write an article. And unless someone comes forward with a seven-figure endowment, it’s unlikely to change.

During the 2008 recession, if we had tried to launch the Heights Observer on the traditional newspapering model, we wouldn’t have found the money to get it off the ground, and it couldn’t have sustained the loss in revenue during the pandemic. We’re glad to have a financially viable operating model, and our focus is on working within the constraints it imposes.

We regularly get calls or e-mails from people who want to direct us to stories that deserve coverage. Our answer is consistent: If there’s something you believe should be in the paper, please put it together and submit it to our member center at heightsobserver.org.

We know the idea of gathering facts and organizing them into an article is daunting for a lot of people. It can seem scary if you don’t do it regularly. But it’s not rocket science either, and my experience is that, with a little direction, most people are able to pull together an informative article.

When back when the paper was new, we offered a series of workshops on how to report and write for the Heights Observer. We ran them until the attendance dropped off, at which point we figured we had reached the people who were interested. But a decade has passed, and maybe it’s time to pick up the trainings again. At this point, never mind the people who followed through, for them online. If you’d like to attend, please let me know by e-mail (brosenbaum@heightsobserver.org).

Please don’t lose sight of the important fact that the Heights Observer exists to serve the community, and it’s only as good as the articles the community provides.

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

Transportation committee supports lower CH speed limits

To the Editor:

As members of the Cleveland Heights Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), we support the reduction of speed limits on residential portions of certain streets as recommended by Mayor Seren, recommended by city council’s Public Safety and Health Committee (chairs by Council Member Larson), and passed by council.

This action by the mayor and council is consistent with the city’s Complete and Green Streets Policy, approved by council in 2018, and Council Resolution 96-21, adopting and supporting the ideals, principles, and concepts of Vision Zero for the city.

The city’s lowering of speed limits is also consistent with policy of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). It defines Complete Streets as “streets that are safe, and feel safe, for all users” (emphasis added), and makes Complete Streets the default approach for funding and implementing street improvements.

Our city, with its acclaimed Complete and Green Streets Policy, may be well positioned to receive financial and other assistance in designing and constructing Complete Streets infrastructure improvements.

The city has been criticized in social media and elsewhere for not relying on a traffic engineering study setting speed limits. However, traffic studies rely on drivers’ assessments of safe speed and do not consider the safety assessments of vulnerable users of streets, such as pedestrians (including children, the elderly and disabled, users of [public] transit) and bicyclists.

In 2018, the city’s law department concluded that Ohio law authorized the city to declare residential streets not to be through highways, and to [reduce] the applicable speed limit from 35 to 25 mph. Shortly thereafter, a group of Euclid Heights Boulevard-area residents expressed concerns to TAC that, at 35 mph, it was not safe for them or their children to walk or ride bicycles to school or other nearby destinations.

TAC then requested that council declare the residential portions of Euclid Heights Boulevard not to be a through street. At that time, the city was operating under a city manager/council form of government. TAC received no response from the city manager nor council.

We are encouraged by our new elected mayor/council form of government taking meaningful action in furthering of pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Cindie Carroll-Pankhurst
Howard Maier
Charlie Mosbrook
Kathy Petrey
Catalina Wagers
Cleveland Heights is ‘dementia friendly’

Tracey Lind

Six years ago, at the age of 62, I was diagnosed with early onset dementia. On that fateful afternoon, my wife, Emily, and I began a journey into the wilderness of dementia, disability and discernment. We had to accept the reality of my diagnosis. I had to retire early as dean of Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland; Emily had to put our financial and legal affairs in order; and, together, we had to figure out how we were going to live with dementia.

One of the decisions we made was to return to Cleveland Heights. We gave up our newly built dream home in Detroit Shoreway for a 100-year-old house on Scarborough Road. Why? We wanted to be close to family and friends in a neighborhood where I had long-term, embedded memory. We wanted a quiet, safe, walkable community with parks and trees. We wanted local restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, shops, movie theaters, and fitness facilities. We wanted to be within walking distance of a great public library. And, most importantly, we wanted to live in a diverse community with shared values and vision.

Over the past six years, as I’ve been making a new life as a retiree in Cleveland Heights, I’ve found that I’m not alone. I’ve met many others who are struggling, yet thriving, with various forms of cognitive impairment due to brain injury, disease or aging.

I’ve learned that dementia is the world’s seventh leading cause of death, the foremost reason for disability and financial insecurity among the elderly, and a growing public health crisis. One in three persons over the age of 85, and one in 10 over 65, will have some form of dementia. Based on these statistics, some 200 residents of Cleveland Heights and their families are likely living with dementia.

I’ve learned firsthand that while dementia doesn’t discriminate, access to quality care does, sometimes causing financial ruin for those affected by it. I worry that, as baby boomers age, and dementia begins to accelerate at a more rapid pace, this condition could bankrupt Medicare and Medicaid. In this political climate, I’m fearful that we’ll start warehousing those who don’t have family support systems, can’t take care of themselves, and can’t afford assisted living.

There is hope. Anticipating the growth in dementia, cities around the globe are becoming dementia-friendly communities. They are deliberately cultivating a climate where people living with dementia and their families can thrive and remain engaged in the community.

According to the organization Dementia Friendly America (DFA), in dementia-friendly communities, banks, businesses, restaurants and even Uber or Lyft drivers learn how to accommodate customers who have cognitive impairment. First responders learn to recognize the signs of dementia, and act accordingly; health care systems promote early detection, diagnosis and effective interventions; and faith communities intentionally welcome and make accommodations for those living with dementia.

In dementia-friendly communities, local governments design and build housing, transportation, and public spaces that enable people with dementia and their care partners to live independently; residents learn how to interact sensitively and create networks of support; and residential care providers and community agencies offer services to maximize independence and encourage ongoing community involvement.

Last year, DFA designated Cleveland Heights a dementia-friendly community. To celebrate this milestone and continue the journey, the Lee Road branch of Heights Libraries will host Dementia-Friendly Cleveland Heights Week, May 15–20. It will offer programs for individuals living with dementia, care partners and families affected by dementia, community professionals, and concerned neighbors.

I encourage everyone to participate in this year’s Dementia-Friendly Week, and help to make Cleveland Heights a year-round dementia-friendly community where people living with dementia, and their families, can find a home with visible and easily accessible support.

Tracey Lind, a Cleveland Heights resident, is the retired dean of Trinity Cathedral, an Episcopal priest, city planner, writer, and photographer.
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I’m sad to say goodbye to Josie Moore

Alan Rapoport

Those serving in public office sacrifice a lot. Many qualified people decline to seek election for that reason. Others decide after their election that the sacrifice is too great. One of those others is Josie Moore, who recently resigned from Cleveland Heights City Council.

Moore had ideas about how CH City Hall should operate under a new system. She thought the mayor and council members need to be “willing to reach out, discuss ideas and concerns, and be responsive to each other in a spirit of collaboration and problem-solving.” She called for leadership that sees civil disagreement as “an opportunity to find pathways for improvement.” She considered “open, ongoing, and respectful communication as the key to an effective working relationship that enables the achievement of our city’s goals.”

Politics can be a nasty business. Moore was perhaps too optimistic. Given the cast of characters, she perhaps was even a little naïve.

I disagreed with Moore’s more “progressive” goals. But watching her perform, I admired her energy, intelligence, and organizational skills. Moore did occasional virtue signaling. But she did much more. As chair of the Municipal Services Committee, Moore tackled mundane but important subjects, like street lighting and snow removal. She set agendas, managed meetings, and worked hard with others to achieve results. Moore was productive. Our city council needs members like her.

Over time, things went wrong for Moore. As she stated in her own words, she felt she was “in the dark, the ground was continually shifting under my feet, the goalsposts kept moving, while my intentions and actions were repeatedly and unkindly mischaracterized.” Moore says she quit to protect her “mental health” and “physical well-being.” Hopefully she will find other ways to stay involved with our community.

Council members and the mayor should accept that Moore resigned because of an unnecessarily hostile environment they helped foster. Moving forward they should remedy that situation.

I am sad that Moore is leaving. And many experienced city employees left this past year for other opportunities. This is a bad sign. Making government service attractive to people with talent must be a prime objective. But it is not enough merely to attract and hire such people. It also is important to help them want to stay.

Alan Rapoport, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, served on CH City Council (1982–87) and as council president/mayor (1982–85).

Moore’s supporters deserve similar representation

Catalina Wagers

Years before climate change, environmental justice, and Vision Zero became mainstream concepts, Mary Dunbar, former Cleveland Heights council member, recognized that the environment and the health of the community are inextricably interconnected. She became an advocate for a greener and healthier Cleveland Heights.

After Ms. Dunbar’s untimely resignation from council, Josie Moore stepped in to fill the vacant seat with a passion and clarity that was refreshing. She brought fresh energy and a platform befitting a city that perceives itself as progressive and welcoming. She offered a vision for a holistic and collaborative approach to decision-making that considered the potential impact of policies and projects on the economy, housing, social equity, and the environment. She recognized the severe and immediate threat that climate change poses to human society and the natural world, and she presented sound and actionable steps to not only mitigate the impact of a warming climate but build a resilient, thriving, and equitable community.

She was a steadfast champion of the issues that mattered to the constituents who voted for her. As council members sift through 2x-plus applications for the vacant seat, it is important that they keep in mind that Ms. Moore’s constituency deserves to be represented by a council member who is willing and able to approach decision-making and policy-making with an understanding that economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental health are interconnected and mutually dependent. [We need] a strong advocate for a more sustainable Cleveland Heights, willing to lead with urgency and determination; a person who understands that failure to act will only exacerbate the existing problems and make them more difficult and more expensive to address in the future.

Catalina Wagers is an eight-year resident of Cleveland Heights, served on CH City Council (2013–19) and as council president/mayor (2018–19).

Heights Observer February 1, 2023

Sunday Worship
7:45 a.m. • Holy Eucharist
9 a.m. • Holy Eucharist
11:15 a.m. • Holy Eucharist (live streamed)

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Funds support COVID recovery in schools

Inadequate school funding is an old and tragic story in Ohio. Those who defend this reality like to say money doesn’t matter, but the federal government has a different view. In 2021 Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and granted $130 billion in Elementary Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to states and school districts to help students “recover, succeed and thrive.” Ohio received $4.475 billion to award to local school districts. The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District received $17.1 million to spend by September 2024. That’s equivalent to about $1,400 a year per student, for three years. The funds are a one-time resource specifically dedicated to recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic on students and school operations. This infusion of federal funds provides needed relief from years of funding shortfalls that constrain plans and options for helping students.

It’s hard to comprehend what $170 billion looks like, but how those funds are spent is what matters. Federal guidelines allow expenditures in three areas: making it possible for schools to safely remain open for in-person learning, helping students grow academically, and supporting students’ mental health needs. These broad goals give districts lots of room to fashion strategies to promote recovery. While recovering from the pandemic is a long-term proposition, three years of funding gives school districts a fighting chance to right the ship.

Each school district develops its own plan. The CH-UH district website lists the components of its recovery plan: increase student learning, address needs of the whole child, ensure COVID-19 health and safety, and engage with families. These are in keeping with federal guidelines and the basics of healthy school districts.

I’m impressed that ARPA recognizes the importance of mental health, which education fundamentalists don’t consider to be in the purview of daily life in schools. But isolation, fear and loss—three core features of life during the pandemic—have taken a toll on all of us and cannot be ignored.

Federal funding has not produced a lot of shiny new solutions. Rather, more resources have made it possible to hire more people who can implement tried-and-true activities, including more time for learning and more personal attention.

One example is in-school tutoring. Our school district has employed a cadre of three to five professionals in each of our seven elementary schools—mostly retired and former classroom teachers—who each spends up to 20 hours a week working with kids who need to catch up. They target students who are not already receiving extra services, and, to minimize the loss of time with the classroom teacher, tutors are “pushed into” the classroom to work alongside classroom teachers. They also pull kids out for one-on-one or small-group work during times set aside for that.

Robin Koslen, a retired special-education teacher, has put her well-honed skills to work at Noble Elementary School. One of the first tutors employed by the district, she started at Noble last spring. Koslen spends most of her time with third-graders—students who lost the formative years for reading. “I feel useful,” said Koslen, who sees progress and feels like she is supporting dedicated and caring teachers. “I’ve learned so much from these phenomenal teachers.”

When the Ohio legislature passed the last state budget, they relied on the federal funds to make up for the shortfall in funding for the Fair School Funding Plan. As school districts demonstrate what is possible with this improved level of funding, I hope lawmakers will see that money does matter. When the next budget is approved this June, they need to fill the funding gap that the end of ESSER funds will create.

Susie Kasser moved to Cleveland Heights in 1979. She is the former director of Reading 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 a book about local activism, Resisting Segregation.

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Seeking substance inside Cleveland Heights City Hall

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

On Jan. 3, we witnessed a Cleveland Heights City Council meeting that lasted an hour and seven minutes, but felt interminable.

Mayor Kahil Seren made two brief announcements, but inexplicably did not mention the Dec. 23-24 life-threatening storm Elliott and attendant heavy snowfall, which had choked some residential streets in the city for days. Nor did he utter a word about when the Community Center, closed due to flooding caused by Elliott’s sub-zero temperatures, might reopen.

Public comments ranged from polite complaints about unplowed streets to abusively long harangues by speakers who rudely ignored reminders that they exceeded their three-minute time limit.

During council’s comment period, some members monopolized the floor to deliver state-of-the-city addresses, grandstand about their own accomplishments, or malign their cohorts. (Council members Craig Cobb and Gail Larson maintained their customary self-discipline.)

After not gaveling to silence long-winded residents, nor certain pontificating members of her own council who far exceeded their time, Council President Melody Hart lost her temper, scolded her council, and abruptly adjourned the proceedings.

As Hart said, it was embarrassing. Certainly, it was an inauspicious beginning to 2023.

Seeking to understand recent lapses in city services and basic communications, we e-mailed a series of questions to City Administrator Joseph Sinnott, cc’ing the mayor. Some of Sinnott’s answers proved insufficient, requiring us to follow up. We appreciate his prompt responses to both queries; however, many replies were disappointingly evasive or inadequate, leaving us scarcely better informed than before. (Because we lack the space to summarize our inquiries, we invite any interested readers to e-mail us at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com and we will provide the full text.)

Council’s second 2023 meeting, held Jan. 17, lasted only 55 minutes and felt rushed.

Nevertheless, Seren seemed relaxed and was almost laconic. To our surprise, he reported, “In the last snowfall [Jan. 14], . . . we received no complaints in the mayor’s office for snow-cleaning and salting.” This, after barely three inches of snow; whereas he has yet to address the administration’s woeful communications and snow removal during storm Elliott three weeks earlier.

No one on city council appeared relaxed, least of all President Hart. She rushed through an agenda that stated three times, regarding comments by council or the public, “Council Presi dent reserves the right to reduce time limit.” Her reluctance to use the gaveldent reserves the right to reduce time limit.” Her reluctance to use the gavel was excuses for muzzling people by arbitrarily restricting their time on the spot. With careful preparation, one can make a big impact in three minutes or less. Think of Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address. Hart seems to want to bring down the hammer without wielding her gavel.

As it turned out, President Hart did not shorten speakers’ time, and none exceeded their three minutes. They were distraught at the recent closure of Cleveland Heights’ Olympic-size North Rink due to storm damage, coming on the heels of losing their customary wintertime access to the South Rink.

Many, including three generations of one family, spoke about how important those rinks are—not just to them, but to the city’s position in the wider region. (The City News e-mailed late Friday, Jan. 20, announced that the North Rink would re-open on Monday, Jan. 23.)

And they demonstrated what a crisis the administration’s failure to communicate with the public has become, a full year into the new mayor’s first term. While one speaker thanked Seren for having mentioned in his remarks the fact that North Rink repairs were still being investigated, another asked, “Mr. Mayor, do you get your e-mails, or do you even read them? . . . Who’s in charge?”

The long-awaited “mayor’s action center” coordinator, slated to be hired soon, is supposed to be able to solve this problem by answering residents’ questions, or routing them to staff who can help. We have reservations because we have yet to learn how calls will be tracked and outcomes documented, or who will be privy to that information. Furthermore, even a highly effective coordinator won’t replace direct access to the mayor.

Seren needs to institute regular events—some combination of open office hours, town halls, and/or resident forums—for constituents to engage with him directly. A mayor cannot lead at arms length; it’s a people-facing job. Seren is a smart man, and we hope he grasps this soon.

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

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Bye Bye Birdie: University Heights suspends city’s Twitter account

Mike Cook

At the last University Heights City Council meeting of 2022, Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan announced the city will suspend use of its Twitter account, citing concern with the social media platform’s recent alarming changes.

“University Heights is a diverse and welcoming city,” Brennan reported to council. “And while we need not share all the same values and opinions to live together harmoniously, we do need to share the common value of mutual respect.

“Hate has no home in University Heights.”

On Oct. 27, Elon Musk became the owner and CEO of Twitter. Brennan said he has watched with concern and dismay Musk’s management of Twitter.

“A self-described supporter of free speech, Twitter under Elon Musk coddles white supremacists and anti-Semites,” Brennan said, “while censoring journalists and others based upon Musk’s personal whims and ever-changing arbitrary and capricious criteria.

Numerous advertisers have pulled out of supporting Twitter, numerous users have left as well. As a diverse mosaic and a welcoming city, University Heights cannot remain active on this social media platform given its continued downward course.”

The city administration has suspended operation of the city’s Twitter account. UH City Hall is increasing the city’s presence on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, and will explore additional options.

Another way to keep up with city news is to subscribe to the weekly University Heights Wrap-Up e-newsletter. To subscribe, e-mail a request to info@universityheights.com.

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

Brennan to deliver Feb. 15 State of the City

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan will deliver his annual State of the City address on Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 6 p.m., at the Dolan Science Center auditorium on the campus of John Carroll University (JCU).

In his fifth State of the City, Brennan will update the community on multiple projects, including new municipal facilities, updating the city’s zoning code, and the fieldhouse and South Gateway projects at JCU.

Brennan will discuss the city’s commitment to sustainability and a partnership with Power a Clean Future Ohio.

The mayor will also outline significant progress on University Square.

“For some time, we have negotiated with Target, Macy’s, and the new developers to break the impasse on redeveloping University Square,” Brennan said. “In December, we came to terms on a Memorandum of Agreement.”

The speech will be recorded and made available on the city’s website and YouTube channel.

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

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46275-HM-0920
University Heights City Council Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 19, 2022 - regular meeting

Present were Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan, Vice Mayor Michelle Weiss, and council members Barbara Blankfeld, Christopher Cooney, Yael Soule, Brian J. King, Rachel Namdar, and P. Rash, and Sheri Sax. Also present were Kelly Thomas, clerk of council, Luke McCormile, law director, and Dennis Kennedy, finance director.

Mayor’s report
As Twitter under Musk’s leadership now “coddles” antisemites and censors journalists, University Heights, as a diverse community and welcoming city, has suspended its Twitter account.

Cleveland Kosher Food Pantry donation
Council authorized a donation of $10,000 of its annual budget to the Cleveland Kosher Food Pantry, on an emergency, so that the mayor and council could present the donation immediately.

University Square MOU
Council approved a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the current stakeholders in University Square, including KL Holdings LLC, Macy’s, and Target. The Community Improvement Corporation (CIC), a separate entity from the city of University Heights, would take ownership of the University Square garage, and thus provide a layer of protection to the city for liability and responsibility.

The mayor noted that, while he has had meetings about the MOU in the past, this was the kind of project that the CIC was intended to undertake when it was created. The mayor and law director noted features of the proposal, which include a retail tenant, apartments, and greenspace.

CIC budget
At the mayor’s request, council voted to oversee his veto of council’s passage of additional funding for the CIC at the Dec. 5 city council meeting. In light of the MOU for the University Square project, he no longer has an objection to additional funding being provided to the CIC.

2023 budget
Council approved the 2023 budget on third reading. This budget was proposed by the mayor and reflects changes recommended by council.

Aleksander Shul lawsuits
With all members Ould and Cooney voting no, council authorized the mayor to enter into a settlement of two lawsuits with Aleksander Shul, a religious institution located in University Heights (that is) attempting to build new facilities. There was some public discussion of the lawsuit until Law director McCormile expressed the need to move further discussion to executive session, as is customary for ongoing litigation.

The lawsuits basically challenge the University Heights ordinance that prevented construction of a new shul. The parties would agree that, other than requisite permits and inspections, and an administrative review for their new structure, Aleksander Shul would be subjected to no further administrative processes, including review by the Board of Zoning Appeals or the Architectural Review Board. Cooney expressed concern about bypassing the planning commission. Gould was concerned about review of the project bypassing council, and claimed the proposed settlement was not transparent.

LWV Observer: Marilyn Singer.

JANUARY 3, 2023 - regular meeting

The mayor and all council members were present, as were the clerk of council, law director and finance director.

Mayor’s report
The State of the City address will be held Wednesday, Feb. 15, at John Carroll University’s Dolan Science Center. Mayor Brennan presented a preview, which included accomplishments and some ongoing issues, including trash pickup and recycling.

Council actions
Council approved the proposed renovation of the UH City Hall entrance roof, which increased in cost from $18,500 to $24,500 after the Architectural Review Board reviewed the proposal and requested changes.

Moving back to City Hall
After some research, Law Director McCormile determined that the city must make its facilities ADA accessible. [The current council chambers in City Hall is on the second floor, accessible only by stairs, and has been meeting at the former Wiley school building.] Providing a service to a disabled person that is different in that it provides a remote viewing area discriminatory and non-compliant.

Council discussed a variety of issues concerning the intelligibility of recordings, the need to return to City Hall, the expenses that would entail, issues regarding compatibility between school district and city equipment, and difficulties with streaming, and other IT considerations.

Mayor Brennan noted that once the city has an IT contract there will be more options. Legally, in-person access is required while streaming is not, and the city may not be able to make meetings accessible in-person and have reliable streaming. The city is about to file an eminent domain action for the property next door to City Hall.

There is an accessible meeting room on that property that could be ([name] new council chambers.

Council approved a motion directing the clerk of council to work with the law department to identify ADA-compliant options for returning to City Hall.

LWV Observer: Marilyn Singer.

No need to wait a month for more community news.

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SEVERANCE continued from page 1

Namdar Realty has declined incentives, offered by local governments in several states, to redevelop its high vacancy shopping centers.

In cases like STC, where properties have many vacancies, local governments in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, as well as Ohio, have tried to interest Namdar Realty in redeveloping significantly empty malls that have lost their anchor tenants. They have offered Namdar incentives and sought to find prospective purchasers for mixed-use development. The results have been consistent: Namdar Realty has declined to participate in the redevelopment of these malls, leaving these properties as a “blight” in many cities.

Any effort to redevelop STC into a vibrant, mixed-use site, and an asset to the community, must face these realities regarding Namdar Realty. In his 2021 League of Women Voters’ campaign profile, CH City Council Vice President Craig Cobb warned, “Efforts at redevelopment are hampered by Namdar, a real estate investor that specializes in buying distressed shopping malls in foreclosure to hold them as assets in their real estate portfolio versus redevelopment. A strategy (strict code enforcement, no parcel subdivision) must be employed to pressure Namdar to work with the city on redevelopment.”

W. Dennis Keating, a longtime Cleveland Heights resident, is a volunteer with FutureHeights and SAG, which has been working for the comprehensive redevelopment of Severance Town Center. He wrote this to explore the impact of the owner on Severance’s future.
Cleveland Heights City Council
Meeting highlights
DECEMBER 27, 2022 - regular meeting

Present were Mayor Khalil Seren, Council President Melody Joy Hart, Council Vice President Craig Cobb, and council members Tony Cuda, Gail Larson, and Anthony Mattox Jr. (Davida Russell was not present. Also present were Addie Balester, clerk of council, and Laura Wagner, assistant law director. (The meeting took three minutes; there was one agenda item.)

Insurance contract
On second reading and on emergency, council authorized a contract with Public Entities Pool of Ohio to join in self-insurance pool for property, vehicles, law enforcement, general, employment practices, and public official risk protection and liability coverage for calendar year 2023.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem
JANUARY 3, 2023 - regular meeting

The mayor and all council members were present, as were the clerk of council and William Harmon, law director.

Public comments
Two residents criticized the city’s snow removal efforts.

- A resident expressed thanks to Davida Russell, and urged her not to resign from council.

- A resident expressed frustration at the lack of follow-up to problems raised during council meetings’ public comment period.

- A resident expressed discontent with the new form of government, [the] continuing irresponsible treatment of some neighborhoods, and [the] discourteous behavior of some council members in committees of the whole meetings.

- Resident Erick Preston, president of Branch 40 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and another resident who is a retired letter carrier, described the staffing issues undermining timely mail delivery, including vacancies, long hours, and low retention.

Mayor’s report
Mayor Seren invited council members to schedule ride-alongs with the police. Following council members, members of the Racial Justice Task Force, and then the public would be able to schedule ride-alongs.

Council actions
Gail Larson announced that the Jan. 17 meeting of the Planning and Development Committee would discuss gap financing, and that Park Synagogue redevelopment would be discussed at the Jan. 17 committee of the whole meeting.

Gail Larson announced that the Jan. 17 meeting of the Public Safety and Health Committee would discuss sidewalk repair and sidewalk snow removal. She thanked those who had assisted her campaign and voters for electing her. She urged residents to participate in blood drives and consider applying for city boards and commissions.

In response to complaints voiced by some council members about others, Melody Hart urged members to treat each other with respect and to resolve differences in direct conversations.

Committee of the whole
The committee discussed legislation proposed by Russell related to the Mayor’s Action Center. Russell said she intended to support the Mayor’s Action Center and expressed her frustration that other council members had not responded to her requests for feedback. Mayor Seren voiced his opposition to the measure as duplicative, as council had already supported the initiative by funding it in the 2023 budget. Hart requested that all council members email their feedback to Russell by the end of the week.

Vacancies on boards and commissions were discussed, as were the process and timeline for making appointments, and measures to encourage more applicants.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.
A special meeting of Cleveland Heights City Council, scheduled for Monday evening, Jan. 30, had a single agenda item: Appointment of a Council Member.

With the same-day cancellation of the Jan. 30 meeting, that agenda item has moved to a Feb. 2 special meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m.

CH City Council has until Feb. 2 to appoint a new council member from a field of 20 applicants.

Moore was elected to CH City Council in November 2021, to serve the remainder of the unexpired council term of Mary Dunbar. That term ends on Dec. 31, 2023; the seat will be on the ballot this coming November.

There were 26 applicants originally, six of whom withdrew their names from consideration during the selection process.


Their applications can be viewed on the city’s website, at www.clevelandheights.gov/1144/City-Council-Ap- plicants, along with videotaped interviews for each applicant, conducted by the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, Heights Chapter.

CH City Council is also in the process of selecting residents to serve on the city’s new Charter Review Commission. Per a Dec. 5 council resolution, council will appoint six commissioners, and Mayor Seren will select three.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer. A former master gardener volunteer, she’s looking forward to adding more native plants to her own garden this year.

Kim Sergio Inglis
Help rebuild Coventry playground

Erick Kauffman

I first met Coventry playground on a fine July morning in 2000. Fate, in the form of a loan-repayment contract for my medical-school borrowings, had brought me to Cleveland from Seattle. My wife and I bought a home on Berkshire Road, not far from Coventry school. We flew to Cleveland with a few suitcases, our two young boys, and two cats. Mix-ups delayed the moving truck, which included the truly important stuff like tricycles, Legos and toys. What to do with these rambunctious boys stuck in an empty home?

We went for a walk the next morning and found, just down the street, the coolest park I had ever seen, Coventry Park, a marvelous tumble of wood beams and trampoline, zip lines, bridges and bright roofs. The park became the highlight of our summer, with daily visits to tear around the park and zoom down the slide. We settled into our lives in Cleveland Heights. Work went well. We added a daughter, lost a cat, and the kids got old enough to attend Coventry school. I got involved in the PTA and got to know some great families.

I learned that the park was an ambitious offshoot of the Coventry school PTA. A motivated group of parents, input from the students, had designed the park, raised money, and then built the park in a massive, coordinated community effort in 1993. Anyone who was there, during the two weeks it took to build the park, recalls it as having had the energy of a community barn raising.

I was smitten with the whole vibe of the playground. I got involved with the Coventry PEACE group and became president when it was my time to assume the role. We raised money for park upkeep with T-shirt sales and frantic lemonade stands at Coventry street fairs.

What really stole my heart were the community workdays that we organized in spring and fall to keep the park in good order. They were an explosion of human spirit and energy. We usually had more than 100 volunteers to clean, fix, weed, plant, paint, or do whatever was needed to maintain the park. We had neighbors, families, Heights High athletes, middle-schoolers, college students, boy scouts and passersby—all working, even in the worst weather, to make it fresh and good again.

The closing of Coventry school in 2006 put the fate of the park in jeopardy—while the years and vigorous play continued to wear on the park. We continued to clean and repair it, not knowing how long the structures could reasonably hold up, nor their ultimate fate.

In 2017, Heights Libraries assumed ownership of Coventry PEACE Campus—a move that took courage, and the vision to imagine an outdoor play space as an extension of the community-building that libraries perform.

The playground’s fate was now more secure, but I decided my work would not be done until I saw a new and grand park rebuilt on the Coventry Campus. In my 22 years of growing older alongside Coventry PEACE Park, I [developed] a bucket list, and high up on that list is “redevelop Coventry Park.”

I joined the board of the Fund for the Future of Heights Libraries (FFHL), an advocacy nonprofit that is part of Heights Libraries, which is raising funds for a new park, [with a goal of] $1.2 million. (Yes, inflation has hit the playground world as well.)

We are going to do it! We are going to rebuild this marvelous space—a place for unstructured play, meeting neighbors, sitting around, drum circles, sledding, summer movies, Frisbee, rolling down a hill, or whatever.

I hope that you will be part of the effort, as a volunteer or as a donor—not so that I can check it off my bucket list, but because it is now on your bucket list as well!

Erick Kauffman, a Cleveland Heights resident, is a former president of Covenant PEACE, an FFHL board member, a community medicine physician, and an activist.

So you experience it over time, just as the images were originally captured over time.

“The extremely horizontal format kind of forces a viewer to understand it as a timeline in some way, especially since the sequence embodied in each piece does take place over time,” explained Donley. “I see this body of work as like still films—it’s a single image, but made up of other still images that have been grabbed over some amount of time, looking forward to working with the other board members, who are just as dedicated to preserving our Heights Libraries heritage and commitment to intellectual freedom, freedom of the press, and overall community development.

“Libraries have always been a place of awe and inspiration for me; and knowing that I will now play a part in the care, safe-guarding, and preservation of a library system is an incredible privilege.”

Soto Schwartz is a member of the Organization of American Historians, and sings in the women’s choir Kol Isha at the Temple-Tifereth Israel.

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

Alice Jereko is an environmental advocate who first moved to Cleveland Heights in 1998.

from a few seconds to a few minutes, or even longer sometimes. The look of it is a little bit disjointed, almost like when movies used to get off their tracks and kind of stutter between frames in old-style film projectors. Our handy human brains take that disjointed material and fill in blanks to make sense of it, make it into a narrative.”

Donley, a volunteer editor for the Heights Observer, was the original designer for the publication, establishing many of the style and layout elements that are still used by the current production team.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and a former Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer who thinks this might be the year that her own garden takes steps toward presentability.

CLEAR SNOW continued from page 4

(USPS) is operated by the federal government and is undergoing reform. The city has no control over federal postal worker hours, conditions, or hiring.

To complain about postal staffing shortages and service issues, Heights residents can contact the USPS, U.S. Rep. Shonel Brown, or U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown or J.D. Vance and demand action. Postal workers themselves can file grievances and demand relief through their respective unions and representatives.
Sarah Wolf

FutureHeights is now accepting applications for its spring 2023 Neighborhoods Mini-Grants program. Applications are due March 15.

Now in its eighth year, the program offers awards of up to $1,000 for community-building projects, programs, and initiatives at the neighborhood level, in Cleveland Heights or University Heights.

Applicants are not required to have 501(c)3 nonprofit standing to be considered.

FutureHeights designed the program to enable neighborhood and grassroots-level groups to have access to funding that, without the nonprofit designation, otherwise can be challenging to acquire.

Since establishing its Neighborhood Mini-Grant program in 2015, FutureHeights has awarded a total of $50,538 to 75 projects across the Heights.

There are two rounds of applications per year, one in the spring and one in the fall. The deadline to apply for the fall round of mini-grants will be Sept. 15.

To learn more about the criteria for the mini-grants, and to access the application online, visit www.futureheights.org, or send an e-mail to swolf@futureheights.org.

Sarah Wolf is the community-building programs manager at FutureHeights.
DECEMBER 20, 2022 - special meeting
Board members present were President Malia Lewis, Dan Heintz, James Posch, Jodi Sourini, and Beverly Wright. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

Library board appointment
The board appointed Melissa M. Soto-Schwartz as a library board trustee for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.

Recognitions and awards
Height. High’s Academic Challenge Team competed against 11 other schools to place first in the full National Academic Quiz Tournament, and is scheduled to appear on an NewsChannel 5’s 5 Norborn-Academic Challenge program in April.

Teachers from the Oxford Elementary School preschool program were recognized for receiving the highest rating from the state.

Noble and Rosboro elementary schools earned bronze recognition from the state of Ohio for work by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports teams.

Superintendent’s report
Superintendent Kirby reported that all eighth-graders attended the college, career, and connectores day on Dec. 20 at Cuyahoga Community College.

The district received a $11-million grant from the state of Ohio for school safety. This will upgrade or provide new building-access doors, security cameras, and other safety equipment.

Treasurer’s report
Treasurer Gainer presented three topics related to the district’s financial health:

1. The district is unable to fund community use of the Heights High pool because the apportionment of Title IX. CH-UH district policies will not change, so they will follow federal guidelines.

2. A district grant of Title IX that makes a huge impact on the community.

3. The district is a Title I school, it receives federal grants to provide students with meals, because students cannot learn if they’re hungry. Lewis also observed that IDEA forces districts to continue to support or increase support for students with disabilities.

Inside mileage relates to unvoted mills that are not subject to MB 920. These mills may grow with inflation and change as property values change. Each city controls its own inside mileage rate. The inside mileage rate is based on the millage rate.

Community College.

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Treasurer’s report
Treasurer Gainer.

January 3, 2023 - organizational and regular meetings.
All board members were present, as were the superintendent and treasurer.

Election of officers
Board President Lewis presided over the nomination and vote for Beverly Wright as board president for 2023. Wright presided over the regular meeting that followed.

Jodi Sourini was elected to the position of vice president, Dan Heintz was elected to continue as treasurer pro-tem.

Treasurer’s report
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2. The district is a Title I school, it receives federal grants to provide students with meals, because students cannot learn if they’re hungry. Lewis also observed that IDEA forces districts to continue to support or increase support for students with disabilities.

3. The ACFR (Annual Comprehensive Financial Report) was completed for fiscal year 2022 and submitted to the Government Financial Officers Association and the Association of School Business Officials. All Ohio districts are required to complete audited financial statements. The CH-UH districts choose to use ACFR because it’s more transparent.

Board comments and announcements
Dan Heintz proposed that public comments be limited to community members only. Jen Posch recommended considering a policy regarding who can not for school board, i.e., adding a residency requirement, as proposed by the Ohio School Boards Association.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fôrman.

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed at www.chuh.org/BoardOfEducation.aspx. Meetings are livestreamed at www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools, and recorded as proposed by the Ohio School Boards Association.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fôrman.

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Library earns solid rating for pandemic year 2020

Sheryl Banks

Despite the challenges of CO-VID lockdowns throughout 2020, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System quali-fied for a three-star rating from the Index of Public Library Service’s publication Library Journal.

Heights Libraries was one of only three in Ohio to receive a star des-ignation for 2020—in comparison, Ohio had 27 star libraries in Library Journal’s rankings for 2019.

Heights Libraries has earned the highest designation, five stars, in 11 of the 15 years that Library Jour-nal has published the ratings. (The library received a four-star rating in two of the years, and was not rated one year.)

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

While customer visits, circula-tion of physical items, and program-ming numbers dropped in 2020, the circulation of electronic items, accessible through Heights Librar-ies’ website, rose, including eBooks, audiobooks and streaming services.

“We served our community on-line,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Li-braries director. “And while physical circulation went down, we still man-aged to get items in hands through

What’s going on at your library?

Coventry Village Branch
1925 Coventry Road, 216-321-3400

Fridays, Feb. 3–24, 10:30 a.m. Library PALS. Pre-schoolers are invited to participate in Coventry Village Library’s Play and Learn ev-ery Friday, at 10:30 a.m., for open-ended play, exploration, socializing, and more.

Lee Road Branch
2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 6:30 p.m. Black History Movie Night: MLK/ FBI. In this documentary, award-winning editor and director Sam Pollard lays out a detailed account of the FBI surveillance that dogged Martin Luther King's activism throughout the 1950s and '60s, fueled by the rac-ist and red-baiting paranoia of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. In crafting a rich archival tapestry, featuring some revelatory restored footage of King, Pollard urges us to remember that true American progress is always hard-won.

Noble Neighborhood Branch
2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 2–28, 9:30 a.m. to noon ASPIRE ESOL Classes. Formal Eng-lish language lessons for non-Eng-lish speakers is provided through Cuyahoga Community College’s ASPIRE program. Classes are held twice a week, and are available for speakers at all levels, from begin-ners to advanced speakers. Students must register for the classes at the Tri-C ASPIRE website, www.tri-c. edu/ohio-options-for-adults/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages.html, or by calling the Delisle Options Center in Cleveland Heights (216-371-7138). The class schedule follows Tri-C's academic calendar for breaks.

University Heights Branch
13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Tuesday, Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m. Pop-Tart Candy Houses. Stop by the library and construct a Pop-Tart House, decorated with icing and candy. This family program is open to children ages 3-12. Registration is required.

continued on page 19
Cleveland Heights - University Heights Public Library Board
Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 19, 2022

Library board members present were President Gabe Crenshaw, Vice President Miss Gabrielle, Patt Carlyle, Dana Fluellen, Annette Iwamoto and Tyler McTigue. Not present was Secretary Vikas Turakhia.

Board resolutions

- The board:
  - Authorized establishment of a lease with Equity Star Realty for temporary Noble library branch space at 2940 Noble Road. In addition, other spaces in the community will be used for library programming.
  - Approved the Coventry PEACE Building letters of intent for rental of space. Ten groups are expected to rent space in the building.
  - Approved 2023 library-provided vision insurance with VSP Insurance. The library pays 100 percent of the premium for single coverage, and 44 percent for family coverage.
  - Approved 2023 library-provided dental insurance, replacing Balance dental with MetLife dental. The library will pay 84 percent of the premium for single coverage, and 63 percent of the premium for family coverage.
  - Acknowledged the contributions of Gabie Crenshaw, outgoing board president, who led the board through difficult times.

Personnel report

Three new positions were reported, and two other vacancies were filled. Library staff attended 19 continuing education programs in December, including REI (Racial Equity Institute) groundwater training, REI phase one training, Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness, and de-escalation training.

Director’s report

The Centers for Families and Children will begin holding office hours in the Lee Road Library Branch on Jan. 1, and continue on Wednesdays for six months as part of a pilot project. The resource specialist is available to serve the public and the staff as needed. Appointments may be made in the adult services department.

It’s anticipated that all leases for current tenants in the Coventry PEACE Building will be signed by Dec. 31, 2022. CRSCA Playhouse Square property management will oversee the building. The Coventry PEACE Park fundraising campaign will go public in January.

The Cleveland Heights Planning Commission has approved the Noble library branch renovation project, which [new] will have a first hearing with the Architectural Board of Review. Groundbreaking is anticipated for May 2023.

Strategic Projects Manager Keala Sweeney and her team secured a $30,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Education for the One Community Reads project, a community literacy celebration that will be implemented in fall 2023 with the book Let’s Go for a Walk. Programs will take place in all library locations. Additionally, Heights Libraries is participating in another accelerated learning grant project with all of the libraries in Cuyahoga County.

Heights Libraries has secured a virtual-reality and computer-based training opportunity for patrons. Twenty seats at a time will be available for people to enroll in job skills training to earn a U.S. Department of Labor-approved technical apprenticeship certificate. Continuing Education Manager Heather Howiler and HKIC (Heights Knowledge and Information Center) staff initiated the project and secured a grant from the State Library of Ohio LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) program.

The cause of flood damage at the University Heights Library Branch was determined to be a water main break. A sump pump remedy is being explored.

The Lee Road Library Branch made progress [installing] more ADA-friendly signage.

Public service

Two programs had impressive attendance in November. Cleveland’s workshops had 36 attendees. A program in partnership with the Cleveland Heights Historical Society drew 75 attendees.

The library executed 75 passport applications and 88 photos.

The Read with the Librarian program at Noble Neighborhood Library Branch was repeated, with even more success than a previous session. Children enjoyed working with staff one-on-one, and staff book suggestions were met with enthusiasm. Participants learned how to navigate the library, and find books that appealed to them and were on their reading level.

LWV Observer: Judith Beeler.

Information about the board, board meeting minutes and audio recordings of board meetings can be found at https://heightslibrary.org/locations/heights-libraries-board.!
On Saturday, Feb. 25, the Cleveland Heights High School Instrumental Music Department (IMD) will celebrate a century of instrumental music at the school.

The evening concert will feature performances by current student ensembles and, on several pieces, alumni will be invited to dust off their instruments and play along. Former band and orchestra directors will also be invited to conduct. The concert will be held in the Heights High auditorium. Community members are encouraged to join the celebration as well.

Current music directors Daniel Heim and Nicholas Marzuola have selected several works for alumni to play on, including Bizet’s “Farandole” from L’Arlesienne Suite No.2, and Heights High’s Alma Mater. Prior to the concert, there will be a brief rehearsal that alumni can attend.

Selections played by student ensembles will include Alfred Reed’s El Camino Real, Violinist’s Second Suite in E, and Mozart’s Eine kleine Nachtmusik.

The IMD was established in the 1921–22 school year, but celebrations of its centennial milestone were delayed until this year due to COVID-19 precautions.
The 2023 NEOMFA Playwrights Festival presents:

**For Tickets & Info:**
www.convergence-continuum.org
or call 216-687-0074
LIMINIS THEATER | 2438 Scranton Rd.
Cleveland OH 44113

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**February 9th through February 18th**
**Tickets $20**

**Weekend 1:** Laura Barberi
  *We Call It Family*
  *We Call It Family*
  *We Call It Family*

**Eric Mansfield**
  *We Call It Family*
  *We Call It Family*
  *We Call It Family*

**Weekend 2:** David Hansen
  *Scenes from a Night's Dream*
  *Scenes from a Night's Dream*
  *Scenes from a Night's Dream*

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*In February 1968, I wasn't exactly aimless; I had goals. I wasn't hopeless; I had dreams and wishes. I wasn't totally homeless; there were a few places where I could stay. But I certainly wasn't grounded, or focused, or even very motivated. Too much had gone wrong.*

I was only 18, but my music career had actually shown more promise when I was 16 and 17. It was stalled. I was stalled.

I was staying with a high school friend—one of just two who were still in town—a guy who really was aimless and hopeless, and had even less motivation than I did. But his wife had a job. And they had an apartment right above Heights Hardware on Coventry. That was the second time I had stayed in that same apartment. In the summer of '67, my high school girlfriend, and her friend, rented that place and I spent a lot of time there, especially after I was strongly encouraged to leave my parents' home, by one of my parents. My girlfriend and her roommate didn't have that place long because they started college, in other cities, that autumn. Several months after they moved out, my shiftless friend and his wife moved in, coincidentally.

Of all the people I could have stayed with (and there weren't many), this guy, Tom, was not the influence I needed. Tom and I used to skip school together during high school to write songs together, and practice them for the band we were in. But no more. I had stopped writing songs.

One time, in my last year of high school—I hesitate to say 12th grade, because, by then, I wasn't in any grade—my guidance counselor called me in, again, to tell me, again, how much I was underachieving. I said to him, “You know, a group in New York who's signed to a major label is going to record one of my songs. It sometimes takes songwriters many years to make that happen; but it's happening for me right now, and I'm still in high school. So, I think I'm overachieving.”

But by February 1968, I had stopped writing songs. That previous summer and autumn, I had played quite a bit in places including Farragher's, a place on Taylor Road, near Cain Park, that presented national and local folk artists; and La Cave, a University Circle-area folk and rock club that presented mostly nationally known artists, with local openers. But by February 1968, I had stopped playing anywhere.

The members of all three of my bands had all gone off to colleges out of town (except for Tom). My girlfriend, from all the way through high school, and I suddenly broke up in January. So even that was gone. I had no band, no money, no home, no friends, no...
girlfriend.

But one mid-February night, I got a call, at Tom's apartment, from a college friend of my girlfriend who had dropped out of school and returned to Cleveland Heights.

My girlfriend had introduced us, and I had really disliked her. But I ran into her on Coventry one day and we started talking, and I got a different impression of her. Then we started talking a lot and I began to really like her. Though I knew we'd never have any kind of relationship, other than a friendly one, because she was strange—ethereal and magic, in many ways; extremely empathetic and intuitive; fragile and vulnerable, yet strong and durable in ways, too—and I wasn't ready to handle all of that.

So, she called, out of the blue, one night when I was at my lowest. She was crying. I asked why, but she wouldn't tell me. She only said, “You have to get out of town.”

I said I had no place to go. She said it didn't matter, because I was nowhere already. I said I had no money. She told me to meet her in front of Irv's Restaurant, in the rain, with 20 minutes in front of Irv's. I ran away. I just watched her disappear into the night. I packed what few clothes I had in one guitar case, and my guitar in another guitar case. I called my other friend in town and got him to take me to the airport, that night. Back then, if you were under 21, you could fly stand-by for half of the going rate, which wasn't a whole lot to begin with.

I left town, and my career began almost immediately. The girl—the friend of the former girlfriend—and I remained friends, from afar, for the rest of her life, which was only 10 more years. And when I think of February, I picture her—standing in front of Irv's, in the rain, with tears in her eyes, handing me that bill.

Davíd 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 comedion. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop-music history.

**SONGS & STORIES continued from page 18**

to limit programming and other services even when we were open, for staff and public safety.”

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

**LIBRARY continued from page 15**

curbside services.”

“We’re very proud that we qualified for a solid rating in such a challenging year,” Levin continued. “It truly astonished me, considering we were closed for part of 2020 due to COVID, and had...
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