Dobama launches Full Circle program

Colin Anderson

“At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen” opened at Dobama Theatre on Jan. 26, but there is more happening at the theater than a show.

With the production, Dobama launched its Full Circle program—a new initiative to connect members of those communities represented in the scripts Dobama produces to artists during the rehearsal process, and to patrons through audience-engagement opportunities.

Veronica Li Ne

“Dobama launched its Full Circle program to create a new initiative to connect members of those communities represented in the scripts Dobama produces to artists during the rehearsal process, and to patrons through audience engagement opportunities.”

Cain Park launches winter festival

Jessica Rosenblatt

Cain Park has always been more than Cleveland Heights’ Summer Arts Park. For decades, its sled hill has been a source of winter fun for Cleveland Heights families. Now, residents and visitors are encouraged to embrace the chill, indulge in delicious treats, and be part of a new winter tradition.

This month, Cain Park will embrace its winter role and take the first step toward becoming a year-round hub for community events and activities with the launch of the first annual Cain Park Freeze Fest, a free winter festival planned for Saturday, Feb. 24, 4–7 p.m., and Sunday, Feb. 25, noon to 4 p.m.

Cain Park will transform the top of its sledding hill (on Taylor Road near Superior Road) into a winter wonderland. Heated tents will house local vendors, including The Wine Spot, CLE Urban Winery, and March Ant Manor Cheese, and special guest DJ Marcus Alan Ward will spin crowd favorites. Food trucks, a fire pit, and many “s’more” surprises await participants at this family-friendly event. And, of course, there will be sledding—weather willing.

“In a recent survey, the Cleveland Heights community overwhelmingly called for activities at Cain Park throughout the entire year,” said Ian Hinz, Cain Park’s new general manager. “Cain Park is a one-of-a-kind historic venue that continues to evolve, offering diverse experiences for residents and visitors alike.”

Forest Hill Church celebrates Black history and culture

Ajiah Hales

Black History Month is an annual celebration of Black culture which aims to eradicate discrimination and encourage racial equality. Again this year, as it has done for the past 13 years, Forest Hill Church (FHC) proudly presents a full month of Black History Celebration events.

This year’s theme is “Black Women: Crowned with Glory.” This year, FHC’s Black History Education Committee has chosen to recognize 10 exceptional Black women who exemplify the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness/generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

All events are free and open to the public—though some events offer sweet treats for sale.

Feb. 4: Family Fun Movie Night, 4–6 p.m. Join FHC for a free screening of “The Little Mermaid” (PG). Bring the whole family to enjoy this modern take on a childhood classic. Grab some popcorn and Kool-Aid for just a buck.

Feb. 11: Fruits of the Spirit Reveal, 12:30–2 p.m. Join FHC for an interactive skit, reveal, and discussion featuring church members.

Feb. 18: Soul Food Potluck, 3:30–7 p.m. FHC’s got the meats, you bring the rest.
New CH council leadership sets forth its new agenda

Tony Cuda

Davida Russell and I are delighted to have been elected (on Jan. 2) as the new leadership team for Cleveland Heights City Council.

As council president, I wanted to make sure we hit the ground running. At the time I wrote this, on Jan. 14, Council Vice President Russell and I had already met with the majority of council members, our council clerk, the law director and several residents.

The first thing we wanted to do was get a plan together and begin executing it. Here is what we were able to accomplish in the first two weeks:

• For the first time since the city’s new form of government was established, we were able to get the packets (legislative agenda) out on the Wednesday, instead of Friday, before our Monday council meetings thanks to the cooperation of our council clerk, the law director and the administration. This will allow council members more time to get questions answered ahead of the Monday meetings.

• From now on, each piece of legislation will have a cover sheet with a purpose statement describing what the legislation is about. This will help members and constituents alike by giving context to the legalese they are reading in the legislation.

• We began the creation of a council calendar for 2024.

• We scheduled a photo shoot for our new council member, Jim Petras.

• We assigned committee chairs and membership.

• We began scheduling community meetings with new council leadership and residents.

• We presented a draft of council rules and a legislative process at our first Committee of the Whole meeting.

• We changed the regular meeting agenda so all of the public can address the council at the beginning of our bi-weekly meetings.

We have a lot on our plate this year—ARPA contracts, Noble Station development (Part II), reviewing the Charter Review Commission’s findings, reviewing economic development contracts—and then there’s the 2025 budget this fall.

Most of all, our city government needs to deliver the best possible city services to you, the residents. Although that task largely falls on the administration, council leadership will always be there to advocate for you.

Please stay tuned!

Tony Cuda is a longtime CH resident, a Heights High graduate and president of CH City Council.

CH’s council members and mayor must ‘play nicer’

Alan Rapoport

I appreciate what it can be like for a city council president in Cleveland Heights to manage activities of seven council members. After all, I had four years’ experience performing a very similar job. Once I described it as being like herding cats. Given recent history, new CH City Council President Tony Cuda may find out what I meant.

City council members are equals. As their elected leader, the council president can set the tone and the agenda. But his effectiveness will depend on how much cooperation he gets. Hopefully, each member will put their ego aside and act constructively as part of a team.

The most important job of any city council member is to understand what the city is doing, to appreciate what else needs to be done, and to help articulate action plans in the form of resolutions and ordinances. Occasional public posturing is inevitable. Such is politics. In the end, a city council must be specific and directive in its collective statements. Members must cooperate to make that happen.

But recent history gives some cause for concern. The last city council failed to resolve a dispute with Mayor Seren about its right to have direct communications with city employees. Public meetings suffered from occasional rancor and rudeness. Respect was too often lacking. Rest assured observers have rightly criticized all of this.

Better conduct by council members is essential because so much of importance is at stake. There are a lot of storefronts that are just waiting for the Severance Center has been ignored too long. There is too much turnover of city personnel. The city has lost population, making its tax base inadequate. Cleveland Heights should have a city council that functions well enough to solve such problems.

Political leadership must strive to provide the kind of governance our city needs. Mr. Cuda deserves great credit for his willingness to put himself in the political line of fire. He should now offer an agenda that will address the desires of a diverse and demanding citizenry. And I am sure that cooperation with an agenda from other council members and from Mayor Seren would be most welcomed by him.

City council members and the mayor should have one preliminary goal: They should learn to play nicer with each other. That would benefit everyone.

Alan Rapoport, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, served on CH City Council (1980–87) and as council presid/ent/mayor (1982–87).
Danny Williams returns calls. That’s the first thing we learned when Cleveland Heights’ new city administrator agreed to a Zoom interview with us shortly after the start of the year.

He spoke with us for nearly an hour and promptly answered e-mailed follow-up questions. Here are some highlights:

“Heart’s ultimate goal is for the public to look back on the first elected mayoral administration as the most productive in anyone’s memory,” Williams stated.

He cited the following as examples of what such productivity might include: “a more integrated and comprehensive approach to public safety, incorporating mental health and violence interrupter interventions; demonstrable and significant improvement in delivery of basic city services; continued strong support of business districts; demonstrated support of homeowners seeking to preserve or improve our housing stock; and growth of our population.”

He described himself as primary advisor to Mayor Khalil Seren, "assisting in carrying out his strategic vision.”

Williams is chief operating officer, and five department heads report to him: Colette Clinkscale, public works; Kelly LedBetter, parks and recreation; Steve Bark, information technology; Tara Schuster (acting head), finance; and Mike Thomas, communications.

The directors of law, public safety, and planning and development report directly to the mayor.

Seren and Williams meet weekly with each department head, and with the president and vice president of city council. They meet monthly with all department heads together, to discuss “the status of major projects and key strategic priorities,” and to “take advantage of collective experience and judgment.”

Williams also serves as a liaison between the administration and council, “[to keep them] well-informed about each other.”

Every council meeting agenda now includes City Administrator’s Report; but this will be of little benefit to the public unless he regularly takes the opportunity to present substantive information.

Asked about the greatest challenges facing the city, Williams cited: (1) public safety; (2) economic and community development; (3) growing the population; and (4) preserving and improving upon civic amenities.

Regarding public safety, Williams said, “The city can’t address access to guns, but is working to stem root causes of violence. We are collaborating with Shaker Heights on pairing mental health professionals with police.” He added also to “the need to attract talent to our safety forces.”

Civic amenities include the community center and Cumberland Pool, which Williams said require “community input and buy-in.”

“In addition,” Williams said, “we must take steps to . . . grow our tree canopy, which has been declining over the years. Finally, our parks require attention.”

In a follow-up, Williams added a fifth challenge to those facing the city: “Misinformation that is propagated suggesting nefarious plots and conspiracies behind administration or council actions.”

The best way to head off rumors and misinformation, we maintain, is to build trust by providing consistently excellent services, including issuing timely, reliable information to the community and media.

We brought up the long-neglected city website, www.clevelandheights.gov, which is outdated, often inaccurate, and frustrating to navigate. (Frankly, it’s an embarrassment.) Williams referred us to Communications Director Thomas, whose own department is not listed on the site.

Thomas told us a revamp is underway, and improvements will roll out in stages beginning later this year. The communications department will soon be adding two new staff members, which Thomas feels should facilitate routine and timely updating.

Another way to build trust is by ensuring that residents receive prompt answers to their queries. Williams is promoting a staff philosophy of “no wrong doors,” meaning that even if you call or wander into the wrong department, you should receive a helpful response.

We reminded him that residents still complain about not getting return calls from City Hall. Recently this happened to one of us. “If you don’t get a call back, call me,” said Williams, on the record. His number: 216-321-4995.

Deborah Van Kleeck and Carla Rautenberg, heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.
Non-partisan politics in Cleveland Heights

Edward Olszewski

In the December Heights Observer, Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg lamented the loss of non-partisan races in Cleveland Heights politics. Some of our founding fathers argued against political parties as destructive of true democracy, often devolving into pettiness and narrow partisanship.

When my wife and I moved to Cleveland Heights in the 1970s, we were pleased to learn that voting for city offices at the time was non-partisan. As we moved into our new home on Euclid Heights Boulevard and prepared to vote in our first election for city council, we found ourselves receiving mail intended for the previous owner of the home. Among the letters to be forwarded were flyers from the Republican Party recommending lists of candidates who were flyers from the Republican Party.

Voted in 1974, the cities of Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland became non-partisan, and the city council and mayor were to be elected as Independents. In the December 1978 election, Richard Weigand was elected to the Republican Party to the attention of Richard Weigand, who was a candidate for city council at the time and a member of Heights Dems. So I guess I should confess my guilt in ending the non-partisan nature of Cleveland Heights elections—except that it was the Republican party that abused that neutrality.

Van Kleef and Rautenberg noted that registered Republicans in the city numbered 1,274, against 12,513 registered Democrats, and I suspect that was probably the case back in the 1970s, where it was to Republicans’ advantage to run as Independents. When one is outnumbered by 10 to one, it makes sense to be unaffiliated.

But they also noted that there were 20,475 registered Independents, which would seem to argue for a non-partisan ballot. I find a two-party system necessary for fair and competent government. The city of Cleveland could use more Republicans running for office to keep tabs on Cleveland City Council’s activities—especially necessary since the demise of daily newspapers, and the retirement of the political watchdog Roldo Bartimole. And our state government needs more Democrats to break the ideological hold of gerrymandered offices.

The authors wrote of Democrats’ “blatant hypocrisy,” but I suspect that blind non-partisanship can now be added to gerrymander—shorter voting hours, limited voter registration, restricted mailing of ballots as forms of blatant hypocrisy.

Edward Olszewski is retired chair of art history at CWRU, and a resident of Cleveland Heights since the late 1970s.

Cumberland Pool meeting reassured

To the Editor:

Thanks to CH Parks & Recreation for providing the Jan. 17 opportunity to view the initial concept proposals for Cumberland Pool. [Director of Parks & Recreation Kelly] Ledbetter’s promise to the standing-room-only gathering to provide uninterrupted pool recreation during the 2024 pool season and restoration of the toddler pool prior to the 2024 summer season was reassuring.

The meeting provided residents the opportunity to review and comment on three initial pool concepts. However, the organizers could have calmed some initial mistrust and been more respectful of the attendees by providing the following information:

- Timeline
- Financing
- Budget
- Cleveland Heights priority for the financing of the pool reconstruction
- Gap analysis of the current pool amenities and uses
- Process for review of and thought regarding the residents’ feedback
- Plans for future meetings
- The overall decision process

The tremendous resident turnout showed the investment of the community in maintaining, restoring and improving Cleveland Heights’ aquatic recreation.

Sharon Holtkamp
Cleveland Heights

Housing inspection and code compliance should be top priorities

Tom Bier

I hope whoever runs for mayor of Cleveland Heights recognizes that the city’s future depends squarely on the condition of its homes and apartments. With most properties over or nearly 100 years old, combating deterioration is the top priority by far.

The more that properties deteriorate, the less likely owners (particularly absentee) will be willing and able to make proper repairs, let alone upgrades—and the less likely responsible residents who seek high-quality housing will be willing to live in Cleveland Heights. This, in turn, pushes remaining constructive residents elsewhere, which weakens property values and tax bases and forces ultra-high tax rates, which is more reason to go elsewhere.

Since 1960, Cleveland Heights, along with all other inner-eastern suburbs, has had severe loss of property-tax base—our annual sources amounting to a billion dollars. The loss is much the result of Cleveland City Hall’s decades-long failure to recognize that housing inspection and code compliance are its most important functions. The city’s sizable challenges—crime and violent acts, troublesome youths in schools and on the streets, weak patronage of stores and restaurants—all stem from that failure.

The next mayor, and council, will either get serious about this or they won’t. We rise or fall with their choice.

Tom Bier has lived in Cleveland Heights for 50 years.

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Shore up democracy by defending public education

The Common Good

Susie Kaeser

I started writing this column on the anniversary of the insurrection at the Capitol. On Jan. 6 three years ago, I watched in disbelief as the violence unfolded, and I am still terrified. What would our lives be like if our democratic structures and institutions, including our system of public education, were to disappear or ossify?

This possibility is increasing in Ohio, where state lawmakers have gradually backed away from the strict conditions that define how to spend public funds on K-12 education. They have replaced a steadfast commitment to the common good, to public education, with a commitment to individual choice.

Every state constitution includes a requirement for the state to fund a system of public education. The constitutional commitment codifies that the public interest is served when state resources are used to educate our youth in schools that include everyone and provide comparable opportunities regardless of their location. Public schools must be nonsectarian, free and available everywhere, and accountable to the public. Public education is a magnificent expression of our democratic commitment to the value of each person, interdependence and democratic self-governance.

Historically, public funds have been off-limits to private schools. The public is not obligated to fund schools that select their students, discriminate, promote religion, make decisions in private, and discriminate, promote religion, to underwrite their choice.

Democracy defenders have to identify and support candidates for the Ohio legislature who reject a dual system of K-12 education—who will fight for public education and value democracy. It will take all of us.

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 a book about local activism, Resisting Segregation.
Pruning now is the best way to rejuvenate tired and under-performing plants. Dormant pruning during the winter...
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**University Heights City Council**

**Meeting highlights**

DEC 18, 2023 - regular meeting

Council members present were Vice Mayor Michelle Weiss, Christopher Conney, Theresa Marshall, Brian J. King, John P. Rach, Sheri Sto, and Win Weizer. Also present were Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan, Clerk of Council Kelly Thomas, Law Director Luke McCrory, Finance Director Dennis Kennedy, and City Engineer Joe Cuni.

**Mayor's report**

The recent city charter change means this is the mayor’s final council meeting as presiding officer. He will continue to sponsor legislation. He hopes to be part of the process to select the new law director, as the current law director’s term expires March 31.

**Ranked-choice voting**

The Committee of the Whole continues to discuss ranked-choice voting with the county board of elections. Council will continue the discussion during its council retreat.

**Council actions**

Council passed resolutions recognizing the service of former Mayor Susan Infeld and retiring City Engineer Joe Cuni. The gazebo in Walter Strawn Park was dedicated to Infeld. Council renewed the city’s medical and dental insurance contracts with Medical Mutual.

Council approved the Planning Commission’s recommendations related to parking lot expansion at 2500 Green Road. Council extended the Human Resources contract with Clemons Nelson for another 12 months, at an amount not to exceed $65,252, with Rach voting no. Neither the administration nor the principals at Clemons Nelson were aware that, under the previous contract, the representative assigned to the city had caused a cost overrun of $34,000. Clemons Nelson was unaware of the need for additional oversight and cut the bill in half.

Council amended Chapter 220 and other chapters of the city code to comply with new charter amendments.

Council amended the vice mayor’s compensation due to new duties assigned with the charter changes.

Council amended the contract with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORSD) for the E. Scarbrough/Canterbury sewer, allowing for additional cost sharing from NEORSD when costs increase. The city will pay any additional costs, which the sewer district will reimburse.

Council extended Law Director McCrory’s contract for three months as it seeks a new law director.

Council appointed Mike Cicero as city prosecutor and assistant law director, and Kelly Thomas as clerk of council, both for another two years.

Council authorized a transportation services contract with Senior Transportation Connection.

Council authorized a transfer of funds from the General Fund to the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) Fund, the Street Maintenance Fund, University Square TIF Fund, and Capital Improvement Fund. The finance director said that, except for the CIC, these amounts would be recouped after reimbursements from other jobs.

Council authorized the final 2023 Appropriations.

Council approved the free pruning and removal bid from Parks Tree in an amount not to exceed $49,668.

Staff reports

Law Director McCrory thanked the mayor, council, and the city for the opportunity to serve over the last nine years.

Economic Development Director Susan Drucker said the Economic Development Committee decided John Carroll University’s (JCU) application to rezone the former BP station property at Fairmount Circle for parking. The city needs to see a bigger picture of JCU’s vision for the gateway to the city.

City council committee reports

Building: A new chief building official, Mark Patterson, will start Jan 1.

Communications/Civic Engagement: University Heights is now on Threads, a social media platform similar to X (formerly Twitter).

Council actions

Council renewed the appointments of An Jaffe, Kevin Goodman, and Matthew Kafl to the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the appointment of Brian Brodaux to the Architectural Review Board.

Council tabled an ordinance to hire a firm for engineering services, with King voting no. The mayor and Service Director Allen Pennington have reviewed the three companies that bid for the position, and WallacePancher Group was their top choice. Council members said they had not had a chance to view the three bids and had concerns regarding the increased fee.

Council overturned two vetoes by the mayor. The first was of an authorized fund transfer from the General Fund to the CIC Fund. Council complained that CIC’s structure allows the mayor to obstruct projects, and discussed options to change the CIC charter to make it a more effective organization. The second veto was of a city code amendment to increase the vice mayor’s compensation for the term beginning Jan 1, 2024.

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Before the meeting, council elected Council Member Weiss as vice mayor; she now presides over council meetings.

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Mike Cook

Say goodbye to the old and hello to the new—University Heights City Hall is on Threads. As of Jan. 1, city government officially abandoned the toxicity of X (formerly Twitter) in favor of Threads.

Via this additional social media platform, UH plans to share positive news with residents, as well as Northeast Ohio.

University Heights takes social-media leap to Threads

Launched in 2023, Threads is the latest app from Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The platform looks a lot like Twitter, with a feed of text-based posts, in addition to photos and videos.

To join Threads, log in via your Instagram account.

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

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Let’s help you love your landscape!
Cuda is new CH City Council president

Kim Sergio Inglis

In its first meeting of 2024, Cleveland Heights City Council convened an organizational meeting to swear in the three council members elected in November, and select a council president and vice president.

At the Jan. 2 meeting, Gail Larson and Jim Petras took the oath of office. (Janine Boyd was sworn in at her home, on Jan. 1, by Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Judge Shirley Strickland Safold.)

Davida Russell was then elected president pro tem, and presided over the nominations for council president.

Council Member Anthony Mattox Jr. nominated Gail Larson, who declined; Mattox subsequently nominated Janine Boyd. Larson nominated Council Member Tony Cuda.

Cuda was elected president by a 5-2 vote, in which he, Cobb, Larson, Petras and Russell voted for him, and Boyd and Mattot voted for Boyd.

After taking the oath of office as council president, Cuda presided over the remainder of the meeting, which saw Russell elected as council vice president by an unanimous vote.

To view the council meeting, which lasted approximately 30 minutes, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXbrLmTfEAA.

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

Crowdsourced continued from page 1

• Our Public Parks
• Active Transportation Planning: Living Less Car-Centric in the Heights

Voting on the 2024 topics saw an increase of 229% over the previous year. Event organizers thank all community members who participated in this phase of the program.

The Crowdsourced Conversations series was created in 2022 to provide “a forums series by the people, for the people.” Past topics have included Sustainability, Housing and Neighborhood Preservation, Community Safety, Civic Engagement, Our Public Schools, Traveling Around Town, Building Community with Renters and Landlords, and Planning and Development in the Heights.

Each topic goes through two phases: a communitywide survey and a community conversation. Surveys on each topic, conducted electronically, are live for a month. The data collected is then incorporated into a survey-data report that is accessible on the FutureHeights website.

The survey results are also utilized to create the small-group discussion questions. The forums, then, feature those questions, which are designed to help residents determine ways to become more actively involved in the Heights community.

Information about each of the past events in the series, including links to each of their resource pages, can be accessed on the FutureHeights website at www.futureheights.org/programs/speaker-series-and-public-forums.

The 2024 series will kick off with its first survey on March 1. An announcement will be made soon regarding the order in which this year’s topics will be featured.

Program questions should be e-mailed to swolf@futureheights.org.

Sarah Wolf is the community-building programs manager at FutureHeights.
Cleveland Heights CRC seeks community input at its Feb. 12 meeting

Graig Kluge

Cleveland Heights City Resolution 176-2023, passed by CH City Council on Dec. 5, 2022, established a Charter Review Commission (CRC) to review the Cleveland Heights City Charter and make recommendations for charter amendments.

The commission was instructed to review the 2017 CRC report, and interview and consult current and former city staff, current and former elected officials, and anyone else deemed appropriate by the commission.

The CRC would also like to hear from the Cleveland Heights community and learn what community members consider important for the city charter and city government, which has gone through some growing pains in the past few years. The CRC wants input regarding how we can all make the system function better.

To that end, while all CRC meetings are open to the public—and time at each is reserved for public comment—the CRC will hold a special community meeting on Feb. 12, 6-8 p.m., at the Cleveland Heights Community Center. At the meeting, CRC members hope to learn what residents feel is important to have in the CH charter.

The CRC comprises nine members—six appointed by city council, and three appointed by the mayor and approved by city council. Council approved the final three CRC members on June 22, 2023, and the first CRC meeting occurred on July 12. Since that first meeting, the commission has met on a regular basis.

The CRC has put a great deal of work into reviewing the current CH City Charter as well as all recommendations made by the 2017 commission. Currently, the CRC is in the process of interviewing a number of current and former elected officials.

Graig Kluge is a 27-year resident of Cleveland Heights, and currently serves on its Charter Review Commission. He and his family enjoy the diversity, progressive inclusivity, and welcoming environment in the city, and could not imagine a better place to live and go to school than Cleveland Heights.

CRC meetings usually take place in the executive conference room at City Hall, and are recorded and posted on YouTube. The agenda for all meetings is available on the city’s website, along with links to the minutes and videos from all past meetings. CH residents can e-mail questions to crc@clevelandheights.gov.

Cleveland Heights City Council

Meeting highlights

DEC. 18, 2023 - regular meeting

Council members present were Melody Jay-Hart (president), Craig Cobb (vice president), Janine Boyd, Tony Cuda, Gail Larson, Anthony Mattus Jr., and David Russell. Also present were Mayor Kohler and Law Director William Marmon.

Public comments

Bellevue JCB Executive Director Jeffrey Lee thanked council for working with Bellevue to serve LGBTQIA+ youth.

Journey Center for Safety and Health Board Chairman Eric Logan thanked council for considering Journey Center legislation to support victims of domestic violence. State Rep. Janine Zartas was also present to support the legislation.

Heights Arts Executive Director Rachel Bernstein, Lake Erie Ink Executive Director Amy Rosenblith, and a Heights Art board member offered support for the Arts Commission legislation.

Seven residents opposed council’s Oct. 16, 2023, resolution expressing support for Israel and asked council to reconsider its resolution and call for a cease-fire.

Mayor’s report

Mayor Seren offered a proclamation expressing appreciation for outgoing Council President Hart’s leadership and service.

Council actions

Council adjusted the 2023 budget, transferring $18 million from the General Fund to other funds.

Council authorized two agreements:

1) with Zupka & Associates to prepare annual audits of financial statements for 2023 through 2027, at a cost not to exceed $205,760; and 2) with Kimley-Horn to prepare a Comprehensive and Equitable Safety Action Plan (CESAP) as a step toward achieving Vision Zero goals. A federal Safe Streets For All grant will cover costs up to $198,710.

Council renewed the city’s liability coverage with the Public Entities Pool of Ohio for 2024, at a cost not to exceed $920,000.

Council extended to May 31 the Charter Review Commission’s deadline to provide a report and recommendations.

Council awarded $313,540 of ARPA funds to the Coventry Village Special Improvement District.

Council expanded the Cleveland Heights Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) Board of Directors to include five members, to be appointed by the mayor and subject to council approval. Appointees must have experience in a field related to the CIC’s purpose, and four must be Cleveland Heights residents. They will serve three-year terms and may be appointed for multiple terms. Russell and Cuda voted no. Cuda said he opposed mayoral appointments.

Council authorized changes to the 2024 budget.

Council authorized an agreement with the Journey Center for Healing and Safety for a domestic abuse victim advocate in the CH Municipal Court and other programs, at a cost not to exceed $300,000.

Council authorized a two-year agreement with Bellevue JCB for law-enforcement training and updating the youth diversion and mentoring program to better serve transgender and other LGBTQIA+ youth, at a cost not to exceed $35,000.

Council established an Arts Commission to advise council and the mayor on arts policies, programs, and projects. It will comprise seven to 11 members, appointed by the mayor and subject to council confirmation. Cuda voted no. Russell supported an Arts Commission but opposes mayoral appointments.

Council awarded $15,014,749 of ARPA funds for programs related to housing, parks and recreation, business assistance, safety and health, youth services, and the arts.

Melody Hart

Council members thanked outgoing Council President Hart for her service, praising her integrity, hard work, leadership, and collaborative approach during the challenging first two years of the new form of government. Hart said it was a privilege to serve on council and pointed to the housing diversion program as a collaborative effort involving city budgets and ARPA allocations as successes.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.

DECEMBER 21, 2023 - special meeting

Hart attended remotely, and Russell was not present. The other council members were present, as were the clerk of council and law director.

Council actions

Council authorized year-end changes to the 2023 budget, resulting in a net decrease of $8.9 million; amended city ordinances on specific streets until Dec. 31, 2024; and suspended overnight parking prohibitions on specific streets until Dec. 31, 2024; and authorized a grant application from the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission under the Community Planning Grant program.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.

JAN. 2, 2024 - organizational meeting

All council members were present: Janine Boyd, Craig Cobb, Tony Cuda, Gail Larson, Anthony Mattus Jr., Jim Petras, and David Russell. Also present were the mayor, the clerk of council, and the law director.

Election of council officers

Council elected Tony Cuda as council president, with Mattus and Boyd voting for Boyd. Council elected Russell as its vice president.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.
same conversation. It was in the closet, but was queer but really conflicted by that. It was barely out of the closet to myself.” His uncle died about a year after the conversation.

“That was tough for me,” said Guest. “It shoved me further in the closet and further into relig- ion for a couple years, but I still had this interest in exploring his life and honoring him in some way, but I didn’t know how.”

Guest felt that someday he would want to explore those complex feelings of inner turmoil, confusion and fear, which led him to “At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen.”

Because the script, in part, addresses the health disparities facing BIPOC LGBTQ+ people living with HIV, Dobama is partner- ning with the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland to provide free HIV testing, resources, and information to audiences. There will be post-show discussions following Saturday night perfor- mances throughout the run, featu- ring representatives from the AIDS Task Force as well as from Dobama artists involved with the production.

Another Full Circle engage- ment event will be held on Sat- urday, Feb. 10, when Dobama, in partnership with Near West Thea- tre and Veranda UNI, Cleveland’s tallest drag entertainer, will offer a Drag Story Hour for families at Dobama. UNI is creator of the Drag Pride Flag and is a mainstay of drag events in Greater Cleve- land, and Near West Theatre’s Drag Story Hour performances have been important in serving Cleveland’s LGBTQ+ community.

While “At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen” is appropriate only for adult audiences, Dobama’s Drag Story Hour will offer fami- lies a chance to be a part of the experience.

“This is a raucous, hilari- ous, entertaining, moving, and thought-provoking play that is equal parts drag show, comedy, and drama,” said Dobama’s Artist- istic Director Nathan Motta.

“We are thrilled to share this production with Northeast Ohio audiences and we’re just as excited about the collaborations and part- nerships that have made all the surrounding Full Circle events possible. This viral program is an example of what being a forward- thinking professional theater is all about.”

Also in the works as part of Full Circle programming is a Drag Cabaret Show as well as pre-show conversations with area drag en- tertainers.

For more information about these events, as they become available, and for a complete perfor- mance schedule and tickets, visit www.dobama.org.

Colin Anderson is the director of pro- duction at Dobama Theatre.

Friends of Cain Park seeks new board members

Lisa Mansari
Friends of Cain Park (FCP), an all-volunteer, 501(c)3 nonprofit or- ganization that supports Cain Park by raising funds and awareness, is seeking new members to join its board of directors. Applications will be accepted until Feb. 28.

Since 1997, the Friends have pro- vided more than $200,000 to help fund Cain Park’s programming, and promote and preserve the park as an historical, artistic and educational re- source for Northeast Ohio. FCP funds live music and other perfor- mances, art festival awards, stipends for non-union actors, and park beauti- fication projects.

Community members interested in furthering FCP’s mission are in- vited to apply to join its volunteer board. Each board member is asked to make an annual contribution in an amount of their choosing, because the board asks other individuals and foundations to support staff, programs and projects. While they receive no pay, board members have an opportunity to make a lasting impact on the Cleveland Heights community.

Currently comprising eight mem- bers, FCP’s board has begun to create a more formal operating approach. As part of its continued growth, the board seeks to add new talents and perspectives.

It seeks new members who are:
• available to attend monthly board meetings and volunteer at events, including the Cain Park Arts Fest- ival,
• interested in community develop- ment and involvement; and
• have a background or experience in any of the following: other board service, development (grant writ- ing, fundraising), finance, legal services, accounting, tax services, event management, nonprofit man- agement, community development, education, theater, social media, marketing.

Once all applications have been received, the board will review and discuss applicants’ interests and qualifications. Applicants selected to move on to the next stage will then meet with the board to learn more.

New board members will be selected based on interest, commit- ment to the mission, and broaden- ing the diversity of the current board.

The application is available on- line at https://bit.ly/FCPBoardApp. All applicants will be contacted no later than March 1.

Lisa Mansari is a 17-year resident of Cleveland Heights and a 17-year member of the Friends of Cain Park board.

Meals on Wheels needs CH volunteers

Joy Henderson
The Cleveland Heights Meals on Wheels program delivers two meals—one hot and one cold—four days a week to about 20 homebound senior citizens.

The organization is looking for additional volunteers to help one day a week, from approximately 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

To volunteer, or to request the meal service for yourself or a fami- ly member, contact the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging by phone (216-609-7542) or by e-mail (meal@ clevelandheights.gov).

The city’s Meals on Wheels program is operated by volunteers, with some staff support from the CH Office on Aging. The organi- zation is self-funded; clients pay $5.25 per day for the two meals.

Donations are welcome, and help the organization subsidize a few clients.

For more information about the program, visit https://chparks. com/509/Meals-On-Wheels.

Joy Henderson is a volunteer with Cleveland Heights Meals on Wheels.

Gabriel P. Jones, drummer. In addi- tion, there will be a bake sale before and after the concert.

Forest Hill Church (https:// fb.page.org/), a welcoming and af- firming community, is located at 7031 Monticello Blvd., in Cleveland Heights.

Ajab Hales is a writer, social thinker, and race educator from Cleveland. She has by- lines at VICE, Huffington Post, ZORA, The Breakdown, The Muse, Bold Culture and NPR. You can reach Ajab via Twit- ter at @AjabWrite, by e-mail at ajabh@ ajabhades.com, or by sending her a carrier pigeon. She might eat the pigeon.

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February talk preview April's total eclipse

The total solar eclipse of Monday, April 8, will be unlike anything experienced here in Northeast Ohio in our lifetime. At 3:13 p.m., the moon will be visible as a velvety black shape obscuring the bright face of the sun.

Partial solar eclipse phases happen frequently, but the last total solar eclipse over Ohio was in 1806. This was the pioneer era of the Western Reserve, the “pre-history” of the Heights.

Then, the future site of Cleveland Heights was a primeval woodland. A mere 10 years after Moses Cleaveland arrived, there were only a handful of settlers in Cuyahoga County. Maj. Terry arrived, and there were only a handful of settlers in Cuyahoga County. The first permanent settler of “Cleaveland,” lived in a log cabin along the Cuyahoga River.

In this early period of settlement, Euclid Heights was part of the original Cleveland Township. Years later, East Cleveland Township was created out of portions of Cleveland and Euclid townships, from which Cleveland Heights was eventually incorporated.

One early settler of Cleveland Township was Nathaniel Doan, who had a blacksmith shop at “Doan’s Corner” along Doan Brook in modern-day University Circle. As reported in the early histories of Charles Whittlesey and Crisfield Johnson, other early settlers fled the “ague” (likely malaria) infesting the swamps along the Cuyahoga.

These settlers relocated to the higher ground of the ridge near the present site of Cleveland Heights. “The Newburgh Road” ran south from Doan’s Corner to the mill at the waterfall along Mill Creek. The Newburgh Road was renamed Woodland Hills Avenue, later shortened to Woodhill Road, the southern part of which became E. 93rd Street in 1906.

These early settlers did not report any eclipse sightings. But this history lesson illustrates that it’s been a long time since a rare total solar eclipse has been seen in or around the Heights.

To learn more about the upcoming eclipse, the public is invited to attend an eclipse presentation at Mac’s Backs on Coventry on Saturday, Feb. 17, at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and at The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes on Thursday, Feb. 22, at 6 p.m.

Jay Ryan is a former contributor to Sky & Telescope magazine who has been popularizing astronomy since 1996. He lived near Cedar Lee during his childhood, and attended the original Fairfax Elementary School on Lee Road. Ryan will be giving the talk described in this article. To learn more, visit EclipseOverCleveland.com.

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Help elevate the Heights—join the FH board

Chris Jacobs

Are you filled with ideas and energy for improving our community? Can you give your time and talent to make the Heights an even better place in which to live?

FutureHeights (FH) is seeking candidates for its board of directors, to fill seats as current members’ terms expire. New board members will serve a three-year term. Applicants should be members of the Cleveland Heights or University Heights communities. Applicants should have a vested interest in the organization and the communities it serves, and have the time and talent to donate to the success of the organization and its programming.

Applications can be found at www.futureheights.org, and are due by Feb. 29. Interviews will be conducted shortly thereafter.

About FutureHeights

FH is a nonprofit community development corporation whose mission is to facilitate an equitable, prosperous, and vibrant future for Cleveland Heights and University Heights. FH board members, volunteers and staff work toward this mission through a variety of program areas, including:

• Housing: FH’s FutureHomes program (est. 2019) has overseen the purchase, rehab, and sale of more than 20 houses in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods. Its aim is to promote fair-housing practices and increased owner-occupancy rates. FH is currently rehabbing its 21st and 22nd homes. The 20 homes completed have resulted in a net gain of almost $3.5 million in home values.

• Community-Building and Strengths-Based Leadership: FH runs the Neighborhood Leadership Workshop, the twice-annual Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program (both est. 2015), and the Crowdsourced Conversations Forum Series (est. 2022), all of which serve to empower residents to engage with, and improve, this community.

• Economic Development: FH organizes and staffs events that promote Heights businesses, such as the Heights Music Hop and Best of the Heights awards, and assists the city of Cleveland Heights with community engagement on city development projects.

• Community Voice: FH publishes the Heights Observer (est. 2008), the free community newspaper for both Cleveland Heights and University Heights, now celebrating 15 years of service to the two communities. The Heights Observer represents citizen journalism, and provides a place where all stakeholders can share news and opinions about the Heights community.

Board service overview

The board comprises members of the Cleveland Heights and University Heights communities. Board members come from all walks of life, represent all neighborhoods, and bring their various skills, talents, and interests with them to assist the organization.

Board members participate actively by guiding the organization and its programming, providing staff and event support, fundraising, and serving on committees, and more. Serving a large and diverse area, the organization’s board and new members should reflect and represent the diversity of the Heights. Consideration will be given to ensure that the experiences, backgrounds, neighborhoods, or skills of new members add to the diversity of the organization at-large.

Board service provides opportunities to meet new neighbors, support projects in your own backyard, and give time and talent back to the Heights communities we love calling home.

Chris Jacobs is co-chair of the Future-Heights Board of Directors.

Celebrate 2023 mini-grants Feb. 6

Sarah Wolf

The Neighborhood Mini-Grant program administered by FutureHeights had its biggest year ever in 2023, awarding 21 projects a total of $15,392.

All community members are invited to a celebration on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 6-7:30 p.m., where award recipients will talk about their impactful community-building efforts and initiatives in Cleveland Heights and University Heights. The event will be hosted virtually via Zoom.

To register, visit the FutureHeights website, www.futureheights.org/2023-neighborhood-mini-grant-celebration.

The Neighborhood Mini-Grant Program offers up to $1,000 in funding for neighborhood-level projects. Annually, there are two rounds of funding, once in the spring and once in fall. The deadline to apply for spring 2024 is March 15.

For information on the program, and to apply, visit www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building/programs/mini-grants.

FutureHeights is grateful to the Cedars Legacy Fund for its ongoing support of the Neighborhood Mini-Grant program.

Anyone with questions regarding either the Feb. 6 celebration or the mini-grant program should send an e-mail to swolf@futureheights.org.

Sarah Wolf is the community-building programs manager at FutureHeights.
Crenshaw and Trimble join school board

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District has welcomed two new members to its Board of Education, Gabie Crenshaw and Phil Trimble.

Crenshaw and Trimble, who were elected in November, took the oath of office at the board’s Jan. 9 organizational meeting.

Crenshaw is a graduate of Cleveland Heights High School, along with her husband and their oldest daughter. Their youngest currently attends Heights High, and all three of their children attended Roxboro Middle School.

Crenshaw was appointed to the Heights Libraries Board in 2020 and finished her term as its president. She has served in various leadership roles in CH-UH parent groups, including as president of the Roxboro Middle School PTA and as diversity chair of the Heights High PTSA.

“As an education equity advocate with more than 20 years of professional experience working with students and educators, I recognized and welcomed the opportunity to add cultural competency to the Board of Education,” said Crenshaw.

Trimble, a data scientist for Cox Communications, has lived in the Noble neighborhood for 15 years. His daughter attended Noble Elementary School and is now a student at Monticello Middle School. This is his first elected position.

“I chose to run for office to bring the perspective of a current middle-school parent (and recent elementary-school parent) to the Board of Education,” said Trimble. “I’m a proud product of public education and am looking forward to working with the board to keep our district strong, well-funded, and equitable for the kids and families that we serve.”

Crenshaw and Trimble are taking over for departing board members Beverly Wright and Jim Posch, each of whom served two four-year terms, and did not seek re-election.

“It has been a privilege to serve with Beverly and Jim, who leave a legacy of equitable decision-making and genuine care for Heights schools. I am especially proud of their immeasurable contributions to the fight for fair school funding in Ohio,” said Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby. “I have worked with Gabie and Phil, both dedicated Heights parents, in various capacities over the years, and I look forward to benefiting from their experience and insight as board members.”

Also at the Jan. 9 meeting, the board elected Jodi Sourini as president, Malia Lewis as vice president, and Crenshaw as treasurer pro tem for 2024.

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights

DEC. 19, 2023 - regular meeting

Board members present were President Beverley Wright, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, James Pasch, and Jodi Sourini. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

Recognition of outgoing board members

Continuing board members Malia Lewis, Dan Heintz, and Jodi Sourini expressed appreciation for the service of outgoing members Jim Pasch and Beverly Wright, saying they always kept students as the main focus. Wright and Pasch expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve.

Board policies

The board questioned the vague language of policy 0142 stating a residency requirement for elected board members. The board decided to accept the policy and perhaps amend it for clarification after consulting other districts.

The board approved policies group B.

As required by policy 8210, the proposed calendars for school years 2024-25 and 2025-26 will be reviewed on the district website for public feedback.

Attendance incentive program

Brian Williams, Paul Gustafson, Kristine Campbell, and April White presented the Debbie Options Center incentive program, intended to improve attendance.

Superintendent’s update

The PBIS student outcome meetings are taking place with each elementary and middle school principal. The November principal meeting included review of fall benchmark readiness results, implementation of the ELA (English Language Arts) curriculum, student goal-setting, and instructional coaching. The District Leadership Team met to discuss benchmark assessment results in ELA, math, and first-quarter social studies and science. The district participates in MyCor, a youth development network that seeks to enable all Greater Cleveland children and young adults to access opportunities that allow them to become better adults. More information is available at www.mycorele.org/labs.

The Heights Schools Foundation received a grant to support additional mental health interventions and supports as part of the Mary Heath Schools program.

Also at the Jan. 9 meeting, the board elected Jodi Sourini as president, Malia Lewis as vice president, and Crenshaw as treasurer pro tem for 2024.

Cathan Cavanaugh is the supervisor of communications for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

Going shopping?

Here are 4 reasons to buy from local small businesses:

1. They’re part of the community’s character
2. They recirculate more of your money locally
3. They support local causes and institutions
4. If you don’t support them now, they may not be around later.
Library brings literary services to MetroHealth’s WIC office

Sheryl Banks

On a recent visit to the WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) office at the Severance MetroHealth Center, Youth Services Associate Danielle Maynard saw one of her regulars from the Noble Neighborhood branch library. “It was wonderful,” she said, describing “the sheer delight in the eyes of a young patron who couldn’t contain their excitement when they spotted Coco, the Storytime bear, making a special appearance outside the library.”

Maynard, and Coco, went to the WIC office to provide early literacy outreach services to the parents and children in the waiting room. Those services include reading books, playing games, and distributing literacy resources (“Words to Grow On” kits) while parents wait with their children for WIC services.

“WIC is a federal nutrition program designed to help low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children younger than 5,” said Maynard. “The waiting room of the WIC office at the MetroHealth building in Cleveland Heights is a great place for library outreach,” said Maynard, “because it provides a direct way to reach a population who can greatly benefit from the library’s outreach services.”

Maynard was inspired to create the outreach program after learning of the new WIC office, and hearing of successful “waiting room storytimes” at a local pediatrician’s office. After receiving permission from MetroHealth, she initiated weekly visits to the clinic. Positive feedback from WIC staff fueled Heights Libraries’ desire to expand outreach.

Maynard and other Heights Libraries staff visit the office twice a week, engaging with 15–26 people per visit. Beyond making waiting times for families more enjoyable, the initiative strengthens the library’s connection to families and gives valuable insights into their needs.

“Families are at WIC to support their children’s well-being,” said Maynard, “and we want to be right there with them. By sharing information, resources, and ‘Words to Grow On’ kits, we’re helping families nurture early literacy skills during those important first five years of a child’s life.”

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

Library welcomes new board member

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights University Heights Public Library System announced the appointment of its newest board member, Hallie Turnberrez, whose term began in January. She will serve a seven-year term on the library board, replacing outgoing board president Max Gerboc, whose seven-year term ended in December.

Turnberrez is a staff attorney at the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court and a member of the University Heights Civil Service Commission. She graduated from the Case Western Reserve University School of Law and has lived in University Heights for seven years.

“I am passionate about community engagement—especially in relation to the few community spaces that are free for all people,” said Turnberrez. “Libraries are one of the few remaining guaranteed free spaces in society. This means libraries are now even more important to the health of the community.”

“Public service is a core value of mine,” Turnberrez added, “and I strive to serve where my skill set is needed.”

Gerboc was appointed to the library board in 2016, and his tenure included the purchase of the Coventry PEACE Park and building, the COVID-19 pandemic, the elimination of fines, and the beginning of the Noble Neighborhood branch renovation.

“We will truly miss Max’s passion and support of our mission,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “He also was very supportive of the library staff, and had great respect for them, which they in turn deeply appreciated.”

Gerboc’s parting message to staff and the Heights library community included a call to action. “Threats abound and are real, so if you love the library and care about its future, get involved,” he said. “Take advantage of the incredible programming, learn something new, consume some media for pure pleasure and for free, apply to join the board, join the Friends, etc. Whatever your passion, you can find some way to express it through the library.”

Gerboc has been succeeded as board president by Vikas Turakhia, who previously served as board vice president and chair of its operations committee.

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

Meeting highlights

DEC. 18, 2023

Board members present were Patti Carlyle, Dana Fluellen, Max Gręboc (president), Annette Iwamoto (secretary), Tyler McGowan, Melissa Soto-Schwartz, and Vikas Turakhia (vice president).

Fund for the Future of Heights Libraries

Jackie Nashman, president of Fund for the Future of Heights Libraries, reported on the hiring of the new fund advisor and stated that the donor stewarding fund raised $11,143.78. She presented a $150,000 increase to the PEACE Fund. Total donations to the park fund, from the fund, to date, total $282,000.

Board actions

The board authorized/approved:

• Funds for property, liability, and cyber insurance.
• A "by-law change" to keep the board updated as needed.
• Ask for a real-estate property-tax advance.
• The 2023 permanent appropriation.
• The 2024 permanent appropriation, in the amount of $16,587,796.22.
• Furniture purchase for New Millennium Branch youth services.
• A new sign for the Noble Neighborhood Branch.
• A change order for the structural design required for the Noble Neighborhood Branch construction.

Personal report

The board approved a settlement claim and the 2024 staff salary table. A 2024 staffing plan is being developed to prepare for re-opening the Noble Neighborhood Branch and filing other positions.

Director’s report

Board Member Annette Iwamoto was named one of Crain's Cleveland Business 40 under 40 honorees in November. The collections department has increased nearly all of its budget. Use of multi-vendor purchase orders this year led to greater efficiency, cutting the number of purchase orders in half. More trees will be added to Coventry and Lee Road Branches.

Director’s report

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Senior soloist performs Vivaldi Feb. 9

Eve McPherson

On Feb. 8 and Feb. 9, Cleveland Heights High School (CHHS) will present two Instrumental Music Department (IMD) concerts. Both will begin at 7 p.m. and take place in the school’s auditorium.

The performance on Thursday, Feb. 8, will feature Concert Band, Symphonic Band, Jazz Ensemble and Symphonic Winds.

The concert on Friday, Feb. 9, will feature Monticello and Roxboro Middle School Eighth Grade Orchestra students alongside the Concert Orchestra, Philharmonic Strings, Heights High Symphony, and senior soloist Marquis Payton performing Vivaldi’s G Major Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.

Payton began playing violin in fifth grade at Oxford Elementary School. He continued playing at Monticello Middle School and credits his Monticello classmate Nathaniel Tisch, also a senior soloist, for his ongoing interest in music performance. In high school, Payton joined the non-audition Concert Orchestra before advancing to the middle-level orchestra, Philharmonic Strings. He then moved on to the Heights High Symphony, the school’s highest-level orchestra.

Over the years, Daniel Heim, Heights High’s director of orchestras, has observed Payton’s strong leadership and his commitment to improving as a player. “What’s amazing about Marquis is how quickly he learns things because he just has a work ethic that is like hardly anybody I’ve ever seen,” Heim commented.

Payton regularly participates in Heights High’s chamber music program, has worked as a counselor in the Reaching Heights Summer Music Camp, and performed in the school’s pit orchestra in last fall’s performances of “Sister Act.” In his junior year, Payton received a scholarship for private instruction and began working with Stewart Pharis, an accomplished violinist and violist who volunteers for CHHS music programs. The two regularly meet during lunch periods and after school, balancing lessons with Payton’s track participation.

At CHHS, Payton is a 400-meter sprinter and pole vaulter; he took first place in pole vaulting at a recent Lake Erie League Championship. Last summer, Pharis suggested Payton learn Vivaldi’s G Major Concerto for his senior solo audition. In the audition, Payton played all three movements of the concerto and recalled that, after he finished playing, he was surprised to hear applause from the judges. “I wasn’t paying attention to anything except for what I was playing,” said Payton. “I kind of forgot they were there.” Payton will play the entire concerto on Feb. 9. Considered the “father of the concerto,” Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) wrote more than 500 concertos, with approximately 230 for violin. Payton will also perform at the district’s middle schools as part of outreach offered by Heights IMD students.

After graduation, Payton plans to attend Cleveland State University and major in biology with a minor in music. He wants to become a physical therapist, but keep playing violin. “I feel like it’s just part of me at this point,” he explained.

Asked about his experience in the IMD, Payton said, “I really like the people here, because there are a lot of people that are passionate about playing and you can hear it.” He thanks Pharis for his guidance, Heim for seeing his potential, fellow senior soloist Sophie Muller for encouraging him to play well, Tisch for sparking his interest, the entire orchestra for his experience with the ensemble, and his parents for their support and for always wanting to hear him play.

Eve McPherson is professor of music at Kent State University at Trumbull and co-president of the Heights Band and Orchestra Parent Organization.

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Marquis Payton
Cameron Gorman

Though winter can be dreary, Heights Arts’ first exhibitions of the year aim to warm up visitors through light, color, and abstraction. The Cleveland Heights-based, multi-disciplinary arts organization debuted two new shows on Jan. 12: Prismatic and Spotlight: Amelia C. Joynes. Prismatic features five artists, working in varying disciplines and mediums. Hope Hickman primarily works in the realm of sculpture, Marianne Hite creates fused-glass hangings, Sue Kirchner works in encaustic wax, and Cherie Lesnick and Patricia Zinsmeister Parker utilize paint and mixed media for their pieces.

“When light is emitted or reflected through glass, it lends a certain quality to the piece that nothing else can duplicate,” said Hite, who employs enameling, sandblasting, and laminating in creating her glasswork. “Moreover, the effects of heat, and infiltration of such a distinct and elusive medium invigorating.”

“I have always been involved with creative arts and encouraged to explore new possibilities as a passage to new ways of seeing and creating,” Joynes said. “My artwork challenges me to re-envision possibilities in the way I use artistic materials within my environment.”

As a multidisciplinary nonprofit, Heights Arts also seeks to support the written word. On Feb. 15, Heights Arts will host Ekphrastacy: Artist Talk and Poets Respond, an accompanying program that celebrates the literary arts through new poems composed in response to the two shows on view. Local poets Milenko Budimir, Mimi Pleavin-Foust, and Stephanie Ginese will join Heights Poet Laureate Siarra Freeman in viewing and responding to the pieces.

Also in February, Heights Arts’ musical programming includes both a Gallery Concert and an installment of Close Encounters—Mozart and Mendelssohn: String Quartets. Gallery Concerts provide paid opportunities for local musicians of diverse backgrounds and musical genres to perform in a unique, gallery setting, while Close Encounters, Heights Arts’ signature chamber music series, features members of the Cleveland Orchestra.

For a complete listing of upcoming events, visit www.heightsarts.org.

A Message from County Executive Chris Ronayne

As we embark on our reading journey in February, I encourage you to have some thrilling book adventures. I enjoyed meeting and reading with students at Charles A. Mooney School in Cleveland in January. It was truly an inspiring experience, and I can’t wait to share the video of that visit with you this spring. But there’s still so much more to do. Cuyahoga Reads participants have logged 438,620 minutes, but we can do better. I urge children, teens, and their families in Cuyahoga County to keep reading! Let’s all commit to reading more books this year. Currently, I’m absorbed in Last Train to Paradise by Les Standiford. What about you? What book are you reading right now?

Cuyahoga Reads Literacy Tips

If your child loves watching movies and TV shows, remind them that many of their favorite stories began as books, such as the Harry Potter or the Percy Jackson series. Many books are slated to be turned into movies and TV series in 2024, including several children’s and young adults’ books like The Tiger’s Apprentice, Hanid and the Purple Crayon, It’s Not Summer Without You, Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief, Geek Girl, and The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Field Guide. As a family, read the books ahead of the films’ release and engage children in a conversation about which version they preferred – the book or the movie/TV series. Remember to post a family picture using the hashtag #CuyahogaReads.

Cuyahoga Reads Report

This Valentine’s Day and the days that follow, let’s not forget the timeless joy that books bring into our lives. Whether it’s the sweeping romance of classic novels, the heartwarming tales of friendship, or the empowering narratives of self-love, literature has a unique way of capturing the essence of what it means to love and be loved. This month, consider visiting one of the nine local public libraries in Cuyahoga County. You can also use the Libby app to download an audiobook that you and your family can all listen to together. Which books do you love? Share a pic of a book that is close to your heart with the hashtag #CuyahogaReads.

Cuyahoga Reads Literary Tips

OverDrive

If your child loves watching movies and TV shows, remind them that many of their favorite stories began as books, such as the Harry Potter or the Percy Jackson series. Many books are slated to be turned into movies and TV series in 2024, including several children’s and young adults’ books like The Tiger’s Apprentice, Hanid and the Purple Crayon, It’s Not Summer Without You, Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief, Geek Girl, and The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Field Guide. As a family, read the books ahead of the films’ release and engage children in a conversation about which version they preferred – the book or the movie/TV series. Remember to post a family picture using the hashtag #CuyahogaReads.
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Who else is there?

SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

On a Cleveland Heights-themed Facebook group, someone asked what kind of strange things people found after moving into their Cleveland Heights homes. People named a lot of weird things. One of them was a ghost. I know those people. Let’s call them the Burtons. I’ve been in their house. It has never seemed haunted, but they have some stories.

The house, in the Cedar-Fairmount area, was built in about 1921. It had only one owner until the Burtons moved there, in 1986. Well, there was another owner, briefly, who bought the house to make some repairs and sell it, but never lived there.

When the Burtons moved in, the wife kept telling the husband that she heard footsteps on the third floor, which was an unfinished, unheated attic. He kept telling her that old houses make noises—expanding and contracting due to temperature fluctuations. She kept saying that it sounded like footsteps.

When their son reached high-school age, they had the third floor fixed up for him to live up there, doing major remodeling work on all three rooms, including a bathroom with ancient tub and sink. Some older neighbors remembered hearing about a couple of people—servants, possibly—who had lived up there in the 1940s.

After the son moved upstairs, strange things started happening. He would come home and go upstairs to turn on the air conditioner, and then come back downstairs till the third floor was cool enough to occupy. Except sometimes he would then come back down and ask if anyone had turned off his air conditioner. No one had. I mean, no one who was living . . .

The same thing happened with the lights: He’d have them on, come downstairs to get something, and go back up—and then come down again, to ask if anyone had been up there and turned the lights off, because they were now off.

Sometimes Mr. Burton would sleep on the much-cooler third floor on hot summer nights. But when he did, he would often get woken up by, for instance, hearing people calling his name. Well, it’s a dream, he’d think. But it happened only when he slept up there. Or he’d hear other noises—like hammering or loud knocking. He’d sleepily think: Oh, it’s someone doing some work next door. Though, as he regained consciousness, he’d say, “But not at four in the morning.” Or, when it sounded like knocking, he’d go downstairs to check, but everyone else was sleeping, and no one appeared to be at the outside doors.

Their high-school aged daughter continued on page 19.

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She told him about various incidents, and she said, “Yes. I see the highest order, can describe, in detail, the girl she saw—who, she always used to look at that window. Remember that when I was little, I spun around and said, “Don’t you see a man, not a girl. His daughter must be a fake, because she said she saw a man, not a girl. His daughter about his chat with the medium, but added that the woman is a skeptic of mediumship, but she often showed to her friends. One day Mrs. Burton came down from the third floor, to the second-floor hallway, near the daughter’s room, and saw what she was. The unknown girl passed her and headed down the main stairs to the first floor.

Mrs. Burton knocked on the daughter’s door, which was right there, and asked who that other girl was. But the daughter came out of the bathroom, where she had just taken a shower, and said, “What girl? What are you talking about?”

This woman, who is a skeptic of the highest order, can describe, in detail, the girl she saw—who, she says, turned to look at her before going downstairs.

Around this time, Mr. Burton met a woman who was, he was told, a well-known medium from Canada. He told her about these incidents, and she said, “Yes, I see an old man with craggy features.” Mr. Burton thought: Okay, she’s a quack, because my wife used to look at that window in the door and see an old man with craggy features, for a second?”

He did remember that. Not long after, the ghosts seemed to push Mr. Burton down the third-floor stairs. He was only mildly injured. But then they left. It seems.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications, the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author, and a member editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author, and a member of the National Treasury Association.

For more information and updates about Freeze Fest, visit www.frezeefest.com or follow Cain Park on social media.

Cain Park Freeze Fest attendees will also get a sneak peek at the 2024 Cain Park concert and theater season.

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