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# Park Bugle

St. Anthony Park / Falcon Heights  
Lauderdale / Como Park

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April 2021

## Lion House now sober house for women in recovery

By Scott Carlson

It's called The Lion House, a mammoth 107-year-old mansion on Midway Parkway in the Como neighborhood.

Built in 1914 for \$17,000 by Thomas Frankson, a real estate developer and one-time Minnesota lieutenant governor; the house originally sat on 120-acres of platted farmland called Frankson's Como Park Addition. The mansion boasted more than dozen rooms, a workshop, a carriage house for up to seven cars, glazed porcelain tile brick, a green tile roof, 120 windows and massive stone lions standing guard at the front walk (thus the name The Lion House).

Once home to a dance studio, the three-story mansion Lion House today is a sober house for women recovering from chemical dependency. At any given time, the house, with its eight bedrooms and bathrooms, can accommodate 14 women.

Patrick Flanagan, a former financial services bond trader and a recovering alcoholic, bought the Lion House in 2019 with his business partner Tom Rothstein for \$820,000 with the goal of making it a sober home for women.

"There's 4,000 sober living beds in the Twin Cities," said Flanagan, chief recovery officer of St. Paul-based The Irishman and Associates, a full-service alcohol and drug intervention and case management firm. "I want-

ed to provide an experience that's about the guest's recovery. A different experience than what most experience.

"I found The Lion House online and thought it would be an amazing sober living house in a great, safe neighborhood," Flanagan, 47, said in an email. "I wanted the guests to be proud of their sober living. They feel excited to live here, it's not further punishment."

Flanagan knows all too well the dark side of chemical dependency—and the price.

A heavy drinker since his college days, Flanagan found alcohol taking control of him in his early 40s.

"It was affecting my life, my relationships and my career," he said. "It was really taking away from the dad, the husband and the co-worker I wanted to be. I think as my kids were older, I didn't have as many daily responsibilities. I was successful financially and was coasting a little."

"At the time, I lived in this beautiful house, my kids were in private school and I belonged to a country club. It looked so good on the outside. But things were getting worse and worse on the inside."

Five years ago, Flanagan's family and close friends prevailed on him to enter treatment at Hazelden.

"But I went into that angry, not accepting and not surrendering to the disease. When I got



The Lion House, a grand mansion in the Como Park neighborhood, is now a sober house for women in recovery. Photo by Cigale Ahlquist.

out after 28 days I didn't do any programming. Then I was dry, but not sober. When you're dry, you're not drinking for everyone else. It took me three more years and more trips in and out of rehab to get sober for myself."

When Flanagan finally accepted seeking sobriety for himself, he lived in sober living for six months in 2019, dove into Alcoholics Anonymous and saw the benefits of sober living. But he also lost his marriage in the process.

In 2020, Flanagan began developing The Lion House. A big plus in finding The Lion House up for sale: The mansion needed very little renovation. "For the last 20 years the same family lived at the mansion and took impeccable care of the home, Flanagan said.

Flanagan credits Tara Heald, manager of The Lion House, for much of its success.

"She, like me, has two years of sobriety and has a relationship with every guest and their family," he said. "Tara is a single mother who lives in Woodbury. She is so present in the house and an amaz-

ing role model of recovery for the women who stay with us.

"Once word got out through referrals, it's been amazing," Flanagan said. "We have 14 beds and we are full with a waiting list."

For all of its success, however, the sober house also has faced challenges. For example, starting up during the pandemic hasn't been easy.

"We're taking precautions with cleaning and masks," Flanagan said. "We don't allow many people inside who don't live here or don't have a purpose in terms of recovery or maintenance."

Because the house is 7,200 square feet, the residents have plenty of space to spread out for living and setting up home offices, a rarity for sober homes, Flanagan said.

One drawback during Covid: Having AA meetings close down.

"Thank God Zoom became what it did for the recovery community," Flanagan said. "It's been huge. It has saved a lot of lives. A

Lion House to p. 3

## COVID-19 takes its toll on local care facilities

By Cigale Ahlquist

In the year since the first COVID-19 cases were reported in the United States in March 2020, more than 28 million people had tested positive for the virus and more than 500,000 had died, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control.

In Minnesota, there had been more than 525,000 coronavirus cases and more than 6,500 deaths during that period, the state Department of Health reported.

Residents of senior living facilities were among the most affected.

Locally, there were 150 COVID-19 cases and 49 COVID deaths in the past year, as of March 2, among residents of Lyngblomsten's Care Center, which is licensed to house up to 225 people, Sam Patet, the facility's communications director, said in an email. An additional seven cases of COVID-19 infections and two deaths were reported among residents of Lyngblomsten's 165 senior apartments.

Meanwhile, St. Anthony Park Home, an 84-bed skilled nursing facility that had 70 residents in mid-March, recorded 26

COVID-19 cases and five COVID deaths among its residents during the past year, administrator John Barker reported in an email.

The pandemic also affected employees of both facilities. Lyngblomsten—which employs a staff of 426, including 368 in the Care Center—had 170 COVID cases among staffers in the year up to March 2, while St. Anthony Park Home had 40 cases among its staff of 140 during the same period. Neither reported a staff death due to COVID in the past year.

Local care facilities to p. 3

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## CITY FILES

## Como and St. Anthony Park community council news

District 10  
Community CouncilComo outreach to  
homeless neighbors

During the coldest weekend of the winter season, Como residents showed they don't take warmth for granted.

Responding to a call from the Como Community Council, individuals, families and church groups nearly filled a U-Haul with gloves, mittens, socks, blankets, quilts, hats, scarves, sweaters, coats and other winter gear. To make all those donations happen, more than 20 volunteers stood out in below-zero cold on Feb. 13 and 14 to collect contributions. All donations went to the former Bethesda Hospital, where Ramsey County is operating a temporary homeless shelter for people previously living on the streets.

The Community Council also collected more than \$2,600 in donations from more than 50 local residents. Those funds will help Ramsey County's Housing Stability program provide additional supplies to serve homeless neighbors.

Community matters  
more than ever

Want to have a greater voice in decisions that affect your neighborhood? Consider running for the District 10 Community Council board.

Nine seats are up for election in April to the District 10 board.



Volunteers Joanne Swanson and Annie Huidekoper take in donations from Como residents. Photo submitted by District 10 Community Council.

Most of the openings on the volunteer board do not have an incumbent running.

Any community member in District 10, age 16 or older, is eligible to run. Simple truth: We do better as a community when the board reflects the full strength of Como: renters, homeowners, local institutions, businesses and neighbors of all kinds—regardless of color, age, ethnicity, income, gender, faith or how deep your roots are in the neighborhood or in Saint Paul.

Board seats up for election this year include chair person, secretary, one representative from

each of the neighborhoods' four sub-districts and three representatives from the neighborhood at large. These positions are two-year terms, through April 2023.

For further information or to get on the ballot, apply now at [www.district10comopark.org/candidate.html](http://www.district10comopark.org/candidate.html). **The filing deadline is Sunday April 4.** The election is April 20.

## Voting in District 10 elections

Request your ballot now to vote in the April board elections for the Como Community Council.

District 10 community mem-

bers can vote from home: You can vote online, or by returning a paper ballot through the mail. (Because of current restrictions on public gatherings, there will be no in-person voting.)

**To request a ballot:** Fill out the registration form at [www.district10comopark.org/ballot.html](http://www.district10comopark.org/ballot.html). We'll send ballots beginning Friday, April 9.

- If you intend to vote online, we need your request by Tuesday, April 20, at 5 p.m.

- If you want a paper ballot, we need your request by Wednesday, April 14.

**People eligible to vote are:** Renters, homeowners and other residents of District 10 who are at least 16 years old. Also eligible are representatives from business, nonprofits or other organizations with a physical presence in District 10. If you have questions, email: [district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org).

## Old media navigate new era

As more people get their information (and misinformation) from social media sites, and as daily, weekly and monthly local newspapers scale back or fold altogether, what's the future of local news?

The Como Community Council's Sunday Series features a panel discussion with Tesha Christensen from the Monitor, Scott Carlson from the Park Bugle and Kelly Smith from the Star Tribune.

The online presentation is scheduled for 1 to 2:30 p.m., Sunday, May 2. It will include time for Q&A. To attend via phone or Zoom, email [district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org). We'll send you access information.

## Free food Fridays continue

The Como Community Council and Sanneh Foundation will continue distributing free food boxes every Friday through the end of April.

The food is available to Ramsey County residents dealing with financial hardships because of Covid-19. Food will be distributed from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. (or until supplies run out). The location is the north parking lot of Niem Phat Buddhist Temple, at Dale Street and Front Avenue. The dates are March 26 and April 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30.

Reservations are recommended. To reserve a box, fill out the form at [www.district10comopark.org/mealbox.html](http://www.district10comopark.org/mealbox.html).

The boxes typically contain meat, fresh produce and dairy.

## District 10 meetings

Pandemic or not, renters, homeowners, and other community members are always welcome to participate in District 10's board and committee meetings. You can join either by video conference or by phone.

To obtain links, phone numbers, or other access information, send a request by email to: [district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org). Or, call 651-644-3889. Upcoming meetings:

- **Anti-Racism Work Group:** Wednesday, March 31

- **Neighborhood Relations:** Tuesday, April 6

- **Land Use:** Wednesday, April 7

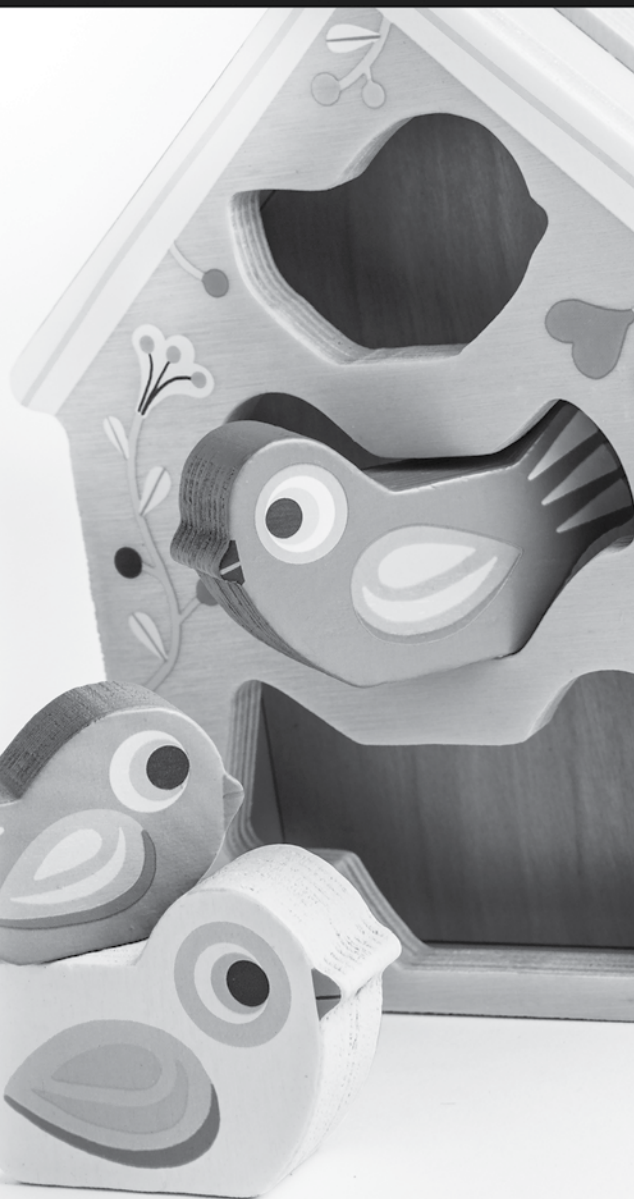
- **Environment:** Wednesday, April 14

- **Board meeting (and annual meeting):** Tuesday, April 20

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# Financing woes stall Lauderdale senior apartment project

By Anne Holzman

The city of Lauderdale will have to wait at least until July to see if state affordable housing financing is available to assist developers in building a proposed senior apartment complex at the former Lauderdale School site, 1795 Eustis St.

Major construction work won't start until affordable housing financing is in place possibly from the July distribution of tax credits and bonding authority from Minnesota Management and Budget.

Meanwhile, the city recently authorized Bauer Brothers, of Minneapolis, to begin salvaging items of interest from the old school and then putting them up for sale through City Hall.

Salvage items may include wooden trim, railings, doors, flooring, cabinetry, bathroom fixtures, drinking fountains, emergency signage, windows, lighting,

chalkboards and a heating and cooling unit.

The developer, Real Estate Equities, has planned 114 senior apartments for the site, designated as "affordable housing" in the 50 percent to 70 percent eligibility bracket of Area Median Income under federal, state and Metropolitan Council rules.

The units would be available for income eligible renters ages 55 and up.

Lauderdale Mayor Mary Gaasch said funding shortage for affordable housing is a perennial topic among Twin Cities mayors when they gather to discuss issues affecting their cities.

"The frustrating part is the (state) Office of Management and Budget has changed the criteria for priority," Gaasch said, referring to the way in which applications are approved.

Further complicating the cities'

efforts is the authority of counties to prioritize distribution of funds, she said. "One part of the puzzle is that some counties have chosen to prioritize 30 percent (of AMI)," Gaasch said, referring to the income eligibility guidelines for renters.

Gaasch said larger cities have an edge in meeting the various targets because they have old buildings available for renovation, which are less expensive than new construction.

"In the suburbs," she said, "we have to build something new."

Gaasch said she doesn't question the need for public funding assistance in order to carry out the project.

"The developers aren't making a whole lot of money; they have tiny margins," Gaasch said. "The problem is married to the cost of construction."

Some utility and street work

already has been done to prepare for the senior apartment complex. City administrator Heather Butkowski said work also continues behind the scenes to line up other financing and take care of other aspects of the project.

She said that while senior housing has been a priority in surveys of residents over the years, it also would open up affordable housing for families as seniors vacate their single-family homes.

"When seniors can move out of their homes to places better suited to aging, they open up housing opportunities for families," Butkowski said. "We can't build our way out of the (affordable housing) problem because new home construction is so expensive compared to existing housing stock."

Whatever the pace to get new housing construction underway, longtime Lauderdale resi-

dent Kathy Bernstrom Lorfald has been compiling memorabilia from school alumni to produce a commemorative book about the former Lauderdale school. She said a recent announcement that salvaged keepsakes will be put up for sale seems to have spurred renewed interest in the project.

"People have been submitting a lot of class photos," Lorfald said, as well as programs, report cards and other documents. "It's been an amazing amount."

Lorfald said the working title to her commemorative book is "History and Memories of Lauderdale School." She said anyone who wants to lend or donate materials should call City Hall at 651-792-7650 to arrange submissions. ■

Anne Holzman covers Falcon Heights and Lauderdale government news for the Bugle.

## Lion House from p. 1

lot of our guests came from one form of isolation or another. With 14 women in the house you can't isolate. It's part of the mission. Sober living has helped keep them from isolation in recovery."

Meanwhile, Flanagan said the Como community has been a strong supporter of The Lion House program, buoyed by his promises to maintain the history of the house inside and out.

"Now we get emails from neighbors offering to bring cookies or pets by the house," he said. ■

Scott Carlson is managing editor of the Bugle

## Local care facilities from p. 1

"We have been fully staffed," Barker said, "but it is not easy."

COVID-19 illness among employees at Lyngblomsten has not caused staffing shortages, Patet said, noting that the facility hasn't had to use temporary agency nursing services.

Patet said the number of resident and employee COVID-19 cases there has remained low since late December, after an increase the last three months of 2020. As of early March, the Lyngblomsten Care Center had no active cases among its residents or its employees.

### Vaccines getting administered

St. Anthony Park Home also had no cases among staff or residents as

of early March and only one employee COVID case since Jan. 1, Barker said. He added that 99 percent of his staff and residents have been vaccinated since that program began in late December.

"The vaccine gives hope," Barker said. "I don't think anything changes this year. But by the summer of 2022, we may get some normalcy back in our lives."

CVS Health, in partnership with the CDC's Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program, has held three vaccine clinics for residents and employees of Lyngblomsten's Care Center. As of early March, 96 percent of Care Center residents had had at least one dose of the Moderna vaccine, and 94 percent had received both

doses. About 75 percent of Care Center employees had received at least one dose of the vaccine.

"We are cautiously optimistic that in the coming months, life will slowly, but surely, be able to return to normal for our residents and staff," Patet said in his email. "While our residents have had some opportunities to socialize with family, friends and one another for several months—for example, small-group activities, essential-caregiver visits, family/friend visits inside our campus's chapel—they are looking forward to more opportunities as conditions develop favorably." ■

Cigale Ahlquist is a Twin Cities freelance writer for the Bugle

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The Park Bugle is a monthly non-profit community newspaper serving St. Anthony Park, Lauderdale, Falcon Heights and Como Park. The Bugle reports and analyzes community news and promotes the exchange of ideas and opinions in these communities. The Bugle strives to promote freedom of expression, enhance the quality of life in the readership communities and encourage community participation.

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## EDITORIAL

### From the Desk of the Editor

By Scott Carlson

#### Light at the end of the tunnel

By the time this issue of the Bugle hits your mailbox or shows up around town at various bulk distribution sites, I will have received my second coronavirus vaccine.

Frankly, I sometimes doubted whether this day was ever going to come. Not just for myself but for our nation, as a whole, as we longingly look forward to returning to a more “normal life.”

At various times during the past year, the situation was overwhelmingly dire. Millions of people infected, millions more people dead from this scourge. Hospitals at or beyond the breaking point from caring for sick and dying patients. First responders under siege. Families and friends often at odds on how to respond to the pandemic.

I hope that all of you have or will be able to soon get the vaccine be it Pfizer, Moderna or John-

son & Johnson. What our doctors, medical researchers and pharmaceutical companies accomplished in coming up with vaccines in such a brief period of time is nothing short of miraculous.

And if you have gotten vaccinated, you are among those blessed to have made it to this point, who have escaped serious illness and, in the worst case scenario, the Covid Grim Reaper.

In this issue of the Bugle, freelance writer Cigale Ahlquist reports on the toll that Covid-19 has taken on senior citizens at two of our local nursing homes, Lyngblomsten and Saint Anthony Park Home. Her story has special meaning to me: My mother Joan, a resident at Lyngblomsten Care Center, succumbed to COVID-19 last May.

Now, I look forward to our country opening up again, with opportunities for people to gather at restaurants, offices, ballparks and so many other venues that made up our old way of life.

That said, however, there will be plenty of scars that will never fully heal.

#### Bugle extras

We had an abundance of copy for our April edition and not enough space to showcase it all.

Our Bugle extras included a photo of the Como High School girls basketball team, a news item from the District 10 Community Council and the monthly Ask the Librarian column.

For these and other items, please check our website at <http://parkbugle.org>.

#### Upcoming Bugle deadlines

Here are our Bugle deadlines for the next three issues. As always, we appreciate when writers and readers submit their articles early. Aside from breaking news, most articles can be submitted ahead of the scheduled deadlines.

Please note our publication dates represent when the newspapers go out for delivery. Mail distribution of the paper may take up to several business days. Meanwhile, bulk drop-offs of the paper around town are completed in two to three days after publication.

#### Issue Copy and ad deadlines Publication

Issue	Copy and ad deadlines	Publication
<b>May 2021</b> (Home & Garden)	Apr. 14	Apr. 27
<b>June 2021</b>	May 12	May 25
<b>July 2021</b>	June 16	June 29

## COMMENTARY

### The violence in our streets and remembering Philando Castile

By Michael Kleber-Diggs

Like many gains in the American struggle for civil rights for everyone, the recent decision of the Falcon Heights City Council to name a portion of Larpenteur Avenue “Philando Castile Memorial Avenue” tastes bittersweet.

The ideal outcome—man not pulled over by police for having a broad nose, man continues compassionate work in schools—is not available to Philando Castile. What’s left for all of us is to work toward better.

I commend the City Council for its vote. I commend them for all the work they have done since Mr. Castile was killed. While we work for lasting change, I begrudgingly favor some recognition over none, ground gained over ground lost, remembering over forgetting, symbolic gestures over apathy, crumbs over starvation.

I was born 11 days after Martin Luther King was assassinated. In

my almost 53 years in America, I’ve learned a lot about its appetite for destruction. The Black experience here, the experience of indigenous people, of Latinx people, of Asian people, of Middle Eastern people, of immigrants, is a centuries-long experience of injustice, violence, backlash in response to progress and erasure.

The sad reality is, in America, people of color too often achieve enduring recognition because of tragedy.

Mr. Castile is worthy of our recognition; he always was. A St. Paul High School Central grad, a longtime employee of our public schools, beloved among students he knew by name, enduring now through his family and friends. Mr. Castile has a scholarship bearing his name at Central, and the Philando Castile Relief Foundation continues his effort to keep kids from going hungry at school.

We are right to remember Mr. Castile and how he died. Because

we cannot change the past, remembering it is among the things we have left.

As I write this, the trial for one of the four Minneapolis Police officers who are accused of killing George Floyd is about to begin. I won’t guess at the outcome except to say I expect it will be bitter-sweet too.

Whatever decision is reached, it will not be accompanied by the policy changes that are needed to end the long history of institutional violence against people of color.

When I heard about Philando Castile Memorial Avenue, I did something I should have done years ago. I looked up the namesake for Larpenteur Avenue, Auguste Louis Larpenteur.

Larpenteur arrived in this area in 1843, 15 years before Minnesota became a state. He is remembered as a settler and fur trader. He also worked in real estate. I don’t know enough to disparage the man, but

I have, over the years, come to see “settler” as a near-perfect expression of how we whitewash history in America.

It almost sounds like a compliment, a noble thing, but behind the appellation there lies tremendous violence. The same is true of “fur trader.”

I’ve learned to be wary of men who worked in “real estate” in the 19th century, men who arrived at a place where people already lived and “acquired” ownership of land.

As I read about Larpenteur, I found myself wondering less about what we honor when we create Philando Castile Memorial Avenue and more about what we honor on the rest of our streets.

I found myself thinking about America’s quieter, more hidden violence, and what festers when we forget our history. ■

*Michael Kleber-Diggs, who lives in Como Park, is a poet, essayist and literary critic.*

### SAP Area Seniors adapts to COVID challenges

By Dave Healy

During the pandemic, people have been doing a lot of pivoting, finding new ways to carry on activities.

Like many nonprofits, St. Anthony Park Area Seniors has also pivoted during the past year. According to Board Chairwoman Marge Avoles, SAPAS moved in-person exercise classes and a care givers support group online. They added activities to their e-news-

letter, website and Facebook page that people can do at home.

SAPAS also started several new services and activities. Hello Service enables a family member or caregiver to set up wellness checks for a senior by calling the SAPAS office (651-642-9052) and negotiating a contract. SAPAS staff then make regular calls to check on the senior’s welfare. Also, Zoom poetry classes provided a supportive environment for participants to share their literary works. The or-

ganization serves upwards of 330 senior citizens annually.

To expand virtual participation opportunities for seniors lacking the requisite technology, SAPAS purchased iPads and Internet hot spots that people can borrow.

To compensate for the pandemic-dictated pause of the St. Anthony Park Leisure Center’s in-person weekly luncheons, SAPAS—which cooperates with Leisure Center—began hosting a virtual gathering, the Lunch

Bunch, on alternate Wednesdays. During that hour, SAPAS staff check in with seniors, oversee online bingo and show a video.

Besides the Leisure Center, SAPAS cooperates with a variety of other organizations and services including Meals on Wheels, Juniper, the University of Minnesota’s Farmhouse Fraternity, Gifts for Seniors, St. Anthony Park Public Library and many others.



COMMENTARY

The case for a St. Paul rent stabilization ordinance

By Joe Krivit

In 2015, a powerful area real estate developer purchased an apartment complex in Richfield. The new owner rebranded the property, “Concierge,” raised rents and instituted income- and credit-score requirements for new tenants. For—at the time—current tenants of the building, this meant eviction. Nearly 670 households were displaced as a result of this “up-marketing.” One hundred ninety-five of the tenants filed a class-action lawsuit and eventually won a \$605,000 settlement in federal court. In reality, this amounted to about \$1,600 in recovery per tenant after legal fees were distributed. That was little more than the current monthly rent at the Concierge apartments for a one-bedroom apartment. (The apartment complex is now owned by a California based holding company.) Under a proposed rent stabilization ballot initiative by the group Housing Equity Now Saint Paul (or HENS as they colloquially call themselves), the egregious example of gentrification

at the Concierge would not have occurred. HENS is seeking to garner enough petition signatures to place the initiative in front of St. Paul voters in the 2021 municipal election in November that would cap rent increases at 3 to 5 percent year-over-year for all St. Paul properties (the organization is still deciding what the exact percentage will be). To place the rent stabilization issue on the ballot, HENS will need the endorsement of 8 percent of the number of registered St. Paul voters who voted in the previous mayoral election, or about 5,000 people. If the petition is successful and voters approve the ballot initiative in November, it would be the most progressive protection against the displacement caused by “free market” housing in the state of Minnesota. It would put St. Paul on par with peers like New York City, Los Angeles, Oakland and Washington, D.C. Critics of the initiative—and you can bet there will be plenty who are backed by the city’s powerful real estate developers—will

cite the “bad economics” of price controls that they say will limit supply and lead to urban blight. One need not look farther than our current housing crisis to see that it is not market controls that are the problem but the free market for housing itself. Their error comes from believing that the housing market operates as a single, monolithic market, when in fact it operates as a handful of markets with different price brackets. While the national and regional housing market has been booming for high-rent and high-margin luxury apartments that are suitable for middle class renters and families, the supply of housing that is 30 percent or less of income for a working class renter or family has shrunk considerably. The 2019 Minnesota State of the State’s Housing Report found that 25 percent of renters in Ramsey County were severely housing burdened, paying more than 50 percent of their income in rent. The same report showed that while rent has increased an average of 9 percent in the county from 2010 to 2017, renters’ in-

comes have actually decreased by 10 percent during the same period. The consequences of this have never been more apparent than in the shameful rise in the number of homeless encampments in the Twin Cities, whose residents are disproportionately people of color and the disabled. However, critics will further insist that such a rent stabilization policy will discourage future real estate investments in St. Paul. Another way to think about this proposed ordinance is that it will clear out the city of price gouging landlords who are placing their bottom lines ahead of the livelihoods of their tenants and the health of our communities. A 3 to 5 percent increase in rents still allows for a landlord to profit, but it asks for that profitability to be balanced with the affordability of the essential human right of housing.

Furthermore, any gap in the supply of housing that is caused by this market control should only increase the call for the city and county to step in to provide more public housing, a conversation that will certainly be welcome among housing advocates. Privileged St. Paul residents are quick to demonstrate their philosophy of progressivism. I saw no shortage of “Black Lives Matter” lawn signs in the wake of George Floyd’s death this past summer. The time has never been more urgent than now for us to put our money where our mouths are: Sign the HENS petition and vote “yes” on rent stabilization in November. ■

Joe Krivit, a secondary social studies teacher for an international school, is a St. Anthony Park resident.

Bugle annual fund drive keeps growing!

By Scott Carlson


As of March 10, several hundred individual and numerous business donors and foundations have contributed \$58,670 to the Bugle’s annual fall fundraiser, further smashing our campaign goal of \$45,550. We are very grateful for your outpouring of generosity and thank all of our financial supporters for your confidence as the Bugle strives to produce great journalism that informs readers and supports the communities of St. Anthony Park, Como Park, Falcon Heights and Lauderdale. While the fall fund drive is over, you can always make a donation any time during the year. You can give online at [www.parkbugle.org](http://www.parkbugle.org) or with a check, sent to The Park Bugle, PO Box 8126, St. Paul, MN 55108. Every gift matters! Now here is a list of our latest donors, from the period of Feb. 10 to March 10:

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# Remembering Peter Ostroushko

By Adam Granger

When my friend, Peter Ostroushko, died in February, he left a hole in the global acoustic music community big enough to drive a Mack truck through.

A mandolin player of inestimable talent, Peter was equally gifted on fiddle and guitar.

Initially, I had decided against writing about him for the Bugle, because encomia (high praises) had already been piled on him by the likes of Jon Bream and Garrison Keillor. But then I decided that, seeing as how Peter's history had been covered, and appropriate superlative descriptors upon his amazing musicianship had been dished, I could write a personal piece, drawn from my memories of Peter.

I knew Peter Ostroushko for over 40 years. We were colleagues in the music world, working on "A Prairie Home Companion" public radio show, doing cruises around the western hemisphere and play-

ing occasional gigs here and there in the Midwest.

Peter was a man of few words. But when he talked, you listened, and you almost always heard something worth hearing.

You learned early on that his taciturnity was not to be confused with his having nothing to say, and that it belied a terrific sense of humor. There are lots of Peter stories that I **could** tell.

I could write about him stealing the mandolin player from my group, The Eclectic Brothers, back in the '80s, to form The Mando Boys, who got to play gigs in places like Central Park—the Central Park.

Or, I could tell how Peter and musical partner Dean Magraw, appearing on "The Cedar Social" (a TV show I did with fellow musician Pop Wagner in the '90s), performed a song about Nelson Mandela that ran 12 minutes in a slot where they had been allotted four minutes. That threw us com-

pletely off schedule, but none of us cared—not Pop, not me, not our producer, not our director—because the song was so damned powerful.

Or, I could describe watching from backstage during a "Prairie Home Companion" broadcast as, following a raucous, bring-down-the-house, 15-person ensemble number, Peter walked out onstage all alone with just his mandolin and played a long, slow, careful composition that ushered the audience to an entirely different and wonderful realm and kept them there for the duration.

But, eulogies of great musicians tend to fixate on their, well, musical greatness, and often neglect their other qualities—some of them more important. So, let me tell my favorite Peter Ostroushko story:

In the 1980s, we were both part of a package tour that wound up in Tulsa, Okla. After everyone had been paid, I discovered that the



Adam Granger, Peter Ostroushko and Chicago banjoist Greg Cahill at a gig near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, circa 1994. Photo submitted by Adam Granger.

tour manager had neglected to allocate money for my emcee work as promised. I appealed to the manager with no success, and was silently licking my wounds. Peter, alone among the dozen members of the tour, noticed and commented publicly on the injustice. It didn't get me my money—that would have been the movie ending!

But I still remember Peter's show of compassion and empathy all these decades later. They are

as important to who he was as to what was his entire artistic output. Funny how such a little thing can say so much about a person.

Rest in peace Peter O. ■

*Adam Granger, who lives in St. Anthony Park, is a frequent contributor to the Bugle and has written for, among others, National Lampoon magazine, Bluegrass Unlimited magazine and Flatpicking Guitar magazine.*

## News around the schools

By Sarah CR Clark

### Murray Middle School

#### On-Site Support program

Murray Middle School's On-Site Support program, which began Feb. 22, is designed to provide in-person connections to school while classes are being held remotely. Each student is assigned

one day per week for a morning session of academic and/or social-emotional on-site support from licensed teachers. The program is offered to all students and the vast majority of students are participating, according to Principal Jamin McKenzie.

"We were so very excited to be welcoming our Pilots as they entered our door for the first time

this year, and many of them for the first time ever," McKenzie said. "As class supports got underway, you could just feel the positive energy coming from our Murray teachers."

#### Classroom partners

Murray Middle School and the University of Minnesota have joined forces to create a new program called Classroom Partners. Currently, more than 60 U of M students—and a few staff members—are joining classrooms (virtually, at the time of the Bugle's press deadline) to academically support middle school students. Ideally, every classroom will be able to host a classroom partner, McKenzie said.

Cheryl Olman, an associate psychology professor at the University of Minnesota and a St. Anthony Park resident, tutored for Murray's Pilot One-on-One program, which no longer exists due to a loss of funding. Olman suggested a U of M partnership, as a replacement, to McKenzie.

"I hope it grows into a sustain-

able relationship that benefits both institutions," Olman said.

McKenzie added, "Our goal is to continue to strengthen this partnership and, in the end, help prepare our young Pilots for success in high school and beyond."

### St. Anthony Park Elementary School

#### A special thank you!

A personal note from Principal Karen Duke: "A huge thank you to all of the families and community members who volunteered to help out with our return to school. (In-person classes resumed on Feb. 1 for kindergarten to second graders and Feb. 15 for third to fifth graders.)

"We had a huge crew of people standing on corners outside in the dark to help direct traffic on foot and in vehicles, helping everyone get to school safely. It has been a joy to have students back in the building. We have about 365 students here in person and 160 still in online classes."

### St. Anthony Park School Association

During this unusual school year, the St. Anthony Park School Association has found new ways to support its school community, hosting community-building virtual events and service projects.

One recent service project benefited the local organization My Very Own Bed, which provides new beds and linens to children whose families have recently secured housing. SAPSA collected 37 homemade fleece-tie blankets.

"One of the unique challenges of the moment has been to keep the school community together now that there are some students (studying) in person while others are schooling remotely," association president Bryn Manion said. "SAPSA has hosted virtual bingo games, geocaching scavenger hunts and crafting times for students and their families.

"Looking forward, we will be helping our students connect as pen pals with each other (matching remote learners with in-person learners) this spring," Manion added.

#### SAPSA plant sale

The annual SAPSA plant sale is scheduled for May 4 to 6 at Langford Park, 30 Langford Park. Pre-ordered plants can be picked up on May 4. The walk-up plant sale will be May 5 and 6.

Patrons can preorder their plants from March 24 to April 7 (Visit [www.sapsamn.org](http://www.sapsamn.org) for links and directions).

*Sarah CR Clark lives in St. Anthony Park and is a regular freelance contributor to the Bugle.*



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# PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: Peter Mercer-Taylor

By Sarah CR Clark

Falcon Heights resident Peter Mercer-Taylor is a professor of musicology at the University of Minnesota and a fan of a great range of musicians including Mendelssohn, the Bangles, R.E.M., Aimee Mann and Kendrick Lamar.

In October, 2020, Mercer-Taylor celebrated the publication of his second and most recent book, "Gems of Exquisite Beauty: How Hymnody Carried Classical Music to America." Equally significant is his project's digital archive (AmericanClassicalHymns.com) that includes 278 hymn tunes' scores with piano recordings (See <https://americanclassicalhymns.com/>).

Born and raised in Oklahoma City, Mercer-Taylor grew up playing the guitar, bass guitar and a bit of piano. Coming of age in the 1970s, or what he calls the "great age of singer-songwriters,"

Mercer-Taylor was also a very serious singer-songwriter.

"Anybody who knew me when I was 16 years old would just assume that I would go out in the world to do (that work)," Mercer-Taylor said. He attended Amherst College in Massachusetts, earning a bachelor of arts in music and then went on to the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned master's and doctorate degrees in musicology.

In 2001, Mercer-Taylor joined the University of Minnesota faculty and moved to Falcon Heights.

"Every state needs a few dozen musicologists," he explained, laughing. His wife, and college sweetheart, Beth (a former Falcon Heights councilwoman) have made Falcon Heights their home where they raised now three, grown children—David, Robin and Andrew.

Mercer-Taylor's recent work on "Gems of Exquisite Beauty" was called a "herculean task" by Clas-



Peter Mercer-Taylor

sical MPR. The project involved many days in the dusty archive rooms of numerous states organizing what he describes as "disorderly piles of stuff;" tunebooks, hymnals and other books.

As the son of two clergy parents, Mercer-Taylor's childhood was steeped in church music, but not classical music—or so he thought.

"I was raised in the (Methodist) church. By the time I was 4

or 5 I knew several pieces of classical music—several hymns based on classical music—by heart, one from Hayden, one from Schumann, one from Handel. There were just these tunes in the Methodist hymnal that I grew up with and that, in fact, I did have this very early exposure to classical music."

In retrospect, Mercer-Taylor said he realized his story paralleled the story of classical music in America.

"We don't tend to think of hymns and classical music and pop songs as the same thing at all. But there was this really interesting couple decades back before the Civil War in the United States when they were the same thing. They all converged in this weird tradition. And that's sort of what the book is about."

When asked what music he turns to again and again for pleasure and comfort, Mercer-Taylor identified Mendelssohn's "Italian

Symphony," which he listens to "every few weeks."

But his appreciation of music is deep and wide.

"I listen to a lot more disco than you would expect," he admitted, as well as "a certain amount of country. I find I am nourished by music that is both happy and sad at the same time." ■

*Sarah CR Clark lives in St. Anthony Park and is a regular freelance contributor to the Bugle*

**Got an idea for a commentary?**

Submit it to:  
[editor@parkbugle.org](mailto:editor@parkbugle.org)

## City Files from p. 2

All meetings begin at 7 p.m. Whenever possible, agendas and other relevant documents are posted in advance in the "Board News" section of District 10's website: [www.district10comopark.org](http://www.district10comopark.org).

*Submitted by Michael Kuchta, District 10 Community Council executive director.*

## District 12 Community Council

### District councils hiring organizer

The District 10 Como Community Council and District 12 St. An-

thony Park Community Council are hiring a community organizer.

The initial focus of this role is to build community connections and activities in support of anti-racism and inclusion goals of both St. Paul district councils. The position averages 30 hours per week.

Initial review of candidates will begin March 31. For a full job description, see the District 10 website ([www.district10comopark.org](http://www.district10comopark.org)) or visit [sapcc.org/come-work-for-us/](http://sapcc.org/come-work-for-us/).

### SAPCC March meetings

• **Land Use Committee:** 7 p.m., Thursday, April 1

• **Board Meeting:** 7 p.m., Thursday, April 8

• **Environment Committee:** 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 28

• **Equity Committee:** 5:30 p.m., Monday, April 26

• **Transportation Committee:** 7 p.m., Tuesday, April 27.

All meetings are hosted via Zoom. Meeting times are subject to change. If you want to attend a meeting or have questions about joining a committee, please contact [kathryn@sapcc.org](mailto:kathryn@sapcc.org) or [emily@sapcc.org](mailto:emily@sapcc.org).

*Submitted by Kathryn Murray, District 12 executive director.*

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## TRANSITION TOWN

This is a monthly column from Transition Town—All St. Anthony Park, the neighborhood-based group working for a local response to climate change: a smaller carbon footprint and a stronger community. Learn more about Transition Town at [TransitionASAP.org](http://TransitionASAP.org).

# Eat your greens and shoots, but find them first

By Pat Thompson

As the ground thaws each spring, edible perennial plants wake up and are there for the taking if you know where and how to look.

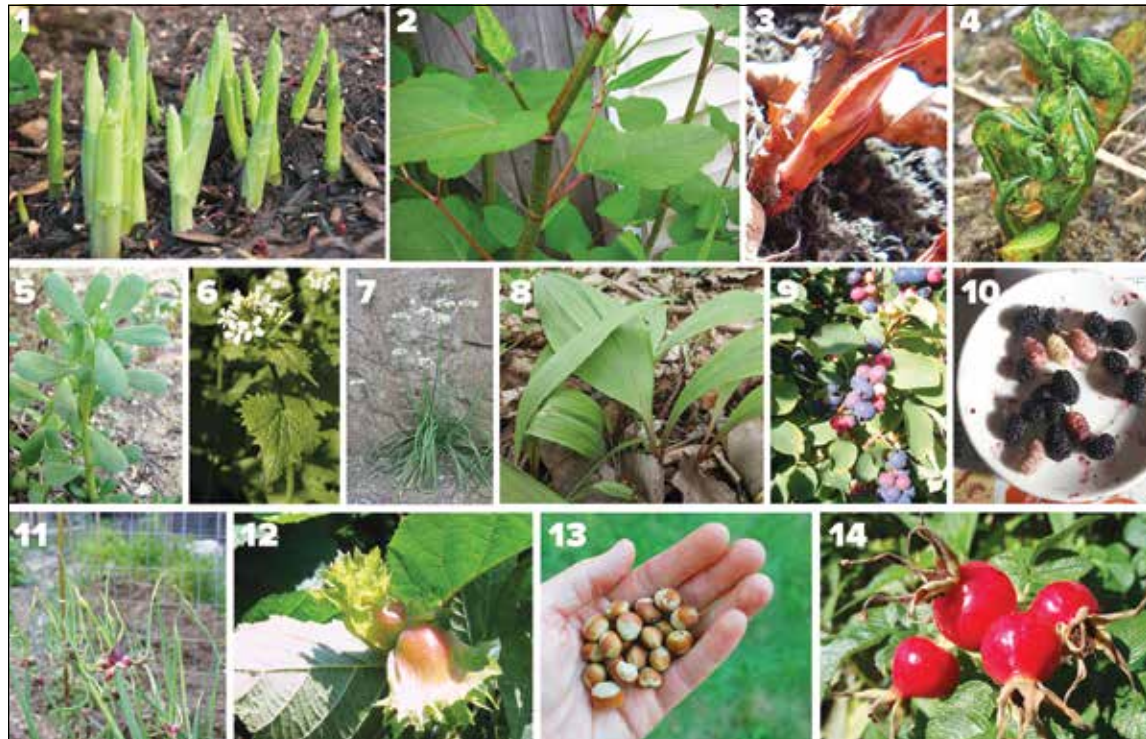
Perennials come up from their roots each year, unlike annuals, which have to be replanted from seeds. Perennials have deep roots, which also means they're sequestering carbon and improving the soil.

Some perennial edibles are grown on purpose, like asparagus and rhubarb.

But others are forageable from plants most people think of as weeds. Or they **are** weeds. Or sometimes they're ornamental plants.

Urban foraging of perennial edibles has recently gained in popularity. As a general rule, greens are gathered in spring, flowers and berries in summer and nuts and roots in fall. Follow a few rules so you're safe and there's enough for everyone:

- **Identify.** Know what a plant is before you eat it.
- **Ask.** If it's clearly on private property (vs. along an alley, boulevard or in a State Park), ask permission and see if the owners know they have an edible plant—share knowledge.



All photos by Creative Common photographers except for: 1 (hostas) by Ellen Zachos, the Backyard Forager [whose link is in the resources] and 12 and 13 (hazelnuts) by Josh Fecteau, [joshfecteau.com](http://joshfecteau.com). Other photos: 2 by Ancatdubh43, 3 by Swale Crouch, 4 by Kropsoq, 5 by ZooFari, 6 by jp hamon, 7 by KENPEI, 8 by Nathan Martineau, 9 by I.Sáček senior, 10 by FabioGag, 11 by Dave Whiting and 14 by Morn the Gorn.

- **Harvest responsibly.** Take some, not all.

- **Plant more.** If you have a yard or other land, plant nut or fruit trees and shrubs or perennial edibles. Note: Don't spread invasive

plants, which are marked below with an asterisk.

### Spring

**Asparagus substitutes:** Hostas, Japanese knotweed\* and Solomon's

seal. These plants emerge from the ground as green spears, and during that week or two, they can be used like asparagus. (Later, hosta flowerbuds and flowers are also edible.)

The good news is the best tasting hostas are the boring green ones. Find a patch that you're sure are hostas. When the spears are 6 to 10 inches tall cut them off near the ground with kitchen shears. They'll grow back! Or you can limit yourself to a third of the spears from a single plant. For recipe ideas check out the website <http://backforager.com>.

**Fiddlehead ferns:** This native plant (ostrich fern, *Matteuccia struthioferis*) is easy to find in your friends' yards here. But fiddlehead season is short, so make sure they're still tightly curled. Remove any brown papery skin (soaking in cool water helps). First boil for 15 minutes (or steam for 10 to 12 minutes), then sauté in olive oil or butter with garlic and salt . . . or use them in a recipe as you would asparagus.

**Greens:** Look for the young leaves of dandelions, nettles, lamb's quarters, oxalis, purslane, garlic mustard\*, chickweed and amaranth. Each has its own flavor—some are better with cooking, while others are great raw in a salad. Look them up to see what's recommended. To remove the sting from vitamin-rich nettles, boil or steam briefly, or just direct-cook into a casserole or quiche.

**Mint:** It's probably not possible to harvest too much of an established patch. The leaves are best before the plant flowers.

**Onion family:** Chives and ramps. You may find garden-escaped chives growing wild (especially garlic chives, identifiable by smell).

If you find ramps, cut off only one leaf per plant and leave the growing part in the soil.

### Summer and fall

As summer starts, you'll find junberries (Amelanchier), then later mulberries, chokeberries (Aronia), elderberries, wild grapes and wild plums. You may see some garden-escaped Egyptian walking onions and mother onions. Into fall, the nuts come along—acorns, black walnuts, hazelnuts, ginkgo nuts—and fruits like crabapples, highbush cranberries, red-fruited sumac (tasty lemonade), and rose hips (vitamin C tea). Later, sunchoke tubers are ready to dig after the first frosts.

**A note about mushrooms:** With the possibility of finding poisonous varieties, mushroom foraging can be dangerous. To be safe, join a group like the Minnesota Mycological Society or do a lot of research before you sample anything!

### Planting more

If you have a spot for planting, consider these for future years.

**Hazelnuts:** Look for the native species (American and beaked) of these 10- to 12-foot-tall shrubs, both with edible nuts.

**Chestnuts:** These nuts could become a staple grain-like crop, providing food resiliency as we face climate change. New varieties resist the blight that mostly wiped out the American chestnut in the 20th century and are also more cold tolerant.

**Ramps:** In the spring produce aisle, you may find whole ramp plants with short roots intact. If so, you can plant them and they will probably grow (I've done it).

**Sunchokes:** These native sunflowers (*Helianthus tuberosus*) have tasty tubers to dig late fall or early spring, good for uses similar to potatoes. They're high in inulin, though, and in large quantities can cause digestive problems for some people, so read up and experiment first.

### Resources

Need more information? Here are some resources to check out:

[BackYardForager.com/roasted-hosta-shoots-recipe](http://BackYardForager.com/roasted-hosta-shoots-recipe) (lots of other recipes, too)

[FourSeasonForaging.com](http://FourSeasonForaging.com) (Minnesota forager/teacher)

[MinnesotaMycologicalSociety.org](http://MinnesotaMycologicalSociety.org) (local mushroom experts)

[wiki.buildsoil.net](http://wiki.buildsoil.net) (An effort to plant 1 million chestnut trees) ■

Pat Thompson is part of Transition Town—All St. Anthony Park and the St. Anthony Park Garden Club. Last year, she ate hostas in spring and planted two chestnut trees in the fall.

## Rabbit Ears Central

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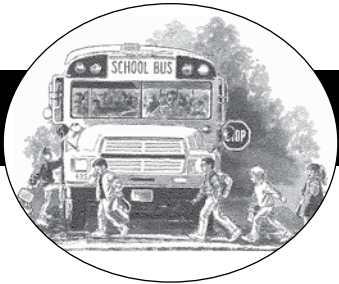
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# SCHOOL NEWS

## Como High classes coming back into school

By Eric Erickson

Students across St. Paul public high schools are scheduled to return to their buildings for in-person instruction beginning on April 14 for the fourth quarter academic grading period.

So far, Como High and all other high schools in the St. Paul School District have been offering on-site academic support to students in need of it since the last week of February.

For most Como students, distance learning has been the standard method of instruction for more than a year.

Students and families choosing to remain exclusively in distance learning will be able to do so while keeping their current teachers. In-person instruction will run on a modified sched-

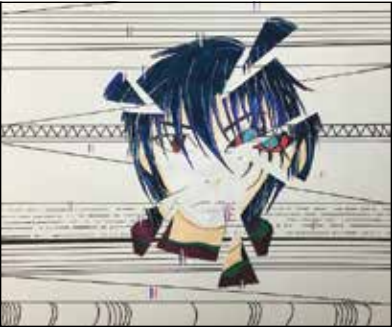
ule from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays. Early mornings and Fridays are reserved for teachers providing online support to those students in distance learning, while all students have available asynchronous learning time.

### Bilingual proficiency testing

Dozens of graduating Como seniors are pursuing the state's Seal of Bilingual Proficiency in April. Students passing a comprehensive test in Ojibwe, Hmong, Karen, Somali, Oromo, Arabic, Hebrew or one of 15 additional languages earn credit at any Minnesota state college or university.

### Advanced drawing

Art students in Meghann Miller's Advanced Drawing class have



Como junior A. K. applied "deconstruction" concepts to create this piece for Advanced Drawing class.

been producing illustrations using modern art concepts.

To apply the concept of appropriation, students altered a cartoon character to create a modern look. For implementing deconstruction, students removed layers or frac-



Como senior Susana Cabello Romero utilized "hybridity" to draw this illustration incorporating an AirPods.

tured the character. And to work with the idea of hybridity, students utilized an item found around their home and incorporated it into a drawing.

A dozen student submissions were featured in Como's morning

announcements videos to reach a larger audience.

### JROTC cadets on the go

From cross-country skiing and polar plunges to service projects and academic competitions, Como's Marine Corps JROTC has been keeping busy. Among its activities: The Junior Leadership Academic Bowl team consisting of sophomores **Alex Le**, **Sophia Moore** and **Jesiah Mason** and junior **Nayblut Kasuh** is ranked in the top 10 percent of more than 250 JROTC programs across the country. The Como team has advanced to the second round of national competition and is preparing for its next contest.

*Eric Erickson is a social studies teacher at Como Park Senior High School.*

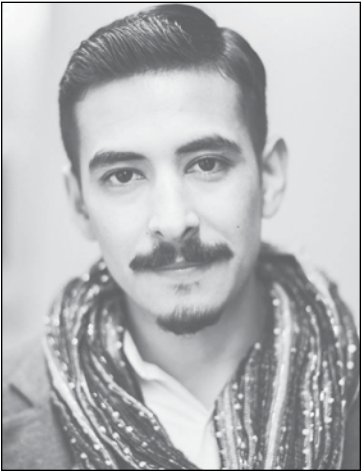
## Author Castillo to lead online book discussion

By Judy Woodward

What does it feel like to stand between two worlds, not fully at home in either, yet drawn by countless ties of affection, culture and language to both?

To navigate a new and unwelcoming life that simultaneously dazzles you with its promise and rebuffs you with its reality? To come of age in a psychological border state that dissolves and hardens seemingly at random, only to discover that border lands of the spirit must give way to the inexorable rules of the American legal system?

That's the experience that award winning author Marcelo Hernandez Castillo portrays in his 2020 memoir of growing up undocumented in a family torn apart by the harsh facts of the border separating Mexico and the United States. Castillo will lead an online discussion of his book, "Children of the Land," at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 22, as part of the St. Paul Public Library's Read Brave St. Paul series.



Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

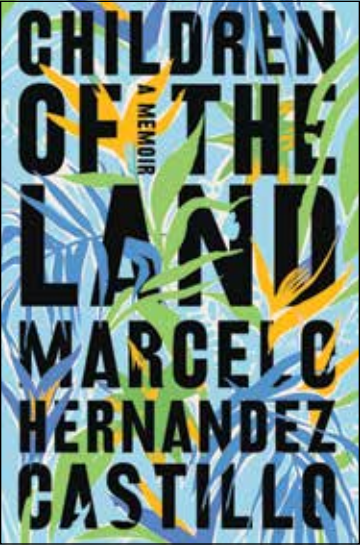
including a chance to sign up for free copies of the book, which may be available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Castillo, who was born in Mexico in 1988, was brought across the border at the age of 5. He grew up in California and, after earning a bachelor of arts degree from Sacramento State, he became the first undocumented person to graduate with an master of fine arts from the prestigious Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan.

As a poet, Castillo has won several awards for his collection, "Cenzontle," (New Poets of America, 2018).

Castillo is also an activist, one of the founders of the Undocu-poets Campaign that successfully worked to remove the citizenship requirement from certain poetry awards. An educator as well as a writer, he continues to teach poetry to incarcerated young people and works with the Ashland University Low Residence MFA program. ■

*Judy Woodward is a St. Anthony Park resident and regular contributor to the Bugle.*



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### Nan joins Como Zoo

New to Como Zoo: Nan, a 26-year female polar bear.

After completing a mandatory quarantine period, Nan was slowly introduced in February behind-the-scenes to Neil, Como's 25-year-old polar bear, becoming acclimated to her new home at Como's Polar Bear Odyssey habitat.

Nan, short for the Inupiaq word Nanutaaq, which means young of a bear, was orphaned and discovered under a house in Barrow, Alaska.

After wildlife authorities determined she was too young to survive in the wild on her own, Nan was placed under human care at Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash., where she resided for nearly five years, according to Como Zoo officials. Later, she transferred to the Toledo Zoo for 16 years and the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago for 4 years.

In January, a Como Friends donor provided the funding for Como's zookeepers to travel and transport Nan to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory.

Although Neil and Nan are not a breeding couple, they will provide each other company, according to Como Zoo officials.

"Nan is an important ambassador for her threatened species,"



Nan, a 26-year old female polar bear, is new to Como Zoo. Photo by Como Zoo & Conservatory.

Como Zoo Director Michelle Furrer said. "When people see and learn more about polar bears, it brings awareness of their plight in the wild."

In 2008, the polar bear became the first species to be listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened primarily due to climate change. There are an estimated 22,000 to 31,000 polar bears in the wild, and polar bear numbers are projected to decline by 30 percent by 2050.

Besides visiting the Como Zoo, people can see video of Nan on "Como Live."

Join local academic and experts as they share their knowledge on a variety of topics.

To register for any or all of these online Tuesday Scholar talks, visit the Ramsey County's Library website here or call 651-724-6001. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Here is the lineup of speakers:

#### March 30 The Strategies of White Supremacists

Lisa K. Waldner, an associate dean and sociology professor at St. Thomas University, will discuss the techniques of white supremacist groups in Minnesota and around the nation.

#### April 6 The Supreme Court and the Theater of Judicial Politics

Teresa Collett, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, will explore the evolution of confirmation hearings and judicial appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court.

#### April 13 The Demographics of Democracy

Michael D. Minta, an associate professor in political science at the University of Minnesota, will talk

about the demographic characteristics of American voters from the 2020 Presidential election and what they mean for our national political future.

#### April 20 The Booth Girls

Kim Heikkila, author of "Booth Girls: Pregnancy, Adoption, and the Secrets We Kept," will discuss her research into the history of the Salvation Army's Booth Memorial Hospital in St. Paul from half a century ago, a facility that was a home for unwed mothers.

#### April 27 Paul Wellstone: Minnesota Populist

Jeff Blodgett, a Minnesota DFL political strategist who helped run Paul Wellstone's three U.S. Senate races, will offer a retrospective look at Wellstone, his political times and his legacy for our own era.

#### Virtual sessions on US presidency

Popular local historian J.B. Andersen will continue his virtual weekly series on "The Presidency: Campaigns and Crises" from 1 to 2:30 p.m., Wednesdays from March 31 through April 14. The sessions, offered by the Ramsey County Library, are:

**March 31**—"Third Parties and the Rise of the Secret Ballot"

**April 7**—"The Dark Secrets of Disabled Presidents"

**April 14**—"The Stain that Haunts US: Racism and the Presidency"

You must register in advance for the event on the library's website or by calling at 651-724-6001.

#### Haiku poetry contest

Transition Town-ASAP will hold an open mic haiku reading invitation at 7 p.m. on April 12. See [www.transition-asap.org](http://www.transition-asap.org) for Zoom link info and other details on the challenge.

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# Thoughtful poems mark Bugle contest

*By Michael Kleber-Diggs  
Bugle poetry judge*

This year the Park Bugle invited its readers to submit poems on the themes of adversity, challenge, change, endurance or perseverance.

Sixteen thoughtful poems were submitted, and they explored the themes in their own unique ways. The Bugle asked me to serve as contest judge.

There is a poem about the weight of grief, a poem where beauty in nature is invaded by pandemic concerns, a lovely piece about childhood imagination and a tight consideration of white privilege.

I read a tight, meditative poem about weather and earth and possibility, a prose poem and a haiku stanza poem. The pandemic and

the possibility of escape is seen in the months of the year and as seasons pass, widows converse while a flower is pressed, a familiar avenue is offered as a way to view a life and time.

There's a thoughtful and insightful poem about Minnesota history and God, and a musical and sonic suggestion about how best to live. In the order I read them, the submissions ended with a smart prose poem featuring Frederick Douglass and an inventive visual metaphor for the circular nature of memory.

After a few reads through, six or so poems stood out for me. I had a difficult time picking a winner among them and even more difficulty picking which poems would finish second and third and which ones would be left outside

the top three. I find myself grateful for every poem shared and for all the ideas and possibilities they advance.

### First place—"Gaia Speaks: How to Stand with Me"

Beyond its necessary messages about self care and abundance, noticing and surrender, I admire this piece for its cadences and sounds and for its structure. We can't withstand challenging times, we can't face adversity and persevere, without perspective and without loving ourselves. Our world is grand. Our animal bodies are complex and prone to hunger. Let's take it all in. Let's indulge our senses, "give way and go under." Let's be grand too and epic like poetry, like life.

## Second Place—"Every Day of Our Pandemic"

“ . . . you look frail to me and still . . . ” I felt disoriented within this lovely hectic poem. Desperate to cling to the beauty blossoming outside and constantly disrupted by reminders from our interior spaces. It felt familiar. “Every Day of Our Pandemic” articulated the compulsions of this time for me. And in the end, when, even still, the weary heart chooses again its frail beloved. Well, okay, my goodness. I’ll do that too. Let’s all do that.

### Third Place— “Yurt of Memory”

The page presents many possibilities. English text can be read left to right and set in paragraphs or strophes, or we can arrange text to

amplify our ideas. e.e. cummings  
and Layli Long Soldier have done  
this work well, so have others.

“Yurt of Memory” works so well with the idea of the page. It helps us expand what’s possible with ink and pulp. It is also a fine work away from its dazzling form—a swirling and lush poem, elegant in its phrases, inventing in its presentation, and provocative in its arguments.

Am I allowed to say I had a difficult time leaving “Resolve” on the outside looking in? Well, I did. “Resolve” makes such smart use of every word. It’s simultaneously right there and deep enough to linger. ■

*Michael Kleber-Diggs, who lives in Como Park, is a poet, essayist and literary critic.*

## Bugle Poetry contest winners

Michael Kleber-Diggs, a poet and literary critic from Como Park, served as judge of the Bugle's 11th annual poetry contest.

All poems were anonymously passed on to Michael with no knowledge of their authors. From among 16 submissions, Kleber-Diggs chose “Gaia Speaks: How to Stand with Me” for first place. The first-place winner, Mimi Jennings, will receive \$50.

Second place goes to Alice Duggan who wrote “Every Day of our Pandemic.” And third place goes to Renoir Gaither who wrote “Yurt of Memory.”

The top three poems are printed below in this issue of the Bugle. Meanwhile, the Bugle will post all poetry submissions on the Park Bugle website at <http://parkbugle.org>.

***First place—***  
**“Gaia Speaks: How to Stand with Me”**  
*by Mimi Jennings*

Croak at dawn.  
Drum. Trumpet, bellow, thunder, be my voice.  
Whinny, whistle, breathe  
in all you need.

Glisten, swell  
unfurl, snake, flourish, relish, slake, gush  
dance in rain. Whirl  
shake making love.

Wonder. Fall silent  
listen to your stars  
dream your place, tremble, kneel.  
Yield, give way

go under  
as if drowning. Crumble, echo, break  
go to wrack. Windows  
lit all night,

drift, what-if  
remember like water—be the shape  
of the shore. Take  
no name  
In spring tingle  
yawn, find others, eat when you're hungry.  
Heed my yes, take up space.  
Wing.

*Second place—*  
**“Every Day of Our Pandemic”**  
*by Alice Duggan*

every day the flame on the stove —  
oatmeal swells in the pan  
every morning the windows  
burst with green —  
snug around our lungs  
a thin tissue of safety —

upstairs an extra bed, someone  
could isolate there

I plant the parade of color, under  
the window a zing of white

but we could both  
be sick at once

white lifts the purples and blues  
those ground weavers —

you look frail to me and still

pole beans will climb the trellis  
tomatoes bloom and bear fruit

I hear myself renewing old vows  
it's you — I choose you —

weariness pulls at me it's critical  
to plant every seed

zinnias to glow beside  
the gentle yellow of lilies  
their green hearts

*Third place—*  
**“Yurt of Memory”**  
*by Renoir Gaither*

perhaps the insect wandering this page cobbles these fonts into a fuse of a work song or is it any wonder that kindness circumscribes malevolence that politicians tag along in the warp and woof of newspapers that only a single dispensational sentence to tarry us to the morning  
the phemerality curates infinity detours engender every route peace tells the same lies as war stillness decants realpolitik  
a virt of memory and white sheets flutter on the clothesline shuttering my mother spooning mayo on slices of obdurate toast with only a single dispensational sentence to tarry us to the morning

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# Student essays reflect Covid-19 struggles

What's on the minds these days from students at Como Park Senior High School?

wrote these essays in late February for English teacher Elizabeth Boyer's CIS Writing Studio class.

## What A Blessing

by Jude Breen

When I reflect on the 2020 football season, I always find myself concurring with the word gratitude.

Every day at practice, Coach Scull would have us take a minute. We would sit there in perfect silence and bask in the opportunity and blessing that we were given in being able to have a season. Not only because it was nice to be doing something normal, but also for the chance to build these lifelong friendships and memories that we all will still think back on decades down the road.

I am constantly thinking back to our game against Johnson. Como hasn't beat Johnson in football for over 10 years and Johnson likes to let us know that. There was a lot of pressure going into the game. We knew we were a good team with many weapons, but we really had to prove ourselves in this matchup.

The game was on a Saturday morning, and it was the first real cold day we had all year. The type of cold where your toes are numb and your snot is frozen inside of your nose . . . not very pretty.

Despite the crisp wind on our faces, we were fired up.

Our Cougars scored first. I threw a corner route in the end zone to Stone who tracked the rock-hard, bruising football for a touchdown. There's no feeling quite like your first touchdown. The defense stood strong all game and only allowed one touchdown.

We went into overtime tied 6-6. The strong bodies of our defensive lineman protected the tie, then out came our offense. We direct snapped the ball to Stone and he follows his bodyguard blockers into the end zone, reaching with every inch he has to get the ball over the goal line.

And then, pandemonium ensues. We stormed the field in a sea of black. Johnson players were on their knees questioning how in the world they let Como beat them. The adrenaline running through my body made me forget all about the blistering wind chill, as Coach Scull did his victory dance in our team circle.

Once the celebration is over, the grind started all over again in preparation for the upcoming game. The next Monday we were back on our beautiful turf, again in perfect silence, processing how

grateful we are for what we have done so far and what is to come.

I will never forget this season. Hard work truly does pay off, and I have unconditional gratitude for my brothers on my team, and the role models I found in the coaching staff. ■

## A Little Bit of Happiness

By Keira Schumacher

Quarantine has been a hard, boring, slow and tiring time for everyone. Being stuck in the same place day after day has made every moment feel the same. It's almost been a year now since quarantine has started, so I'm sure that everyone has felt this repetition of days just like I have.

By now it's very hard to find things that can separate the days for me to make them different or unique. I have hobbies that I can do at home. I draw and paint, play video games. But at some point you get sick of those too.

After months of everything being the same, I knew I had to do something to make my time in quarantine a little bit better. I didn't think that doing little things, like cleaning my room, walking my dogs, or even just taking time to listen to music would make such an impact on my days.

Taking time for yourself and doing something solely for you and no one else have made my days a little better. When your days start to melt together without being able to separate them,

you can get stuck in a rut without being able to get out. That's happened to me a few times. Sometimes the rut lasts only a few days, but sometimes it can last weeks.

When I'm stuck in this place of repetition it demotivates me to do anything. It feels that anything I do doesn't really matter because everything will be the same the next day and the day after that. It can be very hard for me to clear my head and start to actively do things rather than just floating through the days.

Some things that have helped me get through these ruts are making a good cup of coffee in the morning, or doing some laundry to be able to wear your favorite sweatshirt again.

I've been lucky enough to be able to go downhill skiing this winter, which is the biggest factor for helping me clear my mind and resetting. Being able to breathe the cold crisp air on the hills as I'm speeding down. Being able to enjoy skiing with my friends has been one of the main reasons I'm not in a constant rut.

You have to work to find happiness and fulfillment in the little things. ■

## Struggles with online learning

By Logan Becker

Onerous and loneliness are two words I would use to describe the past nine months each and every one of us has experienced. Our main issue, and quite frankly the

most obvious one, would be the coronavirus.

It's been exceptionally difficult on most of us, and the days feel as if they just keep getting worse and worse. Hearing about a vaccine was a lighthearted and a very hopeful sign that everything will turn out okay.

But, social distancing at this point has been nothing but repetitive. I fully understand it's a safety precaution to keep everyone safe from this pandemic, but it still hurts to know I'm unable to see my friends daily.

I go through my day expecting the same thing consistently over and over again through this pandemic. It's quite literally the same: Wake up, brush my teeth, take a shower, eat some breakfast, feed my dogs, check in on my little brother, take out the trash, make some lunch, do the dishes, do my laundry, spend time with family and go to sleep. It seems as if spending time at home has been more time consuming than my regular day life before the pandemic. And it's not entirely easy using my precious free time to focus on school.

Online schooling is more distracting than one might think, surrounded by things you love to do, and having to ignore it to get the things more important done. I've always had a difficulty during normal school to get my homework done when I get home from school because I get distracted and it's really my only time during the day to do what I want to do. But it seems as if that's how my daily routine has wound up to be. It's unfortunate to say the least, and overall has been stressful.

I've talked with other students about this over Google meets, and we've all come to the same consensus that we lack tons of motivation when doing school at home.

Additionally, I find nearly no time to step away from this and haven't given myself much time to just relax and enjoy myself without the weight of school on my chest. . . . I'm quite fully sure there are hundreds of more students who have dealt with this monstrous difficulty, and it's been a very strenuous position to be in. ■

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THE BIRDMAN OF LAUDERDALE

by Clay Christensen

The tenacious, mighty merlin

On a recent morning outing with my newly adopted pup, Rocky, I saw Tamara and her dog, Marshall, approaching from down the street.

As the two dogs were getting acquainted, Tamara told me there was a bird in a nearby tree eating another bird! She offered to show me. No persuasion necessary!

We walked our dogs to the foot of the tree, maybe 50 feet away. And up in the tree, on a big limb, was a dark bird working on what looked like a mourning dove, pulling feathers off and letting them drift down. I looked at the feathers collecting below the tree and confirmed they looked like mourning dove feathers.

I told Tamara that I thought that the bird doing the eating was a merlin. I had seen one just less than a month earlier at the tippy top of another tree across the alley.

I was able to get my binoculars on that one and identified it as a merlin. That was the first merlin I'd seen in the neighborhood.

I saw what I thought was the same treetop bird about two weeks later sitting on a telephone wire in the alley behind my house. The thin white bands on the tail were clearly visible. I judged it to be a female, who had her back toward me.

Tamara noted the merlin didn't seem to be at all affected by us and our dogs standing around under the tree. Merlins seem to be quite



The merlin. Photo by Ellen Lowery

tolerant of humans until one starts climbing their nesting tree.

Merlins are in the falcon family, just slightly larger than the American kestrel. Merlins are from 9½ to 12½ inches long with a wingspan of 21 to 29 inches. By comparison, the American robin is about 10 inches long with a wingspan of 17 inches. Female merlins are larger than males.

Merlins have long, hooked talons and feed on small birds and rodents. They usually attack their prey in flight, knocking it out of the air at 30 mph, then dropping down on it to finish it off with a bite on the neck. There's a hint of Transylvania there.

My friend Val witnessed a bird-on-bird attack near her home in the Como Park area. She was standing in the street with a neigh-

bor. The snow the night before had reduced the morning traffic. Across the street, in the park's woods, there was a mobbing going on; not people, but birds were harassing some predator. There were blue jays, crows, chickadees and others, all in a loud rage.

Suddenly a dark-eyed junco flew out of the woods. Immediately another bird flew after it, hit it and knocked the junco to the street. The attacker settled down on the junco, spent a few moments getting its grip, then squeezed it, picked it up and headed away. Val had time to see that it wasn't an accipiter (a genus of birds of prey), like a Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk. She identified it as a merlin. She had never seen one in the neighborhood before.

Merlins don't always eat their

prey right away. They sometimes cache the victim for later consumption. But according to the Birds of the World website, merlins don't always remember where they stashed it!

During nesting, the male will bring up to three birds a day to the female while she's incubating the eggs and over nine birds a day once they have nestlings. If she doesn't take the food on his arrival, he'll cache it. And, if he doesn't deliver some morning, she'll go retrieve the cached food herself. It's nice to have a pantry.

Like owls, merlins cast (i.e. "spit up") pellets of feathers and skeletal remains from the previous day's meals.

Merlins nest in northern Minnesota and in the metropolitan area. Most of them prefer the cooler, northern ranges of the globe. They breed in Alaska, across Canada and from Iceland to eastern Siberia. They're what's known as a Holarctic species (inhabitants of the northern continents).

Merlins usually use nests that were built by hawks or crows. They have to fend off predation by crows, peregrine falcons, great horned owls, Cooper's and red-tailed hawks. They tend to select nest sites with a good view of the surrounding terrain, but rarely use the same nest two years in a row.

Merlins are rare winter visitors to Minnesota. Most have migrated to the south-central United



Clay Christensen. Photo by Chase Vanderbilt.

States or northern Mexico. But some find shelter in conifers in residential areas, school yards, parks and cemeteries. And there's high prey abundance in cities (think house sparrows!).

I think the merlin I saw in December and January was the same bird, wintering over somewhere near our neighborhood. Maybe in the Como Woods over by Val. It was an intrepid bird to take on a Minnesota winter when the rest of her kind had high tailed it to southern climes. I'll watch for her next year. ■

Clay Christensen lives and writes in Lauderdale.

SAP Area Seniors from p. 4

SAPAS Program Director Katharine Tondra said that some of her organization's services involve offering assistance such as rides to medical appointments, help with raking and other household chores, grocery shopping and delivery.

"But," she added, "we also offer enrichment and wellness activities such as our exercise, chair yoga and poetry classes; the Lunch Bunch; and card making. Last month we hosted a Zoom OARS (Older Adult Resource Series) pre-

sentation on making the most of telehealth visits. We also hosted a virtual concert of guitar music and another of piano music."

Tondra noted that SAPAS relies heavily on volunteers to deliver its services and activities.

"We couldn't do what we do without the assistance of many, many volunteers," she said.

Tondra stressed that SAPAS exists to serve all seniors, to make their lives richer and healthier.

SAP Area Seniors to p. 15

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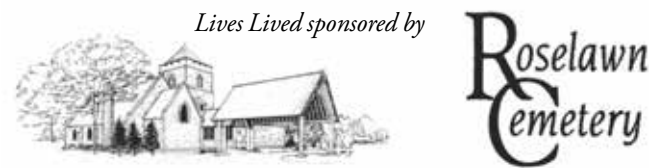
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# LIVES LIVED

The Park Bugle prints obituaries free of charge as a service to our communities. Send information about area deaths to Mary Mergenthal at [mary.mergenthal@gmail.com](mailto:mary.mergenthal@gmail.com) or call 612-670-8510.



## Sorenson, Marriott CEO and former SAP resident, dies at 62

Arne Sorenson, who grew up in St. Anthony Park and went on to become chief executive officer and president of Marriott International, is dead at age 62.

Sorenson, who was born in Japan, succumbed to pancreatic cancer on Feb. 15, 2021. He stepped back from his full-time work at Marriott earlier in February for more treatments of the cancer, which was diagnosed in 2019.

Sorenson became the first outside chief executive of Marriott in 2012 and was best known for overseeing its 2016 purchase of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, which turned Marriott into the world's biggest hotel chain with 30 brands and more than 7,000 properties.

Sorenson was born in Tokyo, one of four children of Lutheran missionaries, Morris and Dorothy Sorenson. He grew up in St. Anthony Park, where he attended Murray High School.

He went to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, then earned a law degree at the University of Minnesota Law School and began his career at the Latham & Watkins law firm in Washington.

J.W. "Bill" Marriott, who led the Bethesda, Md., based company from 1972 to 2012, called Sorenson an "exceptional executive, but more than that, he was an exceptional human being."

"Arne loved every aspect of this business and relished time spent touring our hotels and meeting associates around the world," Marriott said. "He had an uncanny ability to anticipate where the hospitality industry was headed and position Marriott for growth."

Marriott hired Sorenson, then an attorney in Washington, to the company in 1996. Sorenson later became a senior executive in business development and then chief financial officer.

When Sorenson succeeded Marriott as CEO, he became just the third leader in company history. Marriott's father, J. Willard Marriott, started the firm in 1927 and led it until 1972.

Sorenson said, "We want very much to be an example of something different, where everybody is welcome to our company to be an associate with us. Everybody is welcome to be a guest in our hotels."

One of Sorenson's classmates at the U of Minnesota was his older sister; they received their degrees in 1983. "I've lost not only a dear brother but a dear friend," said his sister Mary Ranum, partner and former chairwoman of Fredrikson & Byron in Minneapolis.

"He was, like our father, able to connect with people in a way that reflected his concern and caring for them," Ranum said. "People are attracted to somebody like that. He had the skills that you need to be a leader in a complex business. All of that made him an outstanding leader." In addition to his role at Marriott, Sorenson served on the boards of Microsoft Corp., the Brookings Institution, Business Roundtable and Special Olympics.

Sorenson is survived by his wife, Ruth, and four children, his sister Mary, and brothers Robert and Michael.

## A former University of Minnesota medical professor and 100-year-old former resident of St. Anthony Park are among the people we remember in this edition of "Lives Lived."

### John Doherty

John W. Doherty, 71, died Feb. 4, 2021. John was a 50-year member of Steamfitters-Pipefitters Local 455. He was a lifelong resident of Como Park and member of St. Andrew/Maternity of Mary parishes. John was an avid outdoors-

man who enjoyed hunting, fishing and golfing.

He was preceded in death by his parents Arthur and Dolores and brother James. He is survived by siblings Art (Gloria), Suzanne (Thomas) Hilgert and Tim (Heidi); sister-in-law Nancy; and special friend, Vanessa.

### William Gall

William Gall, 90, died Feb. 25, 2021. Gall was a longtime 3M employee, member and head usher at Como Park Lutheran Church.

He served in the U.S. Navy (1947-51) on the USS Bristol DD-857. He was a member with fellow shipmates of the Tin Can Sailors group.

He raised his family in Como Park and Roseville until he moved to Greenhouse Village senior living.

He was preceded in death by son Daniel and is survived by his wife Arlene; children William (Linda), Robert (Renee), Susan (Kevin); nine grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren. He is

also survived by siblings Lucille Swanson, Harry (Jan) and Dee Dee (Terry) Hanson.

### Evelyn Halverson

Evelyn (Sonnack) Halverson, 100, longtime former resident of St. Anthony Park, died Feb. 14, 2021.

She was preceded in death by her husband Paul Sonnack, infant daughter Mary and brother Leroy Amundson. She is survived by her husband Bill Halverson; son John Sonnack (Chen Chen); and grandson Matthew Sonnack; step-daughters Lynn Halverson (Douglas Lee), Mary Beth Cass (David), Susan Mahler (Paul), Carol Hearn (Timothy); and 12 step-grandchildren.

Evelyn, affectionately known as "Inch" to many of her friends, was an active volunteer with the Augsburg University and Luther Seminary communities. An accomplished singer, she loved classical and choral music and was a

patron of Minnesota Public Radio, the Minnesota Orchestra, The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Norway House Edvard Grieg Society of Minnesota.

Memorials are preferred to the educational and musical organizations listed above.

### Robert Shulstad

Robert Harold "Bob" Shulstad died Feb. 25, 2021. He was born on March 7, 1945, at Fort Sill, Okla. He grew up in St. Anthony Park, and graduated from Murray High School. He enjoyed restoring old cars and hunting. He served in the St. Paul Police Reserve for several years.

Bob died suddenly at an assisted living facility in Eagan. He was preceded in death by his parents, Orris and Leona Shulstad. He leaves behind three brothers and a sister.

Lives Lived to p. 15

## Community Worship Directory



During the current health crisis, services and events may be canceled. Please check websites for updates.

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**Holy Week information:**  
**Palm Sunday:** March 28 (pre-recorded Worship)  
**Maundy Thursday:** April 1 6:30 p.m. (Zoom Worship)  
**Good Friday:** April 2 7:30 p.m. (Zoom Worship)  
**Easter Day:** April 4 (pre-recorded Worship)  
(Visit Church At Home at [saplc.org](http://saplc.org) for all links)

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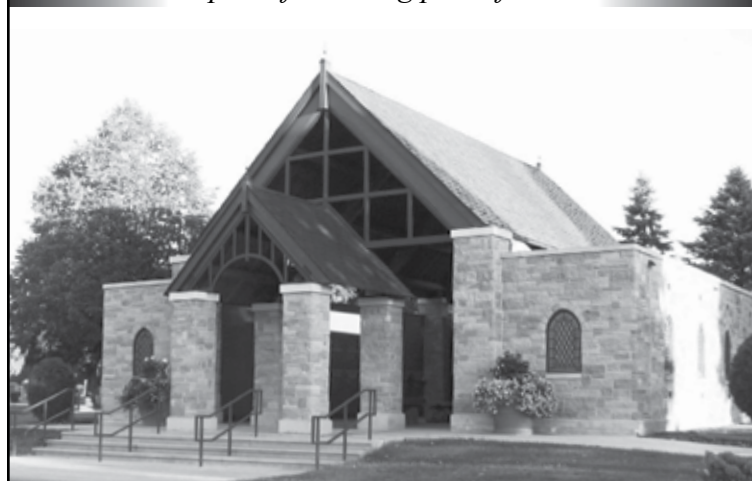
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## Lives Lived from p. 14

### Vernon Weckwerth

Dr. Vernon Ervin Weckwerth, 89, professor emeritus of the University of Minnesota, and a longtime resident of the Como Park neighborhood and of 1666 Coffman Senior Condos, died Feb. 25, 2021.

In six of the eight years Vernon attended elementary school in Colorado and Minnesota, he was the only child in his class. It was the Depression, few children were born, and many didn't have the luxury of attending school. In high school, he was captain of the football team and won state superior speaking awards for several years, foreshadowing the lectures he would give as a professor.

Vernon was a lay reader at Como Park Lutheran Church, a church he joined in 1955 and which he continued to attend and support throughout his life. Vernon graduated from the University of Minnesota with bachelor's and master's degrees, and ultimately a doctorate in biostatistics.

After graduating from U of M, he worked for the American Hospital Association (AHA) in Chicago before returning to the U of M as a professor of hospital administration in the School of Public Health, where he taught and advised graduate students in master's and doctoral programs.

In 1969, Vernon developed the Independent Study Program to serve rural populations. It was an off-site learning program that was an early example of remote learning opportunities common today. The program also appealed to executives already running hospitals around the world and allowed them to continue working while completing their master's degrees.

From 1969 to 2011, more than 3,000 healthcare executives enrolled in ISP. They ran hospitals providing public healthcare to millions of people in 45 countries around the world, including places like Hong Kong and Bahrain.

Even as he led ISP, Weckwerth also taught statistics to students

in six U of M colleges: Nursing, Medical, Pharmacy, Humphrey Public Affairs, Public Health, and Dentistry.

Beyond his work life, the things that mattered most to Vernon were his children, worldwide travel, education, biblical archeology and his Lutheran faith and church. He climbed Machu Picchu in 1977, well before it was a popular thing to do.

He is survived by his five children: Vicki Kennedy, Marsha (Lee) Olch, Debra (Vincent) Fedor, Amy Weckwerth and Mark Weckwerth; six grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and his former wife, Joanne, to whom he was married for 56 years. Interment will be at Lakewood Cemetery.

Please send memorials to Como Park Lutheran Church or to the Vernon E. Weckwerth Professorship in Healthcare Administration Leadership Fund 11702 at the University of Minnesota.

## SAP Area Seniors from p. 13

"I talked with someone recently who said she always assumed that SAPAS wasn't meant for someone like her," Tondra said. "But then she joined our board

and discovered all the things we do. If you're 60-plus or care for a 60-plus loved one, we're the program for you." ■

*Dave Healy lives in St. Anthony Park and is a former editor of the Park Bugle.*

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# Como girls basketball team excels off court too!

By Eric Erickson  
Sports analysis

Academics come first.

For the Como Park girls basketball team, it's more than a mantra. It's a way of life. Academic check-ins with their coach and academic advisor and study sessions fueled by the players are daily routines completed each afternoon before

the team takes the court for practice at 6 p.m.

That priority has produced statistics that make the Cougars an inspiring force, on and off the court.

High school sports fans in St. Paul and the basketball community in Minnesota know of the Como girls team's on-court success: a 72-game conference win-

ning streak stretching back to 2015 and a No. 4 ranking in the 2021 final state polls.

Less publicized but also very important are the players' academic achievements, which include a 4.1 weighted team grade point average. With most players in the program taking accelerated coursework and earning grades on the A and B honor rolls, the

emphasis on "academics first" is laying a foundation for future college success.

Higher education is a goal for every girl in the program. Preparing for college is the standard as set forth by the coaching staff and modeled by alumni.

Senior captain **Demya Riley** knows the message well after four years of Como basketball.

"We know that colleges aren't going to just look at our basketball," Riley said. "They're going to see our grades and what's going to really count is what we do off the court."

Coach **Olonda England** holds each player accountable for their assignments and grades. Failure to keep up has consequences including extra conditioning and individual's missing games when necessary. With expectations well established and grades so high, those disciplinary actions are rare.

Coach England and Academic Advisor Ms. Kristy Pierce communicate with the team via group chat daily during distance learning, providing reminders and encouragement. The group chat is also fueled by the student athletes who offer help and set up study groups for classes they share.

"We're always there for each other," said junior **Shakyla Walker**. "We lean on each other, support each other and we push each other to do our best in all our work."

At 4:15 every afternoon, Pierce greets the girls who need in-person academic support. Study hall is quite literal for Como Park girls basketball as they set up tables and chairs to study in the hallway outside the gym before practice.

"Ms. Pierce is always on us. Even though we hate it, we love it because she believes in us," Riley said. "She knows that if we do bad on something that we can do better, and she pushes us and helps us out a lot."

The Cougars have a well-earned reputation for tenacious play on the court. They are known for their hustle and work ethic, and those same characteristics transfer to their academic studies. It's a winning mindset with the student athletes committed to do the little things in order to achieve big goals.

Joining Como's culture has been inspiring for freshman **Alice Wagner-Hemstad** who said,

"Everyone was so open and welcoming when I came in. Everyone just gives it their all and it's good to be surrounded by that and I appreciate it."

The team's starters have been playing together for years. The fact that new faces have blended in so quickly is a testament to the positive chemistry.

The full roster includes seniors **Abang Cham** and **Riley**, juniors **Ronnie Porter**, **Kaylynn Asberry**, **Cloey Dmytruk**, **Jada James**, **Annaya Bonds**, **Taylor Fairbanks**, **Tenia Childs** and **Walker**, sophomores **Shania Nichols**, **Kayla James** and manager **Dawn Weins**, freshmen **Siham Ali**, **Asia Mohamed**, **Greta Seppanen**, **Ellery Tennison** and **Wagner-Hemstad**.

Coach England's staff also includes assistants **Ronnie Smith**, **Andre Tellis** and **Jeff Dmytruk**.

The combination of ages and personalities keeps things fresh and fun.

Junior captain Porter said, "There's comedy every day. Our coaches are funny. There's always something that makes us laugh and we can make fun of each other."

Laughter has been important during the challenging times of the global pandemic. The last year has made learning harder. The Como girls have stayed strong during distance learning, but it hasn't been easy or without stress.

Basketball has been an opportunity for the physical release of energy, and a support network for the ambitious, forward-looking, talented student athletes who wrapped up their program's seventh consecutive St. Paul City Conference Championship.

The accomplishments on the court are secondary. Academics come first.

And with the shared values of pursuing excellence on and off the court, the student athletes of Como Park girls' basketball have become much more than a team.

"We're sisters," Walker said. "We're family. We're all here for each other as one." ■

*Eric Erickson is a social studies teacher at Como Park High School and a longtime coach of school and youth sports in St. Paul.*

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