

SOUTHWEST Connector

NEWS FOR EVERYONE, DELIVERED TO EVERYONE • APRIL 21, 2022 • VOL. 1 • NO. 8



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FAILED BY FAMILY COURT



VOICES AGAINST VIOLENCE

By **Tesha M. Christensen**

Kelsey Kruse fought to protect her children from abusive father, stepmother but they weren't held accountable until 8-year-old Autumn was murdered

Helpless and hopeless. That's how Kelsey Kruse felt for years as she tried to co-parent with her ex and his wife, Brett and Sarah Hallow. And then one day, she got the call she was scared of. Eight-year-old Autumn was found dead in the bathtub at her dad's apartment in Elk River, Minn. "I knew this was going to happen," Kelsey said to the police when they told her Autumn was dead. "I tried to get help."

CONSTANTLY ACCUSED OF HARASSING THEM

Kelsey was 17 when she met Brett. They were both attending Ivan Sand ALC in Elk River. Brett was known as "the player," but Kelsey ignored what everyone said about him. He was unfaithful the four years they were together. But he was charming. He could convince her that she was crazy, nothing happened, and he wasn't being unfaithful. He could cry instantly if he wanted to, she recalled. "I feel bad for the person that was me when I was younger," Kelsey remarked. "I feel bad for the me that was pregnant and watching him walk out the door and not coming back for days."

She gave birth to Noah when she was 19 on Sept. 20, 2010, and got pregnant again just three months after his birth with their daughter, Autumn. She was born Aug. 24, 2011. "It was never physical, just verbal," she remembered. "I was naive."



Angela Harrelson calls the shift that has taken place since the death of her nephew, George 'Perry' Floyd, "the Great Awakening." (Photo by Jill Boogren)

GEORGE FLOYD'S AUNT RELEASES MEMOIR

By **Jill Boogren**

Becoming an activist in a worldwide movement for racial justice was beyond anything Angela Harrelson would have imagined for her life. But the murder of her nephew, George Perry Floyd, Jr. – or Perry, as his family knew him – by Minneapolis police officers, changed her in profound ways.

In her memoir, "Lift Your Voice: How My Nephew George Floyd's Murder Changed the World," Harrelson shares her reaction to Perry's death and the conviction of Derek Chauvin. She exposes the racism she experienced as a child in the south and as an adult in the Midwest. She challenges White Americans to look closely at their own perceptions and beliefs. And she shares how her nephew's death pushed her to use her voice against injustice.

Before she had time to truly grieve for Perry, Harrelson was launched into the spotlight – as a public spokesperson, a representative of the family, a speaker at events, co-chair of the George Floyd Global Memorial – all brand new roles for her, each in contrast to her upbringing. "I grew up in a raggedy old shack in Goldsboro, N.C.," writes Harrelson. Her family was poor, sometimes on the receiving

MARKET VALUES ON THE RISE AGAIN

Minneapolis values jump an average of 10% with some as much as 19%

By **Cam Gordon**

By now, all property owners in Minneapolis should have received their estimated market value statements from the city's assessor's office. These estimated values will be used to calculate 2023 property taxes after city, county, park and school district budgets are set late this year.

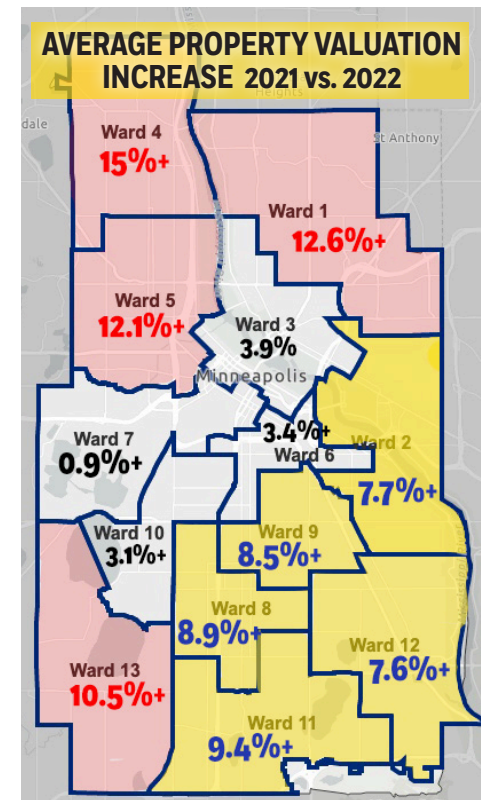
These mailings reflect the assessment of nearly 131,000 properties and are based on sales that occurred between October 2020 and September 2021.

Minneapolis City Assessor Rebecca Malmquist reported to the city council in March that the total assessed value for all properties in the city has risen again for the 10th year in a row. The total for this year is \$64.3 billion dollars, compared to \$33.4

billion in 2013 and \$60.3 billion in 2021. The 10% increase in Minneapolis, however, was lower than other metro areas, including St. Paul, that rose over 13% and suburban Hennepin County that rose over 17%. City residential, commercial, and industrial property values all saw increases, although the subcategory of condominiums went down in value by 1.4%.

The increases were not shared evenly across wards or neighborhoods in the city.

After the presentation to the council on March 22, Ward 7 Council Member Lisa Goodman said, "It is coming to be especially harsh in the 1st, 4th and 5th wards where values have increased by huge numbers." Ward 4 saw the greatest growth in total estimated market value, with a 15% increase. Ward 1 went up 12.6% and ward 5 saw a 12.1% increase. Ward 13 saw the fourth largest increase with 10.5%. All wards saw increases, with the smallest being wards 3 (3.9%), 6 (3.4%), 10 (3.1%) and 7, with the lowest increase at 0.9%.



Autumn, Kelsey and Noah

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They split up in early 2013. At first, Brett had the two- and three-year-old every other weekend at his mom's house. Kelsey did all the transportation for visits and provided everything for them there, including beds, clothes and groceries. He wasn't paying child support, so she filed for it in the middle of 2013. He filed for custody at the end of 2013.

If he had custody, his child support would be reduced.

Kelsey was young, didn't have any money for an attorney, and had heard that the judge would give him 50/50 anyway. So, she agreed to joint physical and legal custody. They set up a parenting schedule where the two kids were with mom for one week, and with dad for one week. They exchanged the kids on Sundays.

Sarah came into the picture pretty early on, and she and Brett married in 2017. Sarah had a child of her own who was a little bit older than Noah, and a restraining order against the dad. "She was good at restraining orders," said Kelsey. "She had one against her parents, she threatened Brett's mom, and she had one against me."

There was an altercation between Kelsey and Sarah one day during drop-off. Kelsey brought Sarah's daughter a gift from Brett's mom, and during the exchange Kelsey allegedly shoved the gift into Sarah's shoulder. Sarah threw the gift at Kelsey and kicked her. A week later, Kelsey was served by a sheriff's deputy at home with a restraining order, alleging she had ripped the stitches in Sarah's shoulder from a recent surgery. "It was ridiculous. I couldn't believe they approved the restraining order without hearing from me," said Kelsey.

"I was constantly accused by Sarah of harassing them." In court, Sarah spoke for Brett. Tenth Judicial Court Judge Mary Yunker ordered that Kelsey could only contact Sarah because Brett had disabilities "and I caused him to have seizures frequently," recalled Kelsey. "I've never seen a seizure. She didn't show any proof."

Brett blocked Kelsey's number so he didn't get the messages she sent about the kids' education and medical care. "They said I never told him," said Kelsey. "It was very manipulative. They tried to make it seem like everything was my fault all the time. There was a lot of blaming. If something went wrong, it was always my fault or the kids' fault."

Sarah told Kelsey that she had just as much right to her kids as Kelsey did. "I don't know why she wanted my kids so



Autumn holds her new baby sister, Delylah. (Photo courtesy of Kelsey Kruse)

much," remarked Kelsey.

"The step-parents are hard to get along with because they want your kids to be their kids. They're playing house."

She observed, "I think that's why she started abusing Noah. Because she hated me."

CHARGED WITH CONTEMPT

One Sunday, Noah came home and the whole right side of his cheek was bruised and swollen.

Brett told Kelsey that Noah had fallen while playing with one of his two half-siblings and hit his face. Kelsey believed what Brett said until later that night. She was getting the kids ready for bed when Autumn told her: "Sarah hit Noah for having an accident in his pants." When Kelsey asked Noah, he told her that Sarah hit him, he fell backwards and hit the bed frame.

When confronted, Sarah admitted to "grazing his lips with two fingertips, he flinched, and fell."

Kelsey went to Elk River Police Department, and they pulled in Sherburne

County Child Protection Service (CPS), but it didn't go anywhere.

Noah came home with bruises again. He had bruises on his chin that looked like fingerprints, and a darkened eye that wasn't quite a black eye.

This time his school counselor reported the injuries to child protection.

CPS interviewed both kids at school and said it would be a good idea if Kelsey kept him a few extra days. Kelsey remembers feeling like it was a good thing they were involved, and she believed they would help.

But they closed the investigation within two weeks saying that Noah's story had changed, and told Kelsey he needed to resume visits with his dad. Noah was crying and said he didn't want to go, and they made Kelsey stay outside the apartment while they talked to Brett. She asked if she could say goodbye to Noah. They wouldn't let her.

Brett and Sarah brought Kelsey back to court to have her charged with contempt for not sending Noah to their house. Judge Yunker charged her and

removed the kids from her care for five straight weeks, saying Brett was entitled to the make-up days.

When the kids were at their dad's, they wouldn't let her talk to them on the phone. Kelsey went to their school to have lunch with them as many days as she could, which Brett and Sarah tried to stop so she had no contact with them at all.

"I felt very helpless and hopeless," Kelsey recalled.

Neither Brett nor Sarah were working, and Kelsey was paying them child support.

She couldn't afford an attorney to argue against the accusations.

ACCUSED OF COACHING SON TO REPORT ABUSE

In September 2019, Brett refused to let Kelsey pick the kids up for their regular Sunday exchange, saying he got extra days. Noah wasn't at school on Monday, and hadn't been there the Friday before either. She called the police and asked for a welfare check. The police officer talked to Brett and Sarah, saw Noah, and reported back to Kelsey that Noah was fine. Brett and Sarah agreed Kelsey could pick him up that afternoon.

When she did, she saw he had bruises all over his face, back, bellybutton and legs. The police officer had seen the marks firsthand, as well, and hadn't mentioned them to Kelsey.

Noah said a kid kicked him on the playground, and that's how he had the bruise on his temple. He said his foot was swollen because it got stuck in a hole. He said his stomach injury was because he fell off the playground. He said he didn't know how he got the rest of the bruises.

Kelsey reached out to a co-parenting support group she was part of online and asked for advice.

Then she took him to the Mercy Hospital emergency room. They made a report to CPS, who didn't call her back for a few days. She dropped Noah off at school and he went back to his dad's house. CPS interviewed him in front of Brett and Sarah.

"I think it's crazy they did that. You don't talk to a kid in front of the people that are being accused of abusing them," said Kelsey.

Again, CPS closed the investigation without any findings of abuse or charges against Brett or Sarah.

Instead, CPS accused Kelsey of coaching Noah and of using this as a tactic to get more custody in court.

"I trusted them to know how to do their job," said Kelsey.

People tell Kelsey they wouldn't have kept sending him to his dad's house.

"I was so terrified of losing



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custody. They already brought me in for contempt and won. I felt like I didn't have a choice but to keep sending him," explained Kelsey.

'A CORRUPT SYSTEM'

Things weren't getting better, but seemed to be escalating five years after Kelsey and Brett had split up. The post-separation abuse included the legal abuse and financial abuse directed at Kelsey, and the neglectful, abusive parenting and isolation directed at the kids. She felt like Brett and Sarah were fighting for control, while she was fighting for the safety of Noah.

Noah kept saying he was being abused at his dad's house. He told his school counselor at Lincoln Elementary that he was scared to go back there for the weekend. He said he was being forced to stay up all night and clean, and then go to school the next day without having slept. He described being forced to swallow liquid dish soap and being confined to a bedroom for hours as punishment for not doing his chores. He said he was being forced to sleep on the floor without a pillow or blanket. He talked about being hit. He wasn't getting help with his homework. He wasn't allowed to read or color, and had to sit still all day. He couldn't play.

He said he was forced to stick his tongue out and then Sarah would push down on his head so that he bit his tongue.

He told CPS he didn't feel safe at his dad and stepmom's house.

"When Noah came to me, I had no reason not to believe him. I knew how Brett and Sarah treated me and I believed what Noah said," Kelsey stated.

But no one else was listening to him. Or, to her.

"To brush that off is unacceptable," she said.

She knows they aren't alone in this. Since Autumn's death, many people have reached out to tell her they've experienced the same thing with CPS, schools, Guardians ad Litem, parenting consultants, therapists, police officers, custody evaluators, and family court professionals who ignore the patterns of abuse, label the mother as a problem, insist she stop putting the kids in the middle, and tell her she needs to communicate better.

"It's so messed up and so corrupt. You think, how is it ever going to change?"

At first, Kelsey thought that having had CPS be involved would hold some weight in family court. It ended up being exactly opposite. Instead, the judge tossed it out because CPS had closed the case, even though they never did a complete investigation.

Kelsey decided she was never sending Noah back.

She negotiated a new custody arrangement with Brett, and agreed to give up time with Autumn in order to keep Noah safe. She would now spend three weeks with her dad and one with her mom. Noah was supposed to spend one week with his dad and three weeks with Autumn, but didn't end up going to his dad's again.

At the start, Kelsey wasn't worried about Autumn. "I had no reason to believe she was being abused. I thought Autumn was spoiled. That's how she made it seem," explained Kelsey. In contrast, Noah was the scapegoat in the family and constantly being punished.

They took a family trip at the end of December 2019, right before Kelsey and longtime boyfriend Justin Osterbauer welcomed a baby girl in January 2020. Autumn met her new baby sister, Delylah, the day she was born. Jan. 26, 2020 was the last time she was home.

'I TRIED SO HARD TO GET PEOPLE TO LISTEN'

In March 2020, Kelsey arrived to pick

KAYDEN'S LAW

In August 2018, seven-year-old Kayden Mancuso was murdered by her biological father, Jeffrey Mancuso, on a court-ordered, unsupervised visit in Pennsylvania. Mancuso then committed suicide. He had a documented history of violent and erratic behavior and had been diagnosed with depression, but none of his past incidents involved his daughter, Kayden. In the year before her death, Kayden's mother, Kathryn Sherlock, had sought a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order for her daughter against Jeffrey.

Kayden's Law is currently making its way through the Pennsylvania legislature. It includes child safety first provisions such as:

- 1) Restricting family court judges from granting adjudicated abusers unsupervised parenting time with children if they present a risk.
- 2) Requiring private custody courts hold a hearing if a parent has been found by the child welfare system to have physically or sexually abused a child, so that the private custody court can hear the facts about that abuse when deciding custody and parenting time for a child.
- 3) Recommendation that Pennsylvania courts train family court judges and court personnel on the facts of domestic violence, child abuse and child sexual abuse.



Delylah visits the Autumn Blaze maple planted to honor her sister. (Photo courtesy of Kelsey Kruse)

up Autumn but Brett cited concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and wouldn't exchange her.

As time went on and Brett continued to refuse to send Autumn back or let her speak to her mom on the phone, Kelsey got increasingly concerned. Brett also stopped responding to messages through their court-approved service, Our Family Wizard.

Kelsey heard from people who lived at the three-story apartment complex that they were hearing children screaming and crying in Brett's second-story apartment, and they were reporting it to the Elk River Police Department. A neighbor recorded the sound of a girl screaming multiple times, and shared it with the police department. Another called when they were woken up in the middle of the night by a child screaming, "Get off me." One heard an adult threaten to hit a kid. In all, reports show officers were called to the apartment over 30 times. Sometimes Brett or Sarah answered, and said the children were misbehaving or attributed the noise to a loud television and video games.

Kelsey tried to get help through the family court system in April, but Judge

LAW PART OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VACA)

Portions of Kayden's Law have been included in the Violence Against Women's Act that Congress reauthorized earlier this year, including a provision aimed at making child safety the primary concern in custody disputes.

"No child should ever be court ordered to be left alone with a dangerous abuser, period. Kayden's Law in VAWA will help states to ensure that never happens again," said Danielle Pollack, the policy manager for the National Family Violence Law Center at GW (NFVLC). "By adding Kayden's Law to VAWA, for the first time since it was passed in 1994, states will be eligible for federal funding when they improve their state custody statutes and close loopholes which routinely jeopardize the safety of children," she added.

Actress, UN Special Envoy, and child rights advocate Angelina Jolie addressed Congress on Jan. 19, 2022, urging support for Kayden's Law.

The legislature is supported by the National Safe Parents Coalition (NSPC), which represents dozens of family court reform advocacy organizations and more than 100,000 survivor parents and concerned citizens in the United States advocating for evidence-based policies which put child safety and risks at the forefront of child custody decisions.

Mary Yunker (whose current term expires in 2025) declined to hear the case saying that Kruse failed to properly serve notice to Autumn's father and that Kruse "failed to demonstrate that the current circumstances constitute an emergency."

She called Sherburne County CPS on Mother's Day, but they told her if the cops couldn't get the couple to answer the door how did she expect them to. The woman who answered the phone said they'd look into it, but Kelsey never heard back from them.

"I tried so hard to get people to listen to me about helping Autumn," Kelsey said.

Kelsey continued going to Brett's apartment on Sundays to pick up Autumn for the exchange, but they never sent her outside.

"I'd sit out there for hours waiting," recalled Kelsey. Sometimes she'd see a curtain move. She called the police five times between May 10 and Aug. 2. The officers sometimes spoke to Brett or Sarah but didn't see Autumn up close. They saw Autumn from the balcony once in June. Often, the apartment lights were turned off when police arrived in the parking lot and no one answered.

"At first, they would come out to the apartment and meet me, try to make contact with Brett, and then eventually, they would stop even coming there," Kruse said. "The more that I called, the less help that I got."

People tell her they would have knocked the door down to get to their child. When she hears this, Kelsey knows they don't have experience with family court or with someone like Brett or Sarah who know how to manipulate the system for money. They don't know how the system works and how often mothers lose custody. They don't know that fear. They don't know how stuck you feel.

"When I really needed help, I couldn't get it," Kelsey said.

She had piles of documentation, of reports, of OFW messages. "It's so overwhelming," she remarked. "It's overwhelming to be in family court for so many years. It makes you feel helpless. You don't want to go through it."

LOSING A CHILD

On Aug. 13, 2020, after six months of not seeing her daughter, Kelsey's phone rang. It was Sarah's father, and Kelsey almost didn't answer the call. He told Kelsey that Autumn was "unresponsive." Kelsey rushed to the apartment complex, and found her mom already there. That's when she understood Autumn was dead. She collapsed.

One of the hardest things Kelsey had to do was tell Noah that his sister was gone.

The funeral home suggested they have a closed casket because of how emaciated the eight-year-old was, but Kelsey explained it was important for her loved ones to see her one last time because it had been so long since they had. She bought her little girl a wig to wear.

There were a lot of details Kelsey didn't know until the murder trial a year later.

At the time of her death, Autumn weighed only 33 pounds. "She weighed more than that at her four-year doctor appointment," said Kelsey. She should have been about 70 pounds.

"I think losing a child is the greatest loss you can endure," Kruse said in court. "I lay in bed and close my eyes and picture what she looked like before she died."

Brett and Sarah pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and first-degree manslaughter. In September 2021, Judge Karen Schommer gave them both the maximum sentence of 40 years in prison. They both appealed the decision and were denied.

According to the Center for Judicial Excellence, 833 children have been murdered by a divorcing or separating parent since 2008. "It is estimated that each year in the U.S., tens of thousands of children are court-ordered into the custody of an abusive parent, frequently without supervision or other safeguards in place. Throughout the world, dangerous parents are using family court systems to harm children and former partners, continuing their post-separation abuse with little oversight and accountability," according to the National Safe Parents Coalition. "While these problems have been widely studied and documented, children continue to be sent into harm's way."

Kelsey has filed a \$30 million federal lawsuit against Elk River Police Department, Sherburne County, and Elk River School District to hold them accountable.

Kelsey has trouble sleeping still. "Every single day I worry about my other kids dying," she said. Noah worries about being kidnapped and taken from her. Kelsey, too, worries every day about her children being taken away.

THEY PLANTED AN AUTUMN BLAZE MAPLE

For now, the urn with Autumn's ashes is in her mother's room with a photo of the little girl. Delylah has a teddy bear with a recording of Autumn's voice and her laugh because her mom wants her to know her sister.

Kelsey and Justin got engaged last year, and still live in the area where Autumn lived and died. Kelsey home-schools Noah.

Kelsey is involved with Rivers of Hope, a domestic and family abuse prevention non-profit located in Monticello. She wishes she would have known about them earlier. They've advocated for her since Autumn's death.

On Autumn's ninth birthday, they planted an Autumn Blaze Maple tree in their front yard, so they can watch it grow.

On her 10th birthday, they gathered at the Elk River Boys and Girls Club where a memorial bench donated by the Elk River Lions was unveiled.

On April 28, 2022, Kelsey will be the keynote speaker at the Rivers of Hope annual gala.

Kelsey hopes that by telling her story, she can work to prevent this from happening to other families.

Mostly, she misses Autumn.

Graffiti isn't all bad. Graffiti art could help reduce crime and prevent violence.

Make today better. That was the message on a mural created at the LynLake Street Art Series in Minneapolis last summer. The mural started as a black wall painted outside the Jungle Theater on Lyndale Avenue. It ended with a mystical hand holding red flowers, surrounded by three golden butterflies, and those three words.



By Eric Ortiz

Make today better. The LynLake Street Art Series returns this summer for a fifth straight year. Organized by the Jungle Theater and LynLake Business Association, this community festival will bring street art, live performance artists, food trucks, vendor booths and community organization tables to the LynLake, Lowry Hill East, Lyndale and South Uptown neighborhoods to promote connection, healing and commerce. The event is free, accessible to all, and will take place on July 16-17. Youth, residents and visitors can support local workers, small business owners, and uplift artist voices.

The organizers are accepting applications for street artists, muralists, graffiti artists and visual artists. The festival will provide spray paint, scaffolding, artist meals/support, and a stipend.

Anyone interested can apply before April 25.

The purpose of the LynLake Street Art Series is to celebrate street art. Local muralists and graffiti artists are being invited to beautify the neighborhood by painting new works on dozens of LynLake build-

THE POWER OF STREET ART



Mural by Tom Jay at the 2021 LynLake Street Art Series. (Jungle Theater/Tom Jay)

ings. By bringing street artists out of the underground and into the public view, this event elevates and legitimizes graffiti arts as a worthwhile craft.

Street art and murals are a meaningful way to amplify marginalized voices peacefully. It is a creative outlet, healing practice, community expression, and method of communication for a community that has faced prejudice and discrimination.

As part of the event, Sprayfing, a nationally recognized youth graffiti arts education organization, will lead youth programming. Sprayfing builds partnerships with artists, teachers, business owners, arts organizations, community leaders, parents and students to address and discuss the culture, community, expression, and process of graffiti writing as an artistic value. The program provides coursework, outlines, and techniques that align with state education standards to deliver high-quality, authentic graffiti arts instruction.

Sprayfing was founded by Peyton Scott Russell, a Minneapolis native, and is the result of Russell's work through a Bush Foundation Fellowship. During the LynLake Street Art Series, Sprayfing will host

spray paint booths that allow attendees to "spray and take" their own graffiti art. They will also host jam walls (8-foot-by-8-foot panels) for "emerging" Sprayfing students to demonstrate their work, accompanied by a student exhibition tent. The booths will give neighborhood youth a chance to make graffiti art, with spray-paint cans, perhaps for the first time, and will connect them with further opportunities to pursue legal artistic outlets.

Graffiti, of course, can be used in negative ways. This form of graffiti has become problematic across Minneapolis, including in Uptown and LynLake, where public and private property gets tagged. This isn't art. It is vandalism. And it's illegal. Property owners, good Samaritans or the city have to remove this graffiti. After it's removed, the property often gets tagged again. Sometimes, the graffiti doesn't get removed for a long time or at all. It's a cat-and-mouse game that doesn't beautify or benefit the community.

But graffiti doesn't have to be a destructive force in the community. Instead of graffiti being used to deface property, what if that energy could be channeled

in a positive direction to create street art? What if Russell's work with Sprayfing could be expanded? There could be designated areas for street art throughout the city. Work could be commissioned. Graffiti art could become a legal, constructive, valued part of our communities. Artists could get paid for their creativity. This artwork would be something we celebrate. Not just for one weekend in the summer, but every day of the year.

Street art has a long history of being a celebrated art form. But it's always had a countercultural edge and been considered an underground phenomenon. It started in Philadelphia in the late 1960s, then got popularized in New York City in the 1970s, and peaked in the 1980s with spray-painted subway car murals. Graffiti art, freestyle rap and breakdancing were part of hip-hop culture. They provided youth with alternatives to violence. Instead of using weapons or fists to settle disputes, many gangs would "take it to the stage" and have rap duels or breakdance battles. Tagging crews were armed with spray cans.

In more recent years, street art and graffiti projects, and other forms of hip-hop culture, have been used in Latin America to address gang violence and provide alternatives to at-risk youth who might engage in criminal activity. These hip-hop and graffiti-based prevention programs have shown promise.

Can these same approaches be used to reduce crime and prevent violence in Minneapolis?

We can start with street art. And make today better.

To learn more about the LynLake Street Art Series, visit their website.



Eric Ortiz lives in the Wedge with his family. When he's not community building, he's the director of media for Granite Media and writes bilingual children's books with his kids. Their first book was "How the Zookalex Saved the Village," available in English and Spanish on Amazon.

FOR ME, 2022 WILL BE THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN

STORIES & JOURNEYS

As I make my way down the river of life experience with those of you who have taken the plunge and joined me as readers of Stories and Journeys, I always knew this moment would come. Initiating conversation with people I interact with during my day is one thing. Recently one of you, a reader, approached me in a grocery store and initiated conversation about Stories and Journeys.

This has me thinking. How do we show up to one another when we encounter one another in the community? Are we wearing a mask like we might at a Halloween party? I'm not very good at wearing masks. Sometimes I feel things deeply. My defense mechanisms may not protect me. Don't let that stop you from approaching me. After all, we are on this river of life experience together as readers; yes, I am a



By Donald L. Hammen

reader of Stories and Journeys. I wonder: can our encounters with one another be as simple as we are in the moment? It's hard for me to believe it's that simple.

In this column and the next I am stepping outside of my comfort zone. I am aware that throughout my lifetime I have been influenced and inspired by women. Sometimes our masks have come off just often enough that we are able to see and connect with the divinity in each other. Recently it came into my awareness that I have never really taken a deep dive into women's issues and realities. In fact, at age 77, I have come to the stark realization that even though I have worked for women, been supervised by women, worked beside women as co-workers, and experienced women as friends that I didn't know women at all. I had taken these associations (all of them positive for the most part) for granted. I needed to take a deeper dive with respect to my woman awareness. I have declared 2022 for me The Year of the Woman.

My Year of the Woman begins with me recognizing my mother as a primary

source of influence and inspiration. Early on in my life, I was displaying a capacity for being a reflective and deep thinker, at times revealing a curious mind about many topics. I have always experienced myself to be on a quest, a seeker of sorts especially in matters of spiritual awareness. It was my mother's affirmation of my questing and seeking that made life in my family of origin stimulating and meaningful. This in no way is meant to disparage my father and brother. It is my experience in my life that all the pieces fit.

What follows are some of my mother's words that continue to contain a grain of truth for me. For example: "Don, you need to take a stand. If you don't take a stand people won't know with whom they are dealing." Other words from my mom that remain in my awareness are as follows: "To your own self be true, and it shall follow as night follows day you cannot be false to any man or woman." Other words from Mom: "No experience is entirely lost." "Your happiness lies right under your eyes right in your own back yard." "Learning is a life long experience." All containing a grain of truth for me.

My mother was 77 the year she died. Now I'm 77. It was 1988. I eulogized her around theme, "A Women of Steadfast Presence, Faith and a Devoted Heart." Her influence notwithstanding, I have discovered that my woman awareness needs updating - which will be explored if I am to continue to grow as an elder man given my current spiritual journey. I must embrace the changes taking place as my own spirituality and healing story unfolds.

In the meantime, what about those masks? Are they just part of our daily round? What about those environments where male domination, exploitation of women and masculine imbalance in relation to the feminine can be so prevalent? Look no further than the current authoritarian dictator making headlines!

What positive maternal influences do you celebrate because they have shaped your life and given you a sense of being whole? Tell yourself, share with others or tell me at news@LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com

In gratitude. Stay tuned.



Donald L. Hammen is a longtime south Minneapolis resident, and serves on the All Elders United for Justice steering committee.

SOUTHWEST Connector

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ADVICE AND SERVICE TIPS FROM BOBBY & STEVE'S AUTO WORLD



By **Susan Schaefer**
UNDER THE HOOD



After a brutal winter, Minnesotans know it's time to tend to our vehicles. And for metro area residents there's no better place than the locally owned Bobby & Steve's Auto World, boasting a long and storied history, with eight convenient locations nearby all our readership neighborhoods – Downtown, South Minneapolis, West Minneapolis, Columbia Heights, Bloomington, West Bloomington, Eden Prairie, and the newest location remodel, in West St. Paul, scheduled to reopen in this month.

Colorful Bobby Williams is founder, senior partner, and common owner. Growing up on a farm just south of Mora, Minn., Bobby attended the University of Minnesota, then bought his first gas station in the early 1960s. The ongoing success of his venture fueled his confidence to buy more stations around the metro area. In 1975, a fellow named Steve Anderson called with a tip about a Shell station for sale at 494 and France Avenue in Bloomington. Steve soon became Bobby's first partner, and by 1996, the two men opened the first Bobby and Steve's Auto World at that very location. The company now operates with four other partners.

MEET ALLEN SANDO

On chilly March morning, I sat down with Allen Sando, operations leader of Bobby & Steve's Auto World's iconic, two-story Downtown location on Washington Avenue. It's hard to miss this flagship station, highly visible from the busy intersection of I94 and I35W.

Sando grew up with the company, joining Bobby & Steve's Auto World in 2000, starting as a light service technician, and rising quickly to become the leader of that department. Promoted in 2004 to Service Leader, he explains that he ran the best service department in the company for several years. His hard work paid off when he was promoted to his current position.

LEADERSHIP IN AN EVOLVING INDUSTRY

Speaking of leadership, prominent on Sando's desk were leadership books that caught my eye. I inquired about the evolving role of the traditional service station in the technical age.

Sando explains that his shop holds weekly leadership meetings where staff discuss not only business opportunities and positive trends in the business, but

'Under the Hood' literally goes under the hood



Technician Paul Edgar checks the tire pressure after testing the battery. "We have seen a large increase of people driving less during the pandemic. Letting your car sit for longer periods of time can cause it to fail. A battery not getting fully charged regularly can cause it to fail also." (Photo by Susan Schaefer)

also are encouraged to read leadership books and articles. "We discuss what we read, how it relates to our work, and how we can best develop our team members," he states. "I'm working to make our team the strongest we can be to serve our customers to the fullest potential."

That type of management creates an atmosphere of respect for workers, making it easier to recruit good people. "Our own team members recruit their friends and family, telling them how great a company this is to work for, and how much fun we have," Sando says. Notably, the company does a lot of promoting from within. "Additionally, a lot of our employees come from word of mouth – customers who say, 'well, this looks like a fun place to work,' and just apply."

Focusing on the future, it seems likely that the grease and lube work of the auto mechanic is increasingly in the rear-view mirror as more electric vehicles hit the roads, running on computer chips.

I ask Sando how the industry is preparing for servicing the surge of electric vehicles. "Our technicians are receiving ongoing training and education to adapt to the changing makes and models," he replies. "And we're installing two charging stations at our remodeled location in West St. Paul. In time, I'm sure you'll see more at other locations."

SPRING TUNE UPS. WHAT SHOULD CAR OWNERS BE DOING NOW?

Minnesota's temperature extremes require servicing our vehicles regularly. Spring and fall are the right times, according to Sando. We discuss what regular maintenance auto owners should consider as we shift into spring.

Fluids are the lifeblood of your vehi-

cle, Sando cautions. "When a fluid is low or out of specifications it can cause harm to the corresponding components. When we perform an oil change on a car, all fluids are inspected and topped off. If any fluids need changing due to condition of manufacturer recommendation, we'll recommend that."

What about testing the battery? "We recommend you have your battery tested twice a year," he continues. "Before the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter – our extreme temps can cause a battery to fail. Also," he adds, "we have seen a large increase of people driving less during the pandemic. Letting your car sit for longer periods of time can also cause it to fail. A battery not getting fully charged regularly can cause it to fail also."

Full confession! That's exactly what happened to your columnist! I learned that my lack of driving over the past months had seriously depleted my new battery. Lucky for me, it was still under warranty, so I got to chat with technician, Paul Edgar, as he tested then replaced it. From now on I'll follow his recommendation to take my car for a spin for at least a half-hour each week to keep it fully charged!

Oh yes, it's essential to check your tire pressure at this time of year, too.

What about headlights? My older model Honda CV-R's plastic lenses seemed foggy. Sando explains that lights are another item inspected during their oil change service. "For foggy lenses we provide a service that restores headlight assemblies that have become worn from weather and road hazards to their original condition." I invested in this service and see a noticeable improvement. Another worthwhile consideration is to install



Minnesota's temperature extremes require servicing our vehicles regularly. Spring and fall are the right times, according to Allen Sando, operations leader of Bobby & Steve's Auto World. (Photo by Susan Schaefer)

newer LED lamps for better nighttime visibility.

Moving down my list, I asked when we need new wiper blades and air filters? Sando suggests that wipers can be checked by simply lifting them away from the windshield and inspecting the rubber blade. He adds that a good rule of thumb is to replace the blade if it streaks when using the washer fluid. Air filters are inspected during the oil change, and it's recommended to replace them every 15,000 miles.

While not a requirement, it's wise to keep your machines clean. Winter's salt and sand can wreak havoc on your auto's finish. I topped my spring inspection off with Bobby & Steve's Auto World's car wash, which still features the personalized touch of humans who provide a smile and initial rinse.

HOW TO CHOOSE A REPUTABLE SERVICE STATION

One of the top questions on the minds of the average car owners having their vehicle serviced is how to determine that the service is reputable? Many people fear being oversold or scammed to replace things not needed, or worse, that the service isn't being performed.

I ask Sando for his advice for consumers. "Ask questions," he emphasizes. "If you are unsure about a recommended service, ask why it is important and what benefits it has. In our shop we use digital inspections. This allows us to take pictures of parts that need to be replaced. We also have the capability to send videos showing exactly what we are recommending. This helps build trust that what we are recommending is fully understood by our customers."

He added, "Serving people is the most important part of Bobby and Steve's Auto World. We work hard every day to provide world class service."



Something under the hood is not immediately apparent or obvious. This column will uncover stories that span the neighborhoods covered by TMC Publications. Susan Schaefer is a widely published independent journalist, creative writer, and poet. Her articles appear in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, PBS' online magazine, Next Avenue, Next Tribe, and beyond. She was columnist and features writer for Minneapolis' Southwest Journal and Minnesota Good Age magazine.

NEWSPAPER ADS WORK.

7 out of **10**

newspaper readers who read an **automotive ad** took action after seeing the ad.*

THE TOP ACTIONS ARE >>>

- >>> Gather more information regarding the product
- >>> More favorable opinion about the advertiser
- >>> Visit advertiser's website



By Jan Willms

Giving birth to a child can be both a wonderful and challenging experience. But when you are incarcerated, the challenges can be even greater.

Acknowledging this fact and trying to provide a more humane experience for incarcerated women going through pregnancy, the birth of their child and then separation instigated the start of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project (MnPDP).

A doula is a trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to a mother before, during and shortly after childbirth to help her achieve the healthiest, most satisfying experience possible.

"Erica Gerrity was in the master's program in social work at St. Kate's in the early 2000s," said Raelene Baker, director of MnPDP. "She was able to talk with incarcerated people and see what was offered at the time. She realized there was just no support for those pregnant and coming back from having babies. She connected with me and other doulas to see what a program might look like."

After a couple years of program development, MnPDP began in 2010. "We looked at what they needed, what they were missing and how we would be able to help," Baker explained.

"At the beginning, doulas were fairly well known in the Twin Cities but not everywhere across the country. We did a lot of explaining about what we wanted to do, especially in a correctional setting. And now so many more correctional facilities are reaching out to the doulas. Currently the group works with the state prison at Shakopee and several county jails throughout the state.

"We have seen a culture shift over the years, and we want to bring this to our facilities," Baker said. "We have seen a change in how people are treated at the hospital, while they are in care and once they are back in incarceration. Leadership is changing in our state, and we see a lot more 'people first' language."

She said the word offender is not being used, and she is glad to see that shift. "Lots of people are coming together in leadership, and it is all positive," Baker noted. "It sets Minnesota apart from other places."

MnPDP has had a long-term relationship with the University of Minnesota, with Rebecca Schlafer as director of research. Data results have shown a higher rate of healthy babies and healthy pregnancies with women who are part of the doula program than average prison births.

Key partners on the Minneapolis-based program include Ramsey County, Anoka County and Pine County.

'ANYBODY CAN BE INCARCERATED'

Brittany Seaver has been a recipient of doula services and now is a doula herself. "There had been no support for incarcerated women giving birth," she said. "Nurses tried to support as much as they could, but there was no one to rub the mom's back, or provide essential oil. A mom usually spent two days with her baby and then returned to incarceration. There was no support during that separation as well, before the arrival of the doula program."

You are with three guards usually, and with your doula. You don't get to see your partner even if they come to pick up the baby. If your partner is there and caring for the baby, having to miss the birth is hard."

Jocelyn Brieschke

An anti-shackling law was not in place until 2015 when Minnesota passed anti-shackling legislation. As a result, incarcerated women cannot be restrained during pregnancy and in the post-partum

THE PRISON DOULA PROJECT:

Instead of giving birth with just three guards present, doulas help women during labor to reduce trauma for mom and child



Brittany Seaver holds her newly born infant. She used the doula services in 2011 when the program was quite new, and is now a doula herself.

"You have no choice of where you go or how much medical care you receive. You feel like you are not heard or respected," said Seaver.

(Photo submitted)

period, with rare exceptions. However, Seaver said the law is not consistent and in some instances, the practice continues.

Seaver used the doula services in 2011, when MnPDP was quite new. "I was going into jail knowing I was four months pregnant and would have to be there during my pregnancy," she said.

"You have no choice of where you go or how much medical care you receive," Seaver said. "You feel like you don't have a voice and if you do, you are not heard or respected by many staff since you are just a number." She said knowing there was someone there who would hold her hand and be there for her and not judge her was so important.

Baker was her doula and came with her to the hospital. But Seaver arrived first, and there had been some communication problems, so she was waiting for Baker to come. "I was waiting for the doula to get there before I pushed my daughter out," Seaver remembered. "When Rae came, she took a ton of pictures. It was a life-changing moment for me in that moment."

Seaver's mom came to take the baby, and the doula was also there for the separation. "I got out when my daughter was 18 months old," Seaver said. "I got out in two years instead of six. People often say incarcerated mothers do it to themselves and have only themselves to blame for the situation they are in. Anybody can be incarcerated. It depends on who you are with; it can be the company you keep."

"For Rae to be there with me and not judge me was amazing," Seaver said she got pregnant again a year after she had been released, and she wanted Baker with her as a doula again. "She had touched such a spot in my heart," Seaver explained. "I always knew I wanted to work with the doulas and stay connected with them. I have been working with the doulas for four years."

Seaver said she would like to see the doula program implemented in all jails and facilities. "We are always striving for ways we can be of support, and make sure nobody gives birth alone."

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION COMMON

Autumn Mason has also seen the MnPDP from both sides, as a participant and later as a trained doula.

"I came as a client in 2014 when I was incarcerated at Shakopee," she said. "At the time of my sentencing I was seven and a half months pregnant, and I received doula support. I continued to work with a doula through a parenting program and came to appreciate the community it is built around."

"Once I was released, I worked with the doulas on a volunteer basis, and in 2020 I was brought on as staff. I have undergone the doula training, lactation consultant training, family trauma professional training, and I am a certified life coach."

Mason said that fairly often, both parents are incarcerated. "We offer parental support with fathers, but our care is primarily with the mother," she stated. Mason said the doulas try to connect with the mom as soon as possible, but MnPDP is optional, and some expectant mothers may choose not to participate.

She said every case is different, and it is not uncommon for the incarcerated moms to remain connected with unincarcerated partners. "Whatever the family looks like, we support the mom, the caregiver and the child," Mason said.

"Other than my own, every situation or client I have been blessed to work with is unique in its own way," Mason added. "For me, I think my experience resonates with me every time I attend a birth. So many experiences are unfavorable, and I want to make sure my clients don't have that."

Mason said that in particular, she wants her clients to feel a sense of pride and dignity. Births take place in a medical setting at local hospitals in the metro area. Based on the health conditions of the mother and baby, those settings can vary, according to Mason. "If medical issues or complications are expected, it is more of a specialty hospital," she said. She said that in her experience, the medical staff has always treated the patients with the same dignity as an unincarcerated mother.

BY THE NUMBERS

- A total of 278 pregnant women were sentenced to serve time in prison between 2013 and 2020.

- 34% of the pregnant women were native, 12% black, and 53% white.

- 77% were in prison for technical violations of supervision.

- 84% had non-violent governing offenses.

- 77% were sentenced to prison while pregnant for less than nine months.

- The median length of stay for a pregnant woman in Minnesota prison is 4.5 months.

- 41% of mothers who gave birth while incarcerated reached their release date within 90 days of giving birth; 54% released within 6 months of giving birth; 67% within 9 months; and 76% within 1 year.

Data from MN Department of Corrections



Most women are in prison for non-violent crimes, bad choices in a partner or drug addiction, which shouldn't be a punishable crime as far as I am concerned."

Jocelyn Brieschke

enjoy or at least find peace and comfort in her birthing experience."

She said she starts working with the mother before the birthing process, holding conversations about personal preferences so she can best represent her. "We start with stretches and activities and go through the pregnancy to postpartum, as well." Since most mothers are separated from their child within a couple days after birth, support during that separation is essential.

Most of her clients maintain custodial rights with their children, arranging for family, relatives or friends to provide care for the child. "Some may choose not to continue with custodial care; it is the mom's decision," Mason said. She said the doulas provide emotional support for any pregnant client, no matter what her decision is. "We do not make any preference or judgment on decisions," she said. "For the clients who may choose not to continue with their pregnancy, the ongoing services may differ because postpartum may look different, by choice."

Mason said each part of the pregnancy has its individual challenges. "A woman who is pregnant and coming into prison is in a high anxiety situation. Weighing out options of placement for the child could also cause a great deal of stress. There is no way we can change the situation for them, and it's a very delicate process to build trust. A lot of clients are completely foreign to what the criminal justice system looks like from the inside.

"Closer to delivery or at the time of birth, it is a very precious experience. A new life is coming into this world and we witness the growth and empowerment of the mom in this situation. Separation is extremely challenging for any mom, and this is

1 MARKET VALUES

The neighborhoods with the largest increases are Shingle Creek and Folwell, with 19.1% increases each in median estimated value of single-family homes, followed by St. Anthony West, Victory, and Marshall Terrace with increases around 17%. "I worry about people who want to stay in their houses and be able to stay in the city," Goodman said, "who are pretty much being valued out."

In southwest, Tangletown, Kenny and Windom all saw increases over 10% in median single-family home values.

"There has been great demand for homes in those areas," said Malmquist, noting that the Camden Community, along the river in Northeast, and along the southern edge of the city have been especially popular. "It is a sellers' market," she said. "We have had bidding wars."

Minneapolis City Council President Andrea Jenkins (Ward 8) noted that renters could be impacted by resulting property tax increases, as well. She said, that landlords will "pass those increases on to the renters of those single-family homes and that exacerbates our affordability crisis."

Goodman and Jenkins agreed that more housing could be helpful in reducing future increases in valuation. "This screams to me 'we need more housing of all types,'" said Goodman. "So, this should be a wake-up call to all of us."

The affordability problem gets worse for owner-occupant taxpayers who have been benefitting from the state's homestead tax credit system. The current tax credit formula favors lower-valued properties, with the full benefit going to properties valued at \$76,000 or less. Properties valued at \$76,000 have 40% of their market value excluded from property tax-

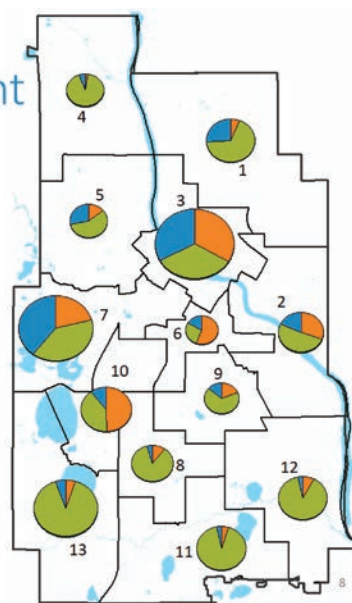
es. For properties valued over \$76,000, the exclusion is calculated at 40% of the first \$76,000 in value minus 9% of the value over \$76,000. As your property value goes up, the homestead market value exclusion goes down until it disappears completely at a value of about \$414,000.

HOMESTEAD TAX CREDIT REFORM?

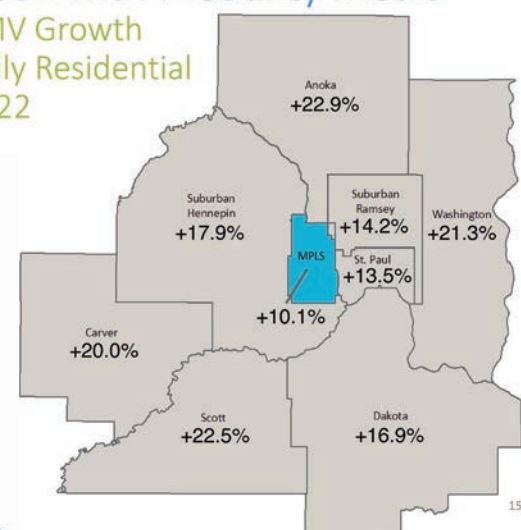
Stephanie Gruver, a realtor with RE/MAX Results who works extensively in north Minneapolis, advocates for homestead tax credit reform. Following this year's valuations, she looked at the seven neighborhoods of Camden. Using the statistics for Camden provided by the Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors she found the average sale price in September 2014 was \$115,735 compared to \$231,741 in 2021. Using the current homestead tax credit formula, she found that in 2014 the taxable value for the \$115,735 home was \$88,911, but in 2021 for the \$231,741 home, it was \$215,358.

"When you look at these numbers the most dramatic changes in housing values are in communities with homeowners who are not seeing dramatic increases in their incomes," Gruver said. "The system needs an overhaul on that lower end value." With the median sale price in the Twin Cities market now over \$330,000, fewer home-

2022 Assessment EMV by Ward



Comparison with 7-County Metro Median EMV Growth Single Family Residential 2021 vs 2022



Williams Integrity who own three properties in south Minneapolis, recommends moving carefully before making a formal appeal. "I had neighbors a few years ago tell me they thought their property taxes were high," she said. "So they reached out to the assessor and the assessor thought the value should be higher and their taxes went up."

While home prices have clearly gone up in recent years, Sjoquist notes, "Just because housing prices have gone up, doesn't mean the city's valuation of your property is accurate." But this year she noted that her valuations seemed reasonable. Two of the values on her properties went down and one went up "only a little bit."

Contacting the assessor and appealing can sometimes yield good results. "It has been many years," Sjoquist added, "but I have contested two of my property's values, and both times they lowered the values and the taxes."

6 PRISON DOULA

a very delicate time. The moms are going through a seesaw of emotions," Mason said. "Doula's provide the most emotional support they get in prison. Post-partum they suffer from a heightened sense of depression."

BIRTH WORK IS SPIRITUAL WORK

Jocelyn Brieschke has worked as a doula for 18 years, mostly in her Indigenous community. "I knew I wanted to work with MnPDP, but I wasn't sure how it would turn out," she said. "It's a lot different for mothers inside to have to give birth while incarcerated. There is the separation visit, and you can't be with your baby. That's very challenging, and I was worried and concerned about what you do." But a friend convinced her to do it. "I feel like birth work is spiritual work when you are there to help that baby come to the world in a good way, and that's what is most important," Brieschke said.



People often say incarcerated mothers do it to themselves and have only themselves to blame. ... Anybody can be incarcerated. It depends on who you are with; it can be the company you keep."

Brittany Seaver

She has been working for the prison project for over five years now. She also works for an Indigenous program and sometimes has private clients.

Brieschke said having a doula takes a lot of pressure off the expectant mom. "I have three kids, and I had a doula for two of them. It is a really nice experience, I think, when you find someone who is a good fit for your family."

According to Brieschke, if a woman is incarcerated she is not allowed to have her partner present at the birth. "You are with three guards, usually, and with your doula.

"You don't get to see your partner even if they come to pick up the baby. If your partner is there and caring for the baby, having to miss the birth is hard for a lot of people." Brieschke said this rule applies to all, and grandparents or relatives who are going to care for the baby are also not allowed to be present for the birth.

A lot of the birth mothers return to incarceration devastated and in shock. "You are supposed to have a nice period of time recovering, but you don't get that in prison," Brieschke said. "Most women are in prison for nonviolent crimes, bad choices in a partner or drug addiction, which shouldn't be a punishable crime as far as I am concerned."

CONSIDER THE KIDS

For some of the incarcerated mothers there has been a monumental change.

Gov. Tim Walz signed the Healthy Care Act into law in May 2021. This act enables incarcerated mothers to be moved to a halfway house or residential treatment facility so that they can bond with their newborn and not be separated from their child. MnPDP was a strong advocate for this law, with many of the doulas testifying on its behalf.

"This is something small and easy to do," Baker said.

"The Healthy Care Act provides these women with other opportunities to give birth out in the community and stay with their babies longer," Seaver added. "But women with longer sentences are not able to utilize it. You have to have only a year left to participate. So women who have a few years remaining on their sentences cannot at this time be with their babies. I hope we can have more influence on that and hope they change the stipulations."

Brieschke noted that lack of housing is a big barrier in trying to get all incarcerated birth mothers covered by this act.

Mason said an ultimate goal is to see moms not incarcerated. "I encourage everyone to consider the kids of incarcerated people. They are innocent but born at a disadvantage. It's worth considering how we can give them a fair and healthy start at life and not continue the cycle of trauma."

BRIEFS

STREET SWEEPING

April 19 was first day of spring street sweeping in Minneapolis. Drivers should watch for temporary "No Parking" signs to avoid a ticket and tow. Temporary "No Parking" signs should be posted at least 24 hours in advance to make sure streets are clear of parked vehicles. Drivers need to follow street sweeping parking rules or they may have their cars ticketed and towed to the Minneapolis Impound Lot. In addition to signs, the city will make about 3,500 automated phone calls each evening to let residents know their street will be swept the next day. You can also use the interactive street sweeping map (found at <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/getting-around/parking-driving/street-sweep/street-sweep-map/>) to see when your street is scheduled to be swept.



AUDIT OF SOUTHWEST LIGHT RAIL PROJECT

The bill authored by State Representative Frank Hornstein and State Senator Scott Dibble has been signed into law by Governor Tim Walz's after passing in both the House and Senate in March. The House passed it on a 132-1 vote and the Senate passed it unanimously. The bill provides \$200,000 to support investigations into cost overruns and delays that have driven the cost estimate of the project to \$2.75 billion with a 2027 opening. It also requires the Metropolitan Council to report to the Legislature whenever there are significant overruns or delays.

2022 SHARED BIKE AND SCOOTER PROGRAM

The city's bike and scooter sharing programs will begin this month. This year the city, working in cooperation with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, the University of Minnesota and the city of Saint Paul, has entered into license agreements with three companies. An exclusive bike sharing license went to Lyft to continue operating the Nice Ride system with both classic pedal bicycles and electric-assisted bicycles. Lyft, Lime and Spin all received licenses to operation motorized foot scooters programs. For more information about motorized foot scooters, visit the city's website or call 311.

CITY COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS CONFERENCE

The city's annual Community Connections Conference will be held on May 21, 2022 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The conference is a free, all-day event intended to build connections between the residents, community groups, neighborhoods and local government. This year's conference theme of "forward together." It will include performances, exhibits from community organizations and city departments, listen and five multilingual community conversations on community safety, housing, local government, small business, and youth. Learn more at minneapolismn.gov/connections-conference.

IN PERSON CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS RESUME

The city council and its committees returned to an in-person format for its meetings starting Monday, April 11. All meetings, hearings, and other events for the council and its committees after that date will be planned and conducted only with the in-person format. All city boards and commissions will also return to an in-person format for their meetings over the next two months. People can still watch and listen to city meetings through the city's television and YouTube channels.

Briefs compiled by Cam Gordon.

GARDEN TOUR COMING JULY 9

The 2022 Hennepin County Master Gardener Volunteer Learning Garden Tour is back and set for July 9, 2022 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine. It's bigger and better than ever this year with 10 gardens in south Minneapolis which includes neighborhoods in Richfield, Tangletown and Hiawatha.

See 10 one-of-a-kind gardens showcasing a wide variety of traditional to eclectic designs. Eight of the featured gardens are Hennepin County Master Gardeners' home gardens, one is a community garden and another is a schoolyard garden. Chat with Hennepin County Master Gardener volunteers about your specific questions and obtain trusted, reliable information. There will be learning opportunities at all 10 gardens covering topics such as garden design, growing vegetables, and native plants. At one garden you'll even learn which plants you can use to create natural textile dyes. A Garden Tour booklet with details for each garden including address and directions, the garden "story," and a list of featured plants.

Single tickets are \$15 in advance; \$20 on the day of the tour. To buy tickets and learn more, visit <https://hennepin-mastergardeners.org/events/learning-garden-tour/>.

SOUTHWEST WOMAN FOUNDS ESPERIENZA

THE ART OF...

Over the past two years, we have all been dreaming of something. Southwest resident Anna Bonavita has been dreaming of Italy. She's the founder of Esperienza, a local nonprofit organization devoted to celebrating Italian culture and preserving its foundation in small villages and towns.



By **Suzie Marty**

A former scientist with a passion for culture, cuisine and environment, in 2006 Bonavita founded the Italian Cultural Center as well as the Italian Film Festival of Minneapolis/St. Paul. Later, while living in Italy, she became acutely aware of the plight of many small towns and villages in Italy. All are special gems, but suffering from a devastating population loss due to changing times. With her own history and love of Italy, Anna decided to do something about it, beginning with the region she knew best.

Her vision was to create opportunities to travel slowly and mindfully, infusing the experience with purpose, meaning and joy. She started Esperienza to bring people to Emilia-Romagna, away from the overcrowded focal points of mass tourism where one can still find the authentic, unspoiled, magical Italy many people long for, and to truly connect with artists, artisans, chefs and just kind, local people.

Beginning in 2018, Esperienza offered travelers the opportunity to learn more about Italian language, culture, art and cuisine, while enjoying immersive and even transformative experiences. It was based on the belief that away from the fast speed and superficiality of mass tourism, we can truly appreciate Italian culture, connect with its creators, and give back to the local economies.

And then, in 2020, everything changed. At the onset of the pandemic, Esperienza quickly sent financial support to two local nonprofits in Pennabilli, a small Italian town population that had hosted several of Esperienza's tour programs. Gratitude came back from Italy, but Bonavita did not stop there.

She reorganized the limited resources of Esperienza and invented new ways to connect to Italy, including high quality Italian online language classes taught by native Italian teachers, online cooking classes led by world-famous Casa Artusi, and monthly live virtual visits and conversations with museum directors, artists, Michelin chefs, farmers and vintners, all who live and create in rural Italy.

Over the last two years Esperienza



has been virtually transformed. The organization continues to offer these online programs. Not only have they enabled Esperienza to survive without its travel programs, but they have also deepened the connection and appreciation the organization's followers have for rural Italy and its people.

Dreams can once again come true, now that the return of travel is becoming a possibility. This year, Esperienza will offer language immersion in villages where students, the only foreigners in the town, can make personal discoveries and genuine connections. Closely following it will also host an amazing culinary tour program featuring lessons with two young Michelin chefs – plus visits to Casa Artusi, markets, bread makers, vintners and farmers.

At the end of September, Esperienza guests will also visit Ravenna, still one of Italy's best-kept secrets. Travelers will be hypnotized by the golden light of its mosaics and the beauty of this ancient city, discovering the wealth of art, history, and hidden treasures in this relatively small, charming and convivial city in Romagna. The capital of three ancient empires, Ravenna, its architecture, archeology and mosaics are highlighted by no less than eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, which will be shared by those who know it best, its local people.

If you're dreaming about Italy, like I am, you can learn more about Esperienza's online and travel programs by visiting their website, www.esperienza.org.

Suzie Marty is an artist and curator at Everett & Charlie art gallery in Linden Hills. She is also an avid supporter of buying local, and a sales representative for the *Southwest Connector*. Contact her at ads@swconnector.com.



WHO IS ANNA BONAVIDA?

Born in a small village in Bulgaria but swept away by the waves of globalization, Anna Bonavita claims several countries as the source of her cultural identity.

Bonavita is the founder and former president of the Italian Cultural Center as well as the Italian Film Festival of Minneapolis/St. Paul. Her latest creation is Esperienza, an organization which aims to celebrate Italian culture and preserve its foundation in small villages and towns through authentic immersion opportunities, both in person and virtually. She believes that away from the fast speed and superficiality of mass tourism, we can still unhurriedly appreciate the pleasures of the palate and the joy of Italian culture while giving back to the local economies.

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TRUTH, BEAUTY AND THE UGLINESS WE'RE UP AGAINST

TEAMING UP FOR GOOD

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," that is all ye need know on earth, and all ye need to know."

This famous quote from poet John Keats has lived inside me since I was an English Major at the University of Michigan 40 some years ago. I've been thinking about it lately, wrestling with this paradox:

What about the truth of untruth? If truth is beauty, and if reality is that which is true and real, how does one find beauty in our current reality, where untruth holds so much power?

I've mentioned faith in previous columns, and I'll share here that my own spiritual journey has led me to have faith in the real. I've even said on occasion that "God is The Real," and "I worship The Real." This means that I do my best to "accept reality," which by no means suggests that I embrace complacency. Far from it. To accept reality does not connote that one does not attempt to change reality. Rather, I think changing reality is part of our job. In order to "do good," we must "accept" reality and then act to "improve" on it.

But again, how beautiful is it that sometimes we seem to live in a post-truth society? There is ugliness in untruth.

We see it everywhere. Untruth about COVID-19 and vaccinations. Untruth about climate change. Untruth about the effect that slavery has had on the development of our country and our laws. This is not about "disagreement." It's about the mass endorsement of untruth. Sometimes



By **Larry LaVercombe**



Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will become the 116th Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. (Photo from senate.gov)

even the worship of untruth. Untruth has molded our identity. The truth is that untruth has become the reality of our time.

How does one find the beauty in that?

Keats is known as one of the Romantic poets, a term which refers not so much to romantic love, but to the romantic's interest in the "spontaneous overflow of feelings." Art of the Romantic period emanated from "deep contemplation of the sublime," and of a near worship of passion and nature. Historians also note that Romanticism "involved a reaction against the prevailing Enlightenment ideas of the 18th century." (All quotes from Wiki/Romanticism)

Today, as we slog through the third decade of the 21st century, we witness

what might be called a "planned overflow of feelings" as one bitter White senator after another teamed up to try to crucify Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. It was as ugly as it was predictable.

Months earlier, when news broke of Justice Stephen Breyer's impending retirement, pundits everywhere were opining on his legacy. This was from the New York Times:

"...it was (Breyer's) fate to be the quintessential Enlightenment man in an increasingly unenlightened era at the court... Justice Breyer's belief in the power of facts, evidence and expertise was out of step in a postfactual age."

I wonder... could the Romantics have imagined a time such as ours, when a reaction against the Enlightenment is not a reaction against the rigidity of facts, but rather, against the reality of facts.

Many of us remember Kellyanne Conway's 2017 assertion of the White House's right to promote "alternative facts," an assertion to which journalist Chuck Todd responded, "Alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods." This exchange led finally to a desperately needed evolution in the mainstream media, and since then, the word "lie" can now be used when addressing the utterance of an untruth. Before this exchange between Conway and Todd, never, ever, did anyone use the word "lie" or "lying" on the nightly news. Now, it seems, you can't avoid it.

Truth is indeed a beautiful thing. But truth has been laid low by belief these days. The truth is not always comforting. Consequently, in order to feel a certain way, we sometimes choose to not believe things, or to believe things that are not true. It is belief that creates feeling. People want to feel a certain way, so we choose to believe, or not believe...

We all do this, to an extent. But we're

no longer in the Romantic Era. This new truth about our rejection of truth, our disrespect for truth, is not romantic and beautiful. It's awful and ugly and terribly unhealthy. Yet we people of conscience are challenged now to somehow embrace this new reality: The reality of our time is that there is no shared reality. People can deny reality right to the end, and we've seen it, watching Covid-deniers and anti-vaxxers actually die unrepentant from COVID-19. Sometimes only in death is reality truly revealed. And often, even then, it's still not recognized by the survivors. It's too painful, too shameful, to admit that what you believed was dead wrong. Shame is a driver even stronger than fear.

The stakes are high these days. Our lives are at risk, and so, too, is our identity. We vote now according to identity, and our identity as Americans has been trumped by an identity based on what we believe. Our identity is our source of pride. We all sometimes need an influx of courage to help us choose truth over belief. But it has become clear that you cannot force courage or truth onto someone else. And so we find ourselves in near constant anxiety around what will happen next... How will the next election turn out? What will "they" do? Can we work together, or must we simply defeat them?

Will truth prevail?

And will it be beautiful?



Larry LaVercombe is a writer, filmmaker, and activist, born in Detroit and arrived in Minneapolis in 1975. He lived in a treehouse in San Diego before getting an MFA from the USC Film School. He writes most days, and as Team Larry he has been selling residential real estate in Minneapolis for 26 years.

ALIGN YOUR WELL-BEING WITH YOUR CHOICES

Spring is emerging here in Minnesota. For me, this is a month to step back, take an inventory of where I am, what I am moving towards, what is clear and what is unclear, what is in flow, and what feels out of alignment. This season invites spring cleaning and planting. How can I make choices that support my well-being and the well-being of my neighbors locally and globally?

During this time of global distress as we witness suffering in Ukraine and across our world, I more deeply appreciate the tremendous privilege it is to have the space, time, and resources to continue my own development. This spring, I feel a sense of urgency to notice and tend to what is out of alignment. I am more aware than ever my inner and outer world is always in flux. I find peace in my daily mindfulness practices and send healing intentions and contributions to those in need.

"We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves." Dalai Lama XIV



By **Michele Rae**

So, I continue to cultivate inner peace for myself and my clients as we impact outer peace to the best of our ability. In my work as a transformational coach, there are many tools and assessments I use with clients to learn more about themselves and accelerate inner peace and realizing their full potential.

As you spend a few moments today contemplating the well-being of yourself and our world, I would like to share a tool called the Wheel of Life. Sometimes we get out of balance in one area of our life or another, and we feel unclear and uncertain about what is our best and most authentic next steps forward.

The Wheel of Life is an assessment beginning with mindful self-reflection. Take a deep breath and center yourself. How satisfied are you in various aspects of your life? Taking time to honestly assess your current experience without judgement is a gift to yourself.

Imagine a Wheel of Life with various sections separated by spokes from the center to perimeter of a circle. Which areas of focus do you want to consider today?

- **Health:** How strong and balanced is your physical, emotional, and mental well-being?

- **Finance:** Do you have a sense of abundance and ease in your finances?

- **Relationships:** Do you have meaningful, supportive, and nurturing relationships?

- **Attitude:** Is your attitude influenced primarily by a steady inner mindset or chaotic external circumstances?

- **Fun and recreation:** Do you regularly make time for relaxing, creativity, and play?

- **Career and business:** Are you contributing to your work and community in a way that feels productive and impactful?

- **Personal growth:** What opportunities and practices do you engage in that develop you emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?

- **Family:** Are all members of your family encouraged to be their best self and mutually support each other?

- **Social and cultural:** How do you engage with diverse social and cultural ideas, people, events?

- **Physical environment:** Does your home and workspaces energize you?

Rank how you're doing in each area from 1 to 10, where 10 is excellent and achieving mastery, and 1 is you couldn't be doing any worse. When you have scored each section, imagine the perim-

JEFFERSON SCHOOL RENAMED

After receiving approval from the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) Board of Education, Jefferson Global Studies & Humanities at 1200 W. 26th St. will be renamed Ella Baker Global Studies & Humanities.

Sheridan Dual Language Elementary (1201 University Ave. NE) will be renamed Las Estrellas Dual Language Elementary.

The process for a new school name for Jefferson also began in 2020. The Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) team, consisting of students and advisors, began the work by brainstorming the values they wanted the new school name to represent. Social studies classes in grades 4-8 then worked on a project where they explored why we name things, what names signify and made their own recommendation for a new school name. Ranked-choice voting was used to deter-

mine the number one pick, which was Ella Baker, an African-American civil rights and human rights activist.

"I'm grateful our students were involved in picking our new name," said Principal Holly Kleppe. "Ella Baker represents a large majority of our student population. For our students to be able to walk into a building named after someone who looks like them will help encourage them to be their whole selves and strive to be as influential as she was."

eter of your Wheel of Life. If this were a real wheel, how bumpy would the ride be?

Consider:

Which of these categories would you most like to improve?

How could you make space for these changes in your life?

What help and support might you need from others to make changes and be more satisfied with your life?

When complete, I invite you to create a few goals to support changes you desire.

We are all a work in process, individually and collectively. When you align your life with your authenticity, passions, and strengths, your example invites others to do the same.

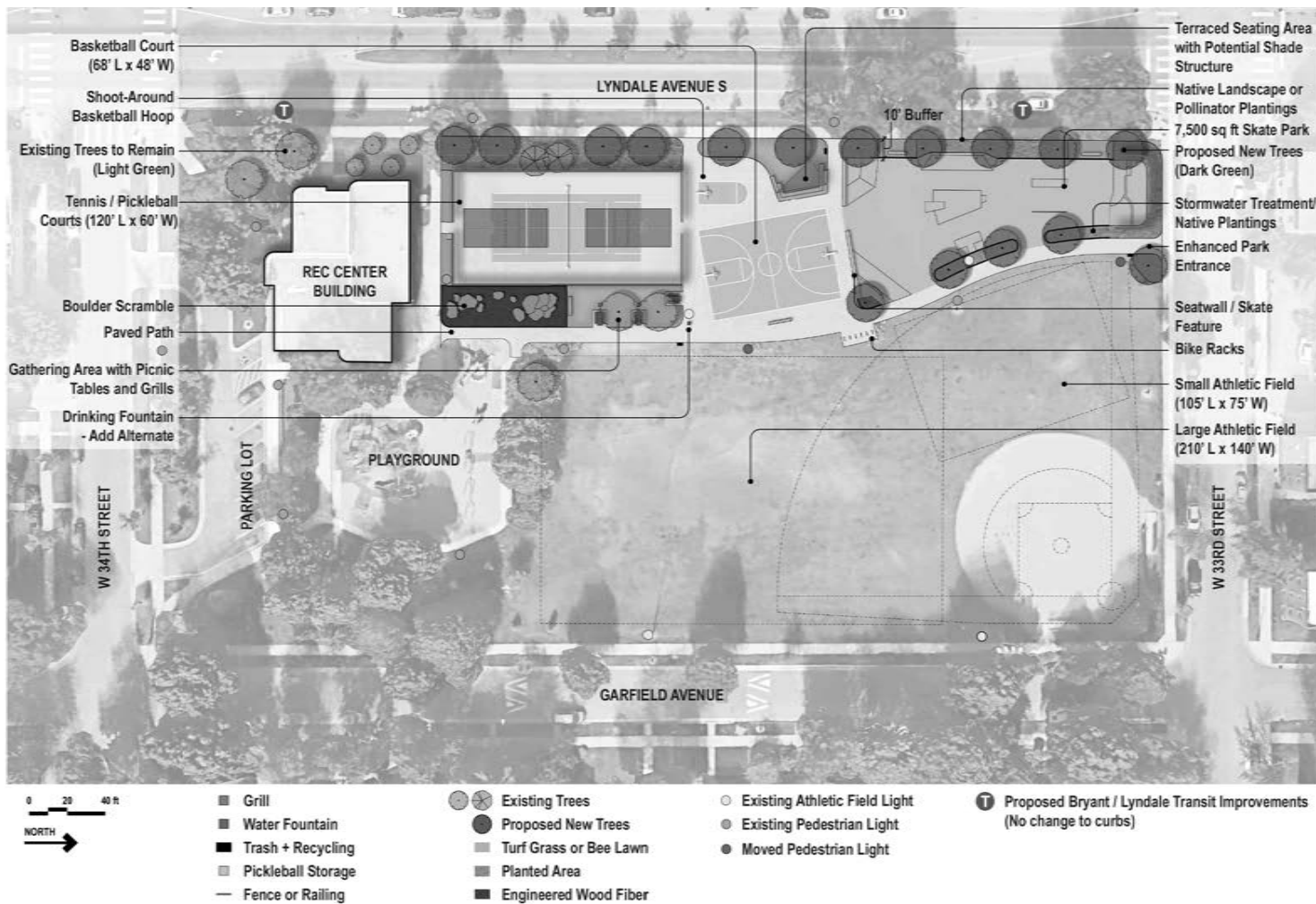
Now is the time our community locally and globally is expanding what is possible. As Einstein reminds us, "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking and consciousness that created them." You are invited to be aligned in well-being as we co-create who we are becoming with optimal outcomes for all living beings on the planet.



Michele Rae, RPh, MA, NBC-HWC is the founder of The Center Within, LLC and author of "Living From the Center Within: Co-Creating Who You Are Becoming." She provides holistic coaching designed to accelerate and support personal, professional, and organizational transformation.

The MPS Facility Names Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board in October 2020, and consisted of students, parents, alumni, former teachers, and other stakeholders. The committee was tasked with researching and providing recommendations on MPS facilities that should be renamed. The recommendations that were turned into the Board included Sheridan and Jefferson.

'BOULDER SCRAMBLE' COMING TO PAINTER PARK



By **Tesha M. Christensen**

In 2023, there will be a new street-style skate park and boulder scramble area at Painter Park. A basketball court will be added, and the tennis/pickleball courts will be improved. Work will start late this summer, according to Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Design Project Manager Andrew Schilling.

The 2.95-acre park at 620 W. 34th St. is part of the old Lyndale School site. It was acquired by the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board in 1976 when playing fields, playgrounds, tennis courts and a recreation center were built.

As with the other two sites, the park board paid for the land with money it had received from the state department of transportation for park land taken for freeways in the 1960s and 1970s. The park is named after Jonathan Painter, the first industrial arts teacher in the Minneapolis school system who created the industrial arts curriculum in city schools.

There is money available through the capital improvement program to do the first phase of work at Painter Park. "The area of the master plan that included the tennis court (with pickleball striping), basketball court, new skate park, gathering spaces and other improvements fit the available budget and were a priority from staff and community input," remarked Schilling.

When asked, community members said that basketball is very popular, and they appreciate the open space, and they want a playground with shade, pointed out Schilling. They want a space that is inviting for

people of all ages.

They expressed concern about aging courts and infrastructure, not enough shade, not much space for native ground-cover versus turf, and balls rolling into the street due to the close proximity to Lyndale.

HOW DID YOU REACH OUT TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

AS: Our community engagement is focused on the development of a concept plan that our board then considers for approval. The engagement for this project took place from spring 2021 through late fall.

Beginning in spring of 2021, we worked with the neighborhood organizations (Lyndale and South Uptown) to introduce the project and to develop and share a community engagement plan. We had an outdoor open house at Painter Park in July (with ice cream), in park pop-up meetings to meet users using the park in August, two online surveys, a second community meeting in October to consider two concept layouts, a skate community-specific meeting to refine skate elements – all to inform the preferred concept plan.

The Board approved the concept plan for Painter Park on Feb. 2, 2022. Since that point we have been working on producing construction documents to advertise for bid.

WHAT WILL THE PARK CHANGES INCLUDE?

AS: We received good guidance and direction from the Southwest Service Area Master Plan (approved in 2020), commu-

nity, staff, and other park user engagement, leading to the development of the concept plan. The concept plan focuses on the west portion of the park north of the recreation center, activating an open area near 33rd Street with a new skate park, relocating and improving existing facilities, creating gathering spaces, and greenspace for native or pollinator plantings - specifically:

- Relocated and reconstructed tennis court (with striping for two pickleball courts using portable nets);
- Relocated and reconstructed full court basketball with additional shoot around hoop area;
- New street-style skatepark with some transition features incorporated;
- New boulder scramble area (youth play and informal seating area);
- New picnic and terraced seating spaces (with shade opportunities where practicable);
- Native plantings and stormwater treatment spaces, and;
- Improved pathway circulation and locations of pedestrian lighting within the project area.

WHAT IS THE BUDGET AND WHERE WILL THE FUNDS COME FROM?

AS: The total project budget is \$1,073,000 with approximately \$880,000 available for construction. Funds are a combination of NPP20 and neighborhood park dedication.

Pending favorable bids received in May, it is anticipated that construction will begin late summer with project completion sometime in summer 2023.

NEIGHBORHOOD BRIEFS

REBUILDING LOCAL JOURNALISM TALK APRIL 27

"Rebuilding Local Journalism" is the topic of the April 27 LHENA Talks series. This talk will focus on how local journalism is being rebuilt in Minneapolis. Christensen will talk about her work with the *Southwest Connector*, and Hoffman will talk about her work with *Southwest Voices*. How are these two local journalism organizations informing and engaging the community? How are they building community and helping advance local solutions? What are the challenges of local journalism today? What are the opportunities? What has been the response from the community to these new local news organizations? What impact are they making? The speakers will answer these questions and more, and then take questions from the community. The online event will be held from 7-8 p.m. on Zoom. More at <https://www.thewedg.org/rebuildinglocaljournalism.html>.



Tesha M. Christensen

IMS 'COLORS OF SPRING' PLANNED

Matt Cook, owner of Sawhill Custom Kitchen & Design and member of the IMS Art Crawl Minneapolis, announced that the "Colors of Spring" Art Crawl (www.imsartcrawl.com) will be on Thursday, April 28 from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. and Friday, April 29 10 a.m.-5 p.m. International Market Square is at 275 Market Street. "We have gathered talented painters, sculptors, jewelry makers, photographers, creators, musicians, and more for our spring event," remarked Cook. "IMS is a hub for everything design related from finishes to fabrics and fixtures. IMS has all you can dream when it comes to beautifying your home and business."

GRAND AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION

The city of Minneapolis will continue with the reconstruction of Grand Ave. S. between 38th St. W. and Lake St. W. The project began in 2021 between 48th St. W. and 38th St. W. The scope of the project will include full removal of the existing street, utility upgrade, subgrade correction, new pavement, curb and gutter, driveways, sidewalks, signal upgrades, trees and sod. The reconstruction will impact local access, parking, and pedestrian paths. More on the project webpage.

204-UNIT APARTMENT BUILDING

Yellow Tree Construction Services has been hired by Hall Sweeney Properties to construct a new 204-unit apartment building at 3536 Nicollet Avenue S. "Our general superintendent responsible for overseeing all field work is Isaac Kendall (612-720-5029). Feel free to reach out to Isaac if you have any questions or concerns regarding construction at the site or call 311. Yellow Tree has successfully completed many projects throughout Minneapolis but this will be our first endeavor in the Kingfield Neighborhood. We hope to show you that we are a safe, professional, and respectful contractor and are looking forward to delivering this project as smoothly as possible for all stakeholders," say Yellow Tree Construction Services staff.

BMNA MEETS IN PERSON AGAIN

Starting in March the Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association resumed meeting in person. They purchased streaming equipment that will allow them to interact with neighbors and presenters remotely while also meeting in person. The meeting link remains the same, meet.google.com/rwc-ytdc-wcc, each month. The BMNA meets at Bryn Mawr School from September to May and at Bryn Mawr Church in June, July, and August.

RESIDENTS DENOUNCE DISMISSAL OF ETHICS COMPLAINTS



On March 31, residents returned to City Hall to denounce the decision by Ethics Officer Susan Trammell and the Ethical Practices Board to dismiss ethics complaints submitted in February by 1,300 residents against Mayor Jacob Frey for the circumstances surrounding the fatal shooting of Amir Locke by the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). The ethics board also dismissed any future, similar complaints. Despite the March 15 ruling, residents delivered 1,100 more complaints to a city staff person after the press conference. "When we submit an ethics complaint, we want it taken seriously – 2,400 complaints dismissed? That is beyond wrong," said Toshi-ra Garraway of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence, at left. "They dismissed 2,400 voices of the people who've had to live in this community." Read the full story online at www.swconnector.com



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1 VOICE FOR JUSTICE

end of racial slurs and discrimination. Her mother, born in 1925, gave birth to 14 kids and had a lot to navigate.

"My mother raised us to be very submissive to White people," said Harrelson in an interview at the memorial. "Even though she would tell us behind closed doors, 'You know you can do this... but at the same time, don't question them.' She did that out of protection. Because she grew up in an era where you didn't question White people."

Harrelson learned to pursue her dreams anyway, but to keep a low profile; speaking up against racism was not an option.

FINDING STRENGTH

As she dealt with a wide range of emotions following Perry's death, Harrelson turned to something familiar, writing, which became very therapeutic for her. She had always journaled – she even used to write family newsletters – and found that the process allowed her to reflect on everything she was feeling: Angry. Mad. Frustrated. Guilt. Her anxiety level was up.

"I was in a dark place," she recalled. "But then... there was love. I felt love. And kindness. That was coming out of me, too. And that's where I needed to be."

The writing process took her back to her childhood, retriggering numerous instances of racism she had endured: Being forced to stand on the school bus, a target of bullying by White students, prohibited by a teacher from using her own first name in class. As an adult, when Harrelson expressed interest in becoming an attorney, an instructor at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa told her straight up, "I'm a racist, and I don't teach Black people."

For Harrelson, the murder of her nephew showed that though there have been changes over time, there were hidden inequalities, injustices within the system; things never really changed.

"Perry's death made me see that very clearly," she said.

Enduring poverty and being raised in a family culture that gave her faith, Harrelson found strength she didn't know she had – including in the determination and willpower passed along by her ancestors, especially her great-grandparents who were born to slavery.

"They passed along that strength through their hands, their blood, sweat and tears, and their faith, all of that was passed along to survive," she said. "Because they had to."



I Ling Thompson from Colorado, Diane Regas from California, Angela Harrelson and Susan Schmidt from the Twin Cities talk at the George Floyd Memorial. Harrelson often greets visitors to the Square and has met people from all over the world. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

COMING TO TERMS

Though Harrelson wanted to see the site where Perry was actually killed, it was too overwhelming at first to go to 38th and Chicago.

"It was difficult because everything happened so fast. One minute Perry was here, and all of a sudden he wasn't here. And it's dealing with the reality that he really is gone," she said. "I knew that he'd been killed... But then, he was everywhere. I walk out and he's on somebody's wall. Somebody's wearing him on a t-shirt. And it played with my mind, my emotions. It was just so sad."

She stayed hidden for a while, but when she came out, the community "wrapped their arms around me, and I knew I was gonna be okay." Harrelson and her family leaned on each other plenty. But being the relative who lived closest to Perry, with the rest of her family in North Carolina and Texas, the community at George Floyd Square became like family to her. Having people nearby to call on when she needed something and neighborhood kids calling her "Auntie" filled a void in her life.

She also saw how they were taking care of the memorial, delicately, meticulously, making sure the offerings were in the right place, one small piece at a time.

"They take care of this memorial as though [Perry] was their brother or sister, and I see them doing that for my family," said Harrelson. "They didn't know him. But they had the commonality of the pain."

On Oct. 14, 2020, Perry's birthday, Harrelson, with Perry's cousin Paris Stevens and now-executive director Jeanelle Austin, launched the nonprofit George Floyd Global Memorial to preserve the offerings and ensure the stories in the movement for justice are carried to future generations.

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Harrelson calls the shift that has taken place since Perry's death "the Great

Awakening."

"It was a validation of this ugliness that was being hidden for so many years, playing with people's minds, because to White America... they could not see that," she said. "When Perry died, it gave validation. It gave meaning. It gave support. That what we were saying was true."

As these hidden layers were exposed, she felt Black people didn't have to defend themselves as much, and White people became more open to hearing the message – that fundamentally, according to Harrelson, "we need to treat people like human beings."

When Perry was pleading for his life, speaking out of desperation, she reasoned, he was appealing to Chauvin as a human being. But Chauvin and the other officers failed to see Perry as one.

With this exposure has come some forward progress, Harrelson believes. Since her nephew's murder, some cases have been reopened, and six police officers in Minnesota have been convicted for extreme violence against Black people (Chauvin, J. Kueng, Thomas Lane, Tou Thao, for George Floyd's murder; Kim Potter of Brooklyn Center in the death of Daunte Wright, and Brett Palkowitsch of St. Paul for using excessive force involving a police dog during an arrest of a person mistaken for a robbery suspect).

"Those may be small victories to others, but those are battles we have won towards the war... So yes, the movement is going forward, and it makes me feel good to see these things happening, because I know that it validates to me that my nephew's death was not in vain," said Harrelson. "Everything takes time. You're not gonna win all the battles. But it doesn't stop us, 'cause when we go five steps backwards, we gonna go 10 forward. And the bottom line is, we're not taking it anymore."

NEGOTIATING FOR EQUALITY

Harrelson talks about Black Americans having to be in constant negotiations – whether or not to take a drink at a water fountain or ride the bus or be educated –

for equality. For her, the Black Lives Matter movement exposes White people to this reality.

"What to them is a privilege, to us is a negotiation. It's a business deal," said Harrelson. "I want one day to not have to say Black Lives Matter. I want one day to not use the words White privilege... I just wanna be able to come out and know that I'm a human being. And I don't have to watch what I say, or when I'm driving I gotta slow down – not because I should by law, but I should because my color's Black, and I don't want my skin weaponized. 'Cause I wanna see another day."

Nowadays Harrelson goes to the Square as often as she can, greeting visitors as she sees them. On the day of this interview, she spoke with people from California, Colorado and St. Paul. A Sudanese gentleman from Australia who attends Harvard University. A Minneapolis educator on strike. Rochester, Minn. Detroit, Mich. They are simple exchanges that uplifts Harrelson and leaves a lasting impression on those she's touched.

"You see something in the news, you're able to meet Angela, with all she's experienced, [and see her] show up with so much love. It's powerful," said I Ling Thompson, who was visiting from Grand Junction, Colo.

Often, White people ask Harrelson, "What can we do?" She talks about the importance of having these conversations, something that just didn't happen before. On this particular day, she encouraged a White woman to go into a Black hair salon, another to a Black church. To be okay with feeling awkward, but to recognize that it's only because it's different. To recognize that many Black people have been moving in White spaces for much of their lives.

Harrelson's warmth and generosity of spirit is felt throughout the pages of "Lift Your Voice." So is her determination. She's blunt about the impacts of systemic racism, in her own life and as played out on the world stage in George Floyd's murder. As she explains in the book, it's not enough to care about racism, you have to act. "The main thing is to speak up when you see injustice."

"Lift Your Voice" is a story of finding strength, holding onto hope and tapping into our collective humanity.

"Lift Your Voice: How My Nephew George Floyd's Murder Changed the World" is available in hardcover through most local and online bookstores, as well as on audiobook, spoken by Angela Harrelson.

More on the George Floyd Global Memorial can be found at georgefloydglobalmemorial.org.

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