



Watershed
Citizen Award
» 10

AFTER 50 YEARS, THEY'RE LIKE BROTHERS



TC Cats nominated for Minnesota Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

By JAN WILLMS

"The longevity of a band is really contingent on loving the people that you're making music with and being able to get along in the long run. It's just like being married, except you're married to more than one person!"

The above quote by musician Grace Potter might have been given with the TC Cats in mind. The local rock group, which plays primarily 50s and 60s music, has been together for 52 years.

Midway resident DJ Traudt, band member and historian for the group, said their story began at Bethel University. "A

Midway resident DJ Traudt said, "We have talked about stopping, but then we never do. We just enjoy it too much. These guys are like my brothers." (Photo by Terry Faust)

bunch of guys played basketball together, and one of them, John Priestley, was from Philadelphia. He had a younger brother who introduced him to rock and roll. We got together to play a concert for the benefit of student missionaries, and we called ourselves Priest and the Scribes."

The band played together a couple years, and Priestley went on to other things, so they became "The Scribes," and later took the name "TC Cats."

At one of its last college concerts, the group was told by a booking manager that they could make money doing this. "That meant a lot to college guys," Traudt said.

The band began playing for weddings, birthday parties, conventions, anniversaries and fund-raisers.

Their first performance in 1974 was at

the Brooks Ballroom in South Saint Paul. They were invited to become the house band at the Farmers Daughter Supper Club in Litchfield, and performed there for eight years. They played in Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin. And they kept doing it while they pursued full-time careers, married and raised families.

"Amongst us, we have had 11 daughters, so we have had job security by playing for weddings," Traudt joked.

THE DUCKTAILS AND THE MECHANICS

"We didn't learn the music, we lived it," Traudt said. Occasionally the TC Cats will play some early 70s music, but they mainly stick to 50s and 60s rock and roll. Traudt said that when their children were

LIKE BROTHERS » 7

Twin Cities activist creates 'Grow and Glow' program for Black girls to connect and grow with one another in the heart of Frogtown.

Creating a safe space

By AAMIRA REDD

In 2022, in the wake of an ongoing pandemic and the uprising following the murder of George Floyd, activist Satara Strong-Allen took a significant step forward.

As the executive director of Love First Community Engagement, she was dedicated to uplifting Black youth by connecting them with essential community resources and creating a safe, culturally centered space. With this foundation, Strong-Allen created Glow and Grow, a program designed for Black girls to connect and hold space for one another.

A SAFE PLACE » 2

Why aren't people riding the train?

Residents talk about issues on light rail lines, hear about new trip agents and transit ridership investment program

By JANE MCCLURE

Addressing short-term and long-term challenges to the area's transit system is the way to bring riders back to Green Line light rail and area buses. Doing so will be a collaborative effort between riders, Metro Transit officials and the Metropolitan Council.

More than 70 area residents and business owners attended a Feb. 22, 2024 Metro Transit Midway Listening Session, held at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in the Midway. They heard from Deb Barber, who chairs the Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee, as well as Metro Transit leaders Police Chief Ernest Morales III, General Manager Lesley Kandaras and Chief Operating Officer Brian Funk.

TRANSIT » 9



Hotel plan at United Village feels cut off from neighborhood, say locals

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Midway Chamber recognizes businesses and volunteers

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LIVING 50+ Episcopal's Marvin Plakut passes the torch

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A SAFE SPACE

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The idea stemmed from Strong-Allen's own childhood as a young Black girl growing up in both Texas and Minnesota. She recounts facing micro-aggressions and systematic racism, often perpetuated in the school system. She said, "There was never a space specifically for Black girls just where we could come and just like be and be uplifted and be empowered and be told something or shown something different than what society is showing and telling us." She added, "Growing up in America, I just felt like there are a lot of issues that I carried and a lot of traumas I experienced. The same 'push out' kind of things that the schools do with Black girls all over the nation."

The documentary "Push Out," which Strong-Allen referenced, is a 2019 film that addresses the criminalization and educational neglect of African-American girls. This neglect has contributed to their disproportionately high dropout rates and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system. The documentary was a catalyst for Strong-Allen to confront the emotional damage that racism can take on young Black women and the need to be "resilient" and not appear to "be angry," said Strong-Allen.

THE GLOW AND GROW CONFERENCE

Before becoming the executive director at Love First, Strong-Allen worked within the Saint Paul Public School District, and found healing in simple, empowering conversations with groups of Black girls. These connections she built inspired her to want to create an environment that would allow "Black girls the space to just 'be,'" said Strong-Allen.

In the pursuit of this goal, Strong-Allen, who is an activist and community organizer in the Twin Cities, applied for a fellowship through The Wayfinder Foundation, an organization that seeks to amplify the voices of Black and Brown women actively fighting racial and systemic injustices in the criminal and public school system.

"I applied for [The Wayfinder Foundation] and said this is what I want to do. I want to create space for Black girls, and I didn't know what the program would entail, but I just knew we needed this space, especially during the pandemic. And you know, there's healing when Black women get together, so I'm assuming there's going to be healing when Black girls get together," said Strong-Allen.

The fellowship empowered her to organize the inaugural Glow and Grow conference in May 2022. The event was realized in collaboration with the Black Table



Satara Strong-Allen of Love First Community Engagement collaborated with Black Table Arts Cooperative for the first Glow and Grow conference in May 2022. (Photo submitted)

Arts Cooperative, a community-driven initiative to unite people through the arts.

"I wanted it to be about the roses that came from the concrete, and knowing that even though everything around you seems rough, you can still grow, and you can still glow," said Strong-Allen.

The conference focused on healing, featuring aromatherapy sessions, painting, and sound bell meditations. Strong-Allen noted that she felt it was imperative to implement these healing practices to help Black girls be resilient when dealing with an ongoing pandemic and civil unrest.

After seeing success with the conference, Strong-Allen was able to create consistent programming with meetings occurring every month. While the program is structured, the main purpose is to allow the girls to be themselves and the importance of self-love.

Strong-Allen emphasized, "We always do identity pieces because when working with Black girls, our Black identity is so important, and it's really one of the only things that I feel like Black and Brown people have left in a country that is built on White supremacy, and that oppresses us day in and day out. Our identities, how we feel about ourselves, our narratives, who we are, is really, really important. And so I try to make the activities either about strengthening who we are or teaching us about who we are, giving us a vision or a deeper sense of our purpose and self."

BUILDING CONNECTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

Creating mentorship opportunities has been a fundamental component of the Glow and Grow initiative. Women such as Tameka Jones (a Rondo native and owner of beauty brand Lip Esteem), and lawyer and social justice activist, Nekima Levy

Pounds, have lent their knowledge and donated their products to the program. Allen said she hopes that these relationships will form a village and community that will work to restore harm and "build a school to success pipeline."

This vision of building a supportive and empowering community has been greatly influenced and supported by Strong-Allen's wife, Chauntyll Allen, who has been integral in bringing Glow and Grow to life. Chauntyll, the founder of Love First, has brought her experience as an activist and youth advocate in the Twin Cities to the forefront. Together, they collaborate on what be beneficial for the girls based on their interests and find women who in a similar field.

A SENSE OF PEACE

The transformative impact that Glow and Grow has had on its participants is palpable. It's not just about the activities or the skills they learn; it's about the profound sense of peace and self-worth they gain from being a part of this community. This sentiment is best captured in the words of Allen who reflects on the feedback and experiences of the girls: "I can see, or at least, I hear from some of the girls, that it's like their peace. We have a girl who just joined us this year and she's like, 'this is my peace. This is my peaceful space.'"

On Thursdays, the girls participate in "What's the Tea" sessions during their meetings, where they spend about an hour connecting and discussing various topics of their choice. This initiative first took place at the inaugural Glow and Grow conference. Following its success and positive feedback, Strong-Allen decided to incorporate it into regular programming.

The concept of "What's the Tea" was inspired by Raeisha Williams, the owner of Heritage Corporations, a company that specializes in loose leaf teas. Williams not only provided the initial idea but also donated her tea products to the program. Recognizing the impact of isolation and the negative effects of social media on young people during the lockdown, Strong-Allen saw these sessions as crucial for helping the girls build connections.

"I don't think people realize this, but young people are also learning how to communicate. It's like teaching them how to communicate with people all over again and how to have boundaries," said Strong-Allen.

The program, though largely successful, has not been without its challenges. Strong-Allen reflects on the occasional conflicts that have arisen among group members. Yet, she views

these instances not as setbacks, but as valuable teaching moments. In her perspective, each conflict presents an opportunity for learning and growth, both for the individuals involved and for the program as a whole.

"My expectations for them are very basic and very simple. But at the top of the list is, you know is value. We value ourselves, number one and so, if we value ourselves, that means we value the time and energy that we put into things," said Strong-Allen.

"I value the time and energy that I put into things because time is important, right? And life is short. We've only got what, five hours a week to spend with each other? We need to make the most of our time, and that means showing up in a way where we're uplifting each other."

A LASTING IMPACT

As the current programming cycle draws near, the participants are preparing for the Glow and Grow Conference in the spring, an event that will highlight the knowledge and skills they have acquired throughout the year. Looking beyond this milestone, Strong-Allen's vision for the future involves expanding the Glow and Grow initiative.

She aims to extend its impact by welcoming an even larger group of young women, those who are seeking not only guidance but also the opportunity to form meaningful connections within the community.

"My goal for the impact of Glow and Grow would be to eventually have Black girls who have experienced over-criminalization to be able to come to [Glow and Grow] and really get tied into the broader love and this village," said Strong-Allen.

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Lee is with Gentle Transitions and will share tips
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Hotel plans feel cut off from neighborhood, say community groups

By JANE MCCLURE

Plans for a hotel and attached parking ramp at the United Village development could be headed to the St. Paul Planning Commission as soon as March 15. The complicated project design requires a conditional use permit and eight variances. That's a large if not unprecedented number of variances for an area project.

But for neighbors and area district councils, the issue is not so much the variances and the permit, but how such a massive structure will fit in along University Avenue and in the adjacent Hamline-Midway neighborhood.

The request won approval from the Planning Commission Zoning Committee March 7. The committee voted to approve the permit and all eight variances, adding more conditions to two of the variance requests. No one appeared at the hearing to speak against the project.

The project is in District 13 Union Park but is across University Avenue from District 11 Hamline Midway, so both district councils are weighing in. UPDC's full board approved its letter March 6, after a land use committee meeting in February. The district councils have been meeting with project advisor Mike Hahm to review hotel details and get updates on United Village.

The Hamline Midway Coalition (HMC) development committee thought the zoning requests are reasonable and is excited to see redevelopment activities on the superblock that includes the Allianz Field Major League Soccer stadium. But support for the request before the Planning Commission asks hinges in having design details reconsidered.

HMC wants to see site drawings in relation to other neighborhood infrastructure and assets, and assurances that the



This view of the proposed hotel and attached parking garage shows what it will look like from the northeast off of University Ave. The green space with seating areas is situated on the inside facing the stadium.

neighborhood was being factored in and is accessible to the building.

In a statement, the HMC committee said, "Our committee thinks that well-designed integration of the hotel into the surrounding neighborhood is critical for the success of this individual development as well as the broader goal of creating a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly University Avenue. We urge the developer to reconsider the design and present the updates to our committee at a future meeting."

"As currently presented, we think the development does not take advantage of potential connections with the surrounding neighborhood. Design approaches such as adding a vehicular street between University Avenue and the new building, failing to screen the parking ramp with

active uses at the street level, and orienting the hotel lobby away from University Avenue all serve to cut off the proposed hotel from the neighborhood." Another concern is that the lack of clear definition of pedestrian bike connections to the surrounding neighborhood are not clearly defined or designed on the plans.

Union Park District Council (UPDC) and its land use committee support some but not all of the variance requests and the permit. Committee members criticized the building design, with comments including "It stinks" and "Fire your architect."

Populous, which designed Allianz Field, is the project architect. "That is about as non-urban a façade as you could put on University Avenue," said committee member Paul Bakke. While he and



That is about as non-urban a façade as you could put on University Avenue."

Paul Baake

other committee members welcome the idea of a hotel on University, they dislike the design of it and the attached parking ramp.

Others are just frustrated with the slow pace of development on the

block bounded by Pascal Street and St. Anthony, Snelling and University avenues. "I personally don't like hearing a lot about revitalizing an area that used to be full of businesses before the property owners demolished the buildings and they became empty lots full of trash," said committee member Lisa Nelson.

After much discussion UPDC members said they could support some variances but lack information on others. And while city staff recommended approval of the developer request, each is with a set of conditions. There are 40 conditions total, between the permit and the eight variances.

Variances are for various window, door and façade design requirements; and setbacks. The conditional use permit is to allow a building height of 90 feet.

Find the Planning Commission Zoning Committee staff report, a project summary, staff recommendations and correspondence about the project at <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-and-economic-development/planning/planning-commission/zoning-committee>

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT ON THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 7-8:30 P.M. AT ALLIANZ FIELD, STADIUM CLUB. THE MEETING IS BEING ORGANIZED BY THE HAMLINE MIDWAY COALITION AND THE UNION PARK DISTRICT COUNCIL.



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We develop and support resident-led initiatives in community building, transportation, food access, economic development, and general neighborhood improvement.

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Elections!



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March 24th ballot deadline
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Apply Here!



Join the conversation, and let us know your diverse and varied thoughts on the issues that affect your neighborhood. Send letters and guest commentaries to tesha@MonitorSaintPaul.com.

Women's History Month: Celebrating local educator and civil rights leader Dr. Josie Johnson

PLANTING SEEDS

BY DR. ARTIKA TYNER,
dr.artikatyner@gmail.com



March blooms with the essence of Women's History Month, a time to honor the fearless trailblazers who have planted seeds of social change. As we reap a bountiful harvest of justice and freedom, let us not forget the profound significance of this moment – a chance to reflect on the enduring legacy of women throughout history. From suffragettes to abolitionists, scientists to entrepreneurs, their contributions have shaped our country and inspired generations to come.

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Women's History Month began as Women's History Week with a celebration in Santa Rosa, Calif. The Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) founded the celebration in 1978. It was held during the week of March 8 to amplify the importance of International Women's Day and recognize the need to honor ordinary women who had an extraordinary impact on their local community. This initiative garnered widespread support and expanded across the nation. The following year was filled with celebrations that honored trailblazing women.

In 1980, women organized an advocacy effort for national recognition. They sought to share the remarkable contributions of women and inspire young women and girls to make a difference in the world. During February 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the week of March 8, 1980 as the National Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress designated March as Women's History Month. Subsequently, U.S. Presidents have signed an annual proclamation in honor of the contributions of women.

This year's theme is: Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. "Women from every background have long realized that an uneven playing field will never bring equality or justice. Many



feel the critical need to speak up and work harder for fairness in our institutions and social interactions," according to the National Women's History Alliance.

Local educator and civil rights advocate Dr. Josie Johnson is at the forefront of building a more just and inclusive world. This begins with the transformational power of education.

HONORING LOCAL EDUCATOR

In celebration of Women's History Month, the Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute (PPGJ) has partnered with Saint Peter Claver Catholic School to completely revamp and rename their school library in honor of Dr. Josie Johnson.

As part of the redesign, PPGJ and Dusty Dembley of Dusty Dembley Interior Design, have transformed the formerly cluttered and outdated library space into a modern, inspiring learning environment designed to promote the enjoyment of reading and discovery. The library's new design features bright and welcoming contemporary styling with artwork celebrating African American heritage.

In addition, the library's entire book collection has been updated to include many new titles by prominent African American authors such as Angela Joy



The updated library at Saint Peter Claver Catholic Church has been renamed in honor of Dr. Josie Johnson.

("Black is a Rainbow Color"), Michael Tyler ("The Smallest Spot of a Dot."), and Elise Washington ("Tika Speaks") that depict diverse characters and experiences.

Our goal at PPGJ is to transform libraries into spaces where children can discover joy in reading. Yet, as our team travels to schools nationwide for book signings, we see many school libraries serving children of color and low-income students filled with clutter, disorganization, outdated books, lack of design and vision, and overall neglect. The lack of aesthetics diminishes the joy of reading and learning.

To honor Dr. Josie Johnson's pioneering legacy as an educator and leader in the Minnesota civil rights movement, the library has been officially renamed the "Dr. Josie Johnson Library" to dedicate the new space in Dr. Johnson's honor and recognize her tremendous contributions.

Dr. Johnson served as one of the founding faculty members of the University of Minnesota's Department of Afro-American and African Studies in 1969. She became the first Black person to serve on the University's Board of Regents from 1971-1973. Later in her career, Dr. Johnson became Associate Vice President for Multicultural Affairs at the University,



News Anchor Serese Cole and Dr. Artika Tyner

HY-VEE AWARD

Planting People Growing Justice Press and Bookstore was honored with Hy-Vee Judge's Award at the Opportunity Inclusive Business Summit. The company is a major resource for education and representation in the BIPOC community. Through its dedication, the company is giving a voice to new and established Black writers, while inspiring children to read, dream, and become the leaders of the future. Children that learn to read, learn to lead.

where she worked tirelessly to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. She is an inspirational leader who continues to pave the way for future generations.

The team at PPGJ saw nothing more fitting than redesigning and renaming a library for one of the most influential educators in recent history. PPGJ hopes their model of transforming underserved school libraries into vibrant learning hubs will be replicated in other school districts nationwide. The new library at Saint Peter Claver Catholic School is an inspiring dedication to Dr. Josie Johnson's pioneer legacy of equality in education.

A CALL TO ACTION

This Women's History Month, let's raise our voices in celebration and gratitude, honoring the remarkable women like Dr. Josie Johnson who paved the way for progress and continue to plant seeds of hope for a brighter future.

Through her organization, Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute, Dr. Artika Tyner seeks to plant seeds of social change through education, training, and community outreach.

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LETTERS

NEWSPAPERS ARE IMPORTANT

I received my Midway Como Frogtown Monitor delivered to my door today. I just read your column, so I'm writing to tell you that I got my paper. Thanks for your dedication to the newspaper industry!

try! I agree with you about newspapers' tremendous value and importance.

Rick Sutherland
Como

LOVE PAPER NEWSPAPERS

Just writing to let you know we did get our paper. It's always fun to read an article by our neighbor.

Hope your delivery services work out

– I myself love a paper newspaper and appreciate reading about what's happening in the 'hood.

Thanks,
Lorna Landvik

THANKS FOR YOUR HARD WORK

It is an important local resource, and so THANK YOU for your hard work in publishing it!!

David Welliver
Midway

Editor's Note: Thanks for the encouraging words you sent in following the publication of my column last month. I've shared them with our team, and we're glad to hear that people value and count on their community newspaper.

WANT TO REACH 47,000 PEOPLE? YOU CAN – WITH EACH EDITION OF THE MONITOR.

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News for you!

The Midway Como Frogtown Monitor is a monthly community publication in the Midway, Como, Hamline and Frogtown neighborhoods of St. Paul, owned and operated by TMC Publications, CO. Visit our website for our calendar and publication dates.

Story ideas always welcome.

Keep in touch with the Monitor. Letters to the editor under 200 words and news releases for publication can be sent via e-mail to tesha@monitorsaintpaul.com. Unsigned letters will not run.

Owner & Editor:

Tesha M. Christensen, 612-235-4464
Tesha@MonitorSaintPaul.com

Advertising & Marketing:

Denis Woulfe, 651-917-4183
Denis@MonitorSaintPaul.com
Sandra Mikulsky, 612-260-7967
sandra.tmcpub@gmail.com

Design & Layout: Tesha M. Christensen

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Jane McClure, Jan Willms, Jill Boogren, Terry Faust, Chad Kulas, Talia McWright, Aamira Redd

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The Monitor is for profit and for a purpose – and we don't sacrifice one for the other. We

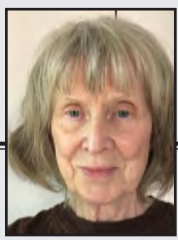
consider ourselves a zebra company, one that is both black and white, both/and. As a media company, we work to highlight issues, solve real, meaningful problems, and repair existing social systems. We are working with our readers and advertisers to create a more just and responsible society that hears, helps and heals the customers and communities we serve.

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KNOW YOUR COMO

BY SONJIE JOHNSON



Meet potter of Front Avenue Pottery & Tile

Drawing inspiration from Como Park wild life and her Wadena childhood lake country, Mary Jo Schmith creates unique, stoneware dinner, serving ware and commissioned tile installations at Front Avenue Pottery & Tile Co. in South Como, according to her website. Fish, wolves, birds, bear and other wildlife move through trees, skies and water, artistically depicting nature at its most evocative. Each of her pieces is food, oven, microwave and dishwasher safe.

One might not expect to find this nationally juried and award-winning, clay work artist on Front Avenue in the South Como, District 10 neighborhood. But here she is, and when I sat down with her recently, she told a most unusual story.

Mary Jo comes from a family of entrepreneurs – both of her parents were self-employed – mother an accountant; father owned a service station. The family's German heritage included functional art – quilting, baking, sewing – and a strong belief in creations that were useful in the world. With a BFA diploma from the University of Minnesota, and a love of working with raw clay, Mary Jo opened her first studio in NE Minneapolis, in 1992.

By 2000, Mary Jo was a single mother with a baby daughter, looking for a living space and a much larger studio that allowed her to install the needed gas kilns and expanded work space. She found them both in 2001, when she talked herself into a long shot loan and a five-year mortgage at 895 Front Avenue in St. Paul. Front Avenue Pottery & Tile company was born. The rest is history and a lot of hard work. Today, her daughter is grown and Mary Jo's design and clay work production business includes three employees, five



Mary Jo Schmith of Front Avenue Pottery & Tile in south Como talked herself into a long-shot loan and five-year mortgage at 895 Front Ave. in 2001 and has been there since.

sales reps, and roughly 500 national customers.

It typically takes several processes to create a pottery piece. Mary Jo makes her own food-safe glaze of ground earth oxides in water. The glazes are dipped, hand brushed or airbrushed in decorative motifs, often repeated in sets, which makes each piece unique. Many hours of drawings precede the final product, which Mary Jo creates for each clay work series. Most pieces are wheel thrown, although some are hand built from rolled clay. Dinner sets, cups, bowls, serving plates and casseroles – her inventory is wide and varied. Several years ago, she added pho bowls to her stock.

With an open-door policy, Front Avenue Pottery & its retail gallery is open to visitors during studio working hours, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m.- 5 p.m., and gladly by appointment. There are times when the studio is closed, exhibiting elsewhere, picking up supplies or just "gone fishing." Mary Jo encourages people to just stop in to browse or ask questions. Calling ahead is always a good idea.

Mary Jo's stoneware has won juried prizes at numerous art shows and exhibits, and has been purchased by national entities such as Yellowstone Park, Cold Water Creek and Caribou Coffee. Galleries in four + states show her work. She will load 24 tubs of pottery in a van and travel most weekends May to August, attending various shows and exhibits. Stoneware sales are cyclical and seasonal, so summer is her busiest season.

A quote on her website best describes her philosophy of clay art, which, like farming, Mary Jo calls a lifestyle:

"A love for the beauty of craft, the science of raw material & the unpredictable forces of fire keep every pot a new challenge!"

More at www.frontavepotteryandtile.com.

EVENTS

FOOD DRIVE MARCH 17

A neighborhood food drive will be held on March 17, noon to 2 p.m., in the Como Park Lutheran Church Parking lot (corner of Hoyt Ave. W and Hamline Ave. N). Cash/checks payable to Keystone Community Services. Needed items: peanut butter, canned tuna (and other proteins), soup, cereal, cooking/baking items (flour, sugar and oil), and culturally specific foods such as rice, fish sauce, bamboo shoots, and vermicelli noodles.

SPAGHETTI DINNER APRIL 20

Scout Troop 13 is hosting their 65th Annual Spaghetti Dinner to raise funds for activities of scouts including camping, hiking and summer camp. Dinner is dine-in or take out, 3 to 7 p.m. Saturday, April 20 at St. Columba auditorium, 1330 Blair Ave. \$10 Adult/\$5 Child, meals include spaghetti with meatballs, salad, bread and dessert. To purchase ticket(s), reach out to mntroop13@gmail.com or through [facebook.com/ScoutTroop13](https://www.facebook.com/ScoutTroop13).

TIDBITS

JOIN THE BAND

The Roseville Community Band would like to increase the number of band members from the Midway, Como and Frogtown areas of St. Paul. Did you play an instrument in high school or college and want to start playing again, come and join the Roseville Community Band. You do not need to live in Roseville to play in the band. The band rehearsals are Monday nights at the Roseville middle school on county road B2 east of Rice Street. For more information check out the web site: Rosevillecommunityband.org

EMOTIONS ANONYMOUS MEETS

Emotions Anonymous is a 12-step program for emotional wellness and learning to live with unsolved problems. The weekly meeting in this area is on Friday at 7 p.m. at the Twin Cities Friends Meetinghouse, 1725 Grand Ave., St. Paul. For further information, call Paul at 651-402-6774.

COMOCONNECTS

For 30 years, Como Park Living At Home Block Nurse Program (CPLAHB-

CURIOUS ABOUT HAMLINE MIDWAY ELDERS?

Adults 60+ are invited to our Spring Social on Thursday, March 21, 1-3 p.m. Live music with Charlie McGuire. Desserts and coffee, Crafts with Coral: Seed Art, seedling planting with Stephanie Hankerson. Book exchange; bring books to give!

Free event, donations always welcome. RSVP to info@hmelders.org or 651-209-6542.

More at www.hmelders.org
HME also offers Chair Yoga, Gentle Exercise, Knitting/Crochet Group, and Solo Seniors Resource Group, and assis-

HAMLINE MIDWAY ELDERS



BY LAUREL COLLINS
laurel@hmelders.org
651-209-6542

tance for seniors living in Hamline-Midway and Frogtown neighborhoods.

Call or visit our website for more information.

NP) has been helping seniors in the Como Park and Falcon Heights neighborhoods live better in their own homes and apartments. Providing health-centric services, up to and including nurse visits and nurse-provided care, was the program's core focus.

But the continued rapid expansion of the local senior population, and its ever growing range of expectations and interests, has called for ongoing adjustments and expansions to the program's original mission – and for a new program name that is reflective of these changes. As of Oct. 1, 2023, CPLAHBNP is COMOCONNECTS

- Resources and Support for Neighborhood Seniors. Lisa Kane, the program's executive director, says that the COMOCONNECTS name came about through conversations with clients and their families, neighborhood residents, volunteers, and other stakeholders. COMOCONNECTS will still help seniors meet their health-related needs, but that the program is also focused on providing life-enriching resources and support for seniors, and on enhancing their autonomy through companionship and socialization opportunities.

For more information, call (612) 433-8627.

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During his 25 years with Episcopal Homes, Marvin Plakut brought major changes to University Ave.

By IRIC NATHANSON

Marvin Plakut came to Episcopal Homes as CEO in 1999, at a time when the eldercare institution was facing serious challenges.

"Our industry on a national level was undergoing a major transformation," Plakut recalled. "Here in St. Paul, Episcopal Home was doing good work operating a stand-alone nursing home, but single purpose organizations like ours were no longer financially viable."

If his agency was to thrive in the new century, Plakut knew it needed a more substantial financial foundation. A former executive with a large Twin Cities healthcare organization, Plakut went to work adding new services and doubling the size of his organization's University Avenue campus. Now, after 25 years on the job, Episcopal Home's long-time leader is retiring.

During his years as CEO, Plakut's most enduring achievement involved some deft maneuvering through the City of St. Paul's regulatory thicket. That chapter in ECH history involved the organization's next-door neighbor, one of University Avenue's most iconic landmarks, Porky's Drive-in.

Over the years, ECH leaders had eyed Porky's as a potential expansion site, but the eatery's owners had rebuffed several offers to sell off their University Avenue property. Then in 2012, the current owner, Nora Truelson had a change of heart. "That year, Nora came knocking on my door, saying that she was ready to sell," Plakut recalled. "We were a willing

'A GOOD TIME TO PASS THE TORCH'



In a letter to members of the Episcopal Homes community, Marvin Plakut said he is "very proud of the continuum of care and affordability we have created on University Avenue." (Photo by Terry Faust)

buyer; they were a willing seller. Both sides were able to agree on a purchase price, so the deal seemed straight forward, except it wasn't."

As the negotiation were wrapping up, Plakut learned that the Porky's site was eligible to be included on the city's Register of Historic Places. Historic eligibility triggered an extensive regulatory review. Once the review started, Plakut could receive no assurances from the city that he would, in fact, be able to clear the site and build a new Episcopal Homes facility there.

At that point, it looked like the Porky's deal was unraveling. "I went back to Nora and told her we couldn't take on the risk," Plakut said. "But I did say that we

would sign a purchase agreement contingent on city approval of our construction plan."

Eventually, the deal got back on track when Truelson learned that she could demolish the drive-in and sell the vacant site to Episcopal Homes. "City rules said that we couldn't demolish the site after we bought it, but Nora could, while she still owned it. That's exactly what happened," Plakut said.

Truelson cleared the site before selling the property to Episcopal Homes, but she was able to save the 1940s-era drive-in building by moving it to an outdoor building museum west of St. Paul.

The Porky's site enabled Plakut and Episcopal Homes to construct a new \$145

million building across University Avenue from the Fairview LRT station. Known as Midway Village, the facility included a pre-school day care center, a therapeutic swimming pool, a skilled nursing home and two independent living apartment developments, one affordable and the other market rate.

MANAGING COVID-19

A half dozen years after Midway Village opened in 2014, Plakut faced his most serious crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged nursing homes all across the country. "Luckily, we were not hit as hard by the pandemic because of the way our nursing homes and senior residences were configured," he recalled.

"In 2005, we expanded our nursing home and created all private rooms. That made an important difference. With no shared rooms, we were able to isolate our residents and protect them, as best we could, from the spread of the disease.

"At the same time, we were immediately in alignment with federal and state guidelines. When Dr. Fauci and the Department of Health spoke, we listened."

Plakut and his staff worked to isolate the residents by creating five zones on their University Avenue campus. Residents and staff stayed within their zones as much as possible. Episcopal Homes staff also bought groceries for residents in order to limit their exposure to the outside world.

"We also worked to mitigate the loneliness that so many of our people experienced," Plakut noted. "We gave an iPad to anyone who wanted it. We encouraged people to telephone and write cards to their friends and family members. We did whatever we could to keep people emotionally healthy while we were in a lockdown."

While Plakut and Episcopal Homes came through the Covid pandemic rela-

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LIKE BROTHERS >> from 1

younger, the TC Cats formed an additional band called the Ducktails. "We played parody songs, such as 'Waking Up is Hard to do' rather than 'Breaking Up is Hard to do.' We played at a lot of children's festivals all over the Twin Cities, and at the fair. That was a fun time. We did that for about six years until our daughters grew out of it."

In the late 90s, there was a contest on KOOL 108 for the best a cappella group. "I signed us up for it, then told the other guys," Traudt said. "We actually won the contest, and did a cappella performances for three or four years. The highlight was when we performed for 3M at the Radisson Hotel." Traudt said that as part of their performing for 3M for several years, Smokey Robinson and Glen Campbell shared the stage with them. "That was a lot of fun," he said.

When Traudt and his wife, Sande, bought an old dilapidated gas station and turned it into Andy's Garage, a restaurant in the Midway area, the TC Cats performed there, too. They also started a trio called the Mechanics who sang at the restaurant. But throughout all the musical innovations, the TC Cats stayed and played together.

'LIKE BROTHERS'

Traudt, who plays percussion, has been with the band for 50 years since the very beginning. Gordie Fransen plays guitar and has been a band member for 49 years. Dave Broza plays keyboards and has spent 48 years with the group. The newcomers are Brian Eckert, who has played bass, guitar and ukulele for 32 years, and Chauncey Richardson, who has been drummer for 30 years.

"Four of us do lead vocals, and Chauncey does mostly background," Traudt added. All the musicians play by ear.



TC Cats has traveled hundreds of thousands of miles together across the region and are up to almost 2,000 shows. They play 15-22 times a year. Members include DJ Traudt, Gordie Fransen, Dave Broza, Brian Eckert and Chauncey Richardson. (Photos submitted)

"We've traveled hundreds of thousands of miles across the region, and we are almost up to 2,000 shows," he said. "That's quite a lot for a part-time band."

He recalled that when the group first started, they played six nights a week. They would sometimes learn songs as they drove to a performance.

Now they play 15 to 22 times a year.

Traudt said it is just as exciting as it was when they began playing together.

"We have talked about stopping, but then we never do. We just enjoy it too much. These guys are like my brothers," he said.

Besides, they cannot disappoint their followers. One woman told them she had followed them for years and at the end of



TC Cats members DJ Traudt, Gordie Fransen, and Dave Broza have been performing together for over 48 years.

a performance, showed them her dancing shoes had holes in them. The band created a fan award and has given it to several of their most loyal fans.

Traudt said their uninterrupted playing for more than 50 years is a result of their being good friends before they started. "Also, we all stayed in the Twin Cities area," he said.

"Recently I was going through some old cassette tapes and found one from a 1978 concert we did for a children's mission. The cassette came out really clear, and Gordie and I transferred it to CD, so we will shortly come out with a version of that," Traudt said.

The TC Cats have also been nominated to join the Minnesota Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. "It was too late for this year, but we'll see what happens," he said.

Besides playing for anniversaries, birthdays and weddings, the group plays for a number of fundraisers, especially for youth who have medical needs.

To book the band, call Traudt at 651-246-4259 or email him at djtraudt@gmail.com.

"When we were college kids, the money was a big deal," Traudt noted. "But now we just like to play; it's fun for us."

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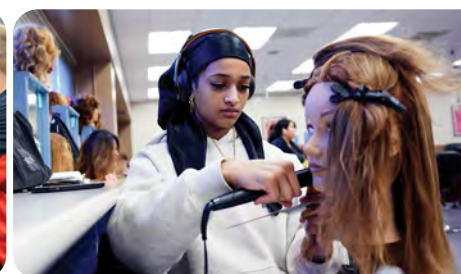
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BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY

BY CHAD KULAS,
Midway Chamber of
Commerce Executive Director
chad@midwaychamber.com



On March 2, 2024, the Midway Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Celebration. This is our biggest event every year and one of the highlights of the evening is honoring members with awards. Our five categories are Rookie, Nonprofit, Small Business, Large Business and Volunteer of the Year. Our members can make nominations, and then a subcommittee narrows down each category to three finalists. The winners are then chosen by our committee members voting. Without further ado, here our 2024 Leadership Award winners...

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: SLICE BROTHERS PIZZA

Over the past two years, Slice Brothers Pizza has shown their dedication to Saint Paul and the Frogtown/Midway neighborhoods. With new locations at Frogtown Crossroads and the upcoming Treasure Island Center in downtown Saint Paul, they have not only shown their dedication to the City of Saint Paul, but also their popularity and success are making waves everywhere they go.

Slice Brothers have opened five locations across the Twin Cities, contributing to the local economy and creating many jobs.

Other Finalists: Chops Inc, Rafiki Coffee & Cafe

NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR: NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

OUR 2024 AWARDS



Finalists for the 2024 awards gathered for lunch at Carondelet Center on Feb. 14, 2024. The winners were announced during the annual Chamber Gala on March 2. (Photo submitted)

NDC has been a community leader in Saint Paul and the Frogtown/Midway neighborhoods for over 30 years. They have supported hundreds of small businesses and BIPOC entrepreneurs, and have now been awarded their biggest responsibility yet by the State of Minnesota in distributing funds through the Promise Act. This heavy lift was assigned because of the expertise and proven track record of NDC.

Other finalists: Como Friends, Visit Roseville

LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: SAINT PAUL PORT AUTHORITY

While technically not a large business

themselves, the Saint Paul Port Authority has done a lot of the Saint Paul business community and is a leader in development and job creation. The Heights project has the potential to the biggest commercial real estate opportunity in the history of Saint Paul's East Side, having a goal of 1,000 jobs.

The Port has also been a great source of information to our members and many others. In 2023, they sponsored six continuing education courses for Real Estate professionals which were held at venues like Chamber member Urban Growler Brewing.

Other finalists: Sunrise Banks, Suntime

Commercial Realty

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: COLOSSAL CAFÉ (COMO LOCATION)

Colossal Café has been a great catering partner for the Midway Chamber as they have partnered with us on both monthly luncheons and economic development events. They have often waived delivery fees as event sponsors and have helped craft special custom menus. Colossal is one of our most popular Lunch on the Line locations, and they have continually been generous with gift cards and certificates for Chamber event auctions.

Other Finalists: Dual Citizen Brewing Company, TMC Publications CO/Monitor

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: JESSIE HIGGINS, NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Jessie never hesitates to volunteer her expertise or connections, or the resources and space of Neighborhood Development Center to a Midway Chamber member or event. The board retreat, as well as other meetings, have been graciously hosted by Jessie at their NDC space. In addition to serving on the Chamber Board and Economic Development Committee, Jessie is this year's Annual Celebration chair, lending her vision and great ideas and energy to ensuring the 2024 event will be successful.

Other Finalists: Kris Kiefer-Vik of Chad Babcock State Farm; Michelle Murzyn of Minnesota Bank & Trust

We were excited to announce this year's recipients and recognize them for their great work in our community and helping build a stronger Midway. Think about others you know who help make our neighborhood better and brighten their day by telling them thanks for their contributions.

Frogtown zen center celebrates 30 years

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, St. Paul's Clouds in Water Zen Center is hosting a continuous 30-hour stretch of meditation: a Sit-a-thon, marking one hour for each year of cultivating joy, wisdom, and compassion in the Twin Cities.

From 7 a.m. on Saturday, March 23 to 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 24, Clouds in Water Zen Center's doors will be wide open. All are invited to join - from neighbors in the Twin Cities to those around the world online via Zoom - whether for a few minutes or a few hours. "Stop by, take a seat in the solace of a candlelit temple, and get your Zen on!"

encourage organizers.

"Clouds in Water is an incredibly unique Zen Center," says executive director Renkyo Heather Fehst. "Our Guiding Teacher, board chair, and executive director (myself) are all female. Many of our teachers and priests are female, non-binary, trans, or queer. We value accessibility and place a priority on offering ways to practice meditation that support each individual's body. This is an inclusive, restful place to find refuge from the noise, fear, and uncertainty that surrounds us in these times. ALL are welcome!"

Opened in 1994 and formerly located



Sosan Theresa Flynn is the Guiding Teacher at Clouds in Water Zen Center in Frogtown.

Mindfulness Group, Youth & Family Program, Queer Dharma Mornings, and more - Clouds is passionate about creating and maintaining a vital sangha that celebrates

ed in Lowertown, Clouds in Water is committed to serving the many diverse communities of the Twin Cities. From daily meditation services and classes throughout the week, to a thriving BIPOC sangha, Racial Awareness Groups, Friday Night Zen for younger adults, 12-Step

diversity.

Jinzu Minna Jain, a priest-in-training, says, "It's vital for me, as a queer, trans BIPOC person with disabilities to practice Zen Buddhism in a community with so many people who understand and share my experiences. It feels particularly important now... to have a sanctuary where I'm not asked to 'leave systemic oppression at the door.'"

Clouds in Water is a vibrant and inclusive congregation in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition, with a mission to awaken the heart of great wisdom and compassion. Founded in 1994, they regularly offer meditation, classes, and retreats. It is located at 445 Farrington Street in St. Paul, and everywhere via Zoom.

PASS THE TORCH >> From 6

tively unscathed, the eldercare organization has had to deal with another major problem facing the nursing home industry: a shortage of qualified workers. "We do have something of a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting staff because of our location at the Fairview LRT station. People looking for work in our industry have a quick and easy way to

get here using mass transit, particularly if they lived in and around St. Paul."

'WE'VE DONE THIS TOGETHER'

After 25 years on the job, Plakut can look back at a career that has brought about major changes in St. Paul's Midway District. In addition to its two skilled nursing homes, Episcopal Homes now operates more than 500 senior housing units on its main campus and at two off cam-

pus sites. In addition, the eldercare agency provides 650 jobs at its St. Paul location.

With Plakut's retirement, Tom Henry, Episcopal Home's chief financial officer, will take on the top leadership role as president and CEO of the 130-year-old non-profit organization. In a letter to members of the Episcopal Homes community, Plakut said he is "very proud of the continuum of care and affordability we have created on University Avenue."

He added, "Whether you live here on our main campus, or just up University Avenue at Kings Crossing or Carty Heights, we have done this together. Episcopal Homes currently has the strongest employee and management teams since my tenure began - not to mention the best residents! We also have an exceptional board for strong governance."

"So, it is a good time to pass the torch."

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Monitor in a MINUTE

By JANE McCLURE

OVERNIGHT TUNES AREN'T MUSIC TO NEIGHBORS' EARS

Wondering where the music is coming from when you try to sleep or visit a Midway Marketplace store? Devices set up by the city's Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) are being used to broadcast music. The devices, which are moved around the property, play classical music all day and night.

Use of such devices is a common tactic to discourage loitering. The city contracts with an outside vendor to set up, maintain and move the devices.

The music carries, especially at night. That has prompted complaints from Hamline Midway residents over the past several months. With the music continuing, some have stepped up their efforts to file complaints with the city.

They are asking residents to contact Ward One Council member Anika Bowie and Ward Four Council Member Mitra Jalali. The shopping center is in Ward One, but the noise carries into nearby Ward Four. A form letter posted on the neighborhood social media page states, "It is loud enough to disrupt my sleep. I have already submitted a noise ticket but this music has been played since last summer, or earlier. The complaint tickets are not working. It is time to stop. Please work with DSI to mute the music."

St. Paul does regulate noise, with decibel limits between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. The city council can work with DSI to grant noise level variances.

Neighbors who had filed complaints over the past several months said they have not had a response that addresses the issues. While the city web page directs residents to call the police non-emergency line to make noise complaints, the public is being directed to an online form, at <https://tinyurl.com/3vnhp2nf>

Read more about noise at <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/safety-inspections/report-concern/common-concerns/noise-and-sound-level-limits-saint>

LIBRARY UPDATE

Renovate 1558, the organization that is focused on trying to save the historic Hamline Midway Branch Library, recently gave an update on its work to save the Henry Hale Memorial Library, Hamline Branch.

The library closed last year. It is slated for demolition and replacement.

Renovate 1558, which takes its name from the library's street address of 1558 Minnehaha Ave. W, continues to argue that the

TRANSIT >> From 1

In recent weeks, transit and council officials have spent time on buses and trains observing situations, said Kandaras. That effort is going to continue. Listening sessions are being held. Ways to improve communication and gather community feedback are on the table.

A theme throughout the discussion is that while many people value transit service, they don't value the behaviors sometimes seen on the trains and buses. Drug use and sales, crime, smoking, loud behavior and a prevalence of litter were among issues raised. Older people and people with disabilities are among those who feel threatened at times.

Another theme is that transit ridership is changing. Ridership dropped dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and hasn't returned to pre-pandemic levels. Some routes were discontinued, and in other cases, trips were offered less frequently. Now, changes in when people use transit are being seen.

Concerns raised from area residents include frequency of service, travel speeds (especially on Green Line), and how the Route 21 will be replaced with the B Line bus. People also asked how routes get priority.

One challenge the Green Line has faced is that the past winter's cold snap and subsequent thaw damaged nine areas of rail, said Funk. Trains must slow down significantly when traveling in those areas. Eight of the nine areas where damage was sustained are on University Avenue. Repairs will be made in the April 19-21 time frame.



The past winter's cold snap and thaw damaged nine areas of rail, including eight areas along the Green Line. They will be fixed April 19-21.

Metro Transit has focused much attention on Blue Line light rail. When Morales took his post last year, he and his wife made a point of riding Blue Line light rail and saw some huge problems. Morales said his wife commented, "This is the first place that you will fix."

Green Line is the next line to receive added attention.

Morales noted that the bad behavior seen on transit is a small window into larger societal issues. Trains and buses often serve as shelter for people who have no place to go. Or riders are people struggling with drug addiction.

Drug dealers often use major transit stops, such as University Avenue, to interact with customers. That is yet another problem Metro transit is working to address. More security on platforms can deter that.

Morales made it clear that the transit police cannot arrest their way out of the

problems.

One change is the addition in late February of "trip agents" on Blue and Green lines. The agents will check fares and provide passenger education on routes and schedules. They can also help direct people to social services and administer first aid, including Narcan, that is used in an opioid overdose.

TRIP stands for Transit Rider Investment Program. It's one of many steps being rolled out in a larger transit safety and security plan.

Several people at the meeting said they want changes. One comment was that the odor of fentanyl can be so strong, people said they must get off of the trains before becoming ill.

One speaker said that he is in recovery and works with others who are trying to become sober and maintain sobriety. He said that riding transit and being around drug users is a "trigger" and can bring fears of a relapse. His suggestion that recovery specialists are on the trains got a positive response.

One step taken for those who cannot afford fares is to provide information programs that can help. Fare evasion is now something that won't draw a criminal charge. Instead it is an administrative citation.

Hamline Midway Coalition and Union Park District Council were meeting hosts. HMC's Transportation Committee is drafting a meeting summary and will post it online.

HMC is also adopting the Snelling Avenue Green Line station through a Metro Transit "Adopt a Stop" program, as part of the council's work to improve conditions at Snelling and University avenues.



1930 building can be saved and repurposed. The group led the charge in successfully getting the structure placed on the National Register of Historic Places in January 2023.

The group is also continuing its legal fight against the city to prevent building demolition, and has launched GoFundMe to help cover legal costs. City official contend that the library is dated and needs to be replaced.

"Sadly, in Saint Paul, Minn., love of history isn't enough to stop a wrecking ball swung by city leadership and the Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL), nor is its inclusion on

the NRHP, which the city actively opposed. Instead, our elected officials and SPPL want to toss away the historic library like a crumpled Taco Bell bag. They plan to replace it with a new library on the same lot. While slightly larger, the new building trades community history, sustainability, and artful character for a design some called 'reminiscent of a credit union,'" the group's GoFundMe page stated.

Renovate 1558 has called for the existing library to be renovated, or for library services to be moved to a larger space, possibly a community center.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS MOVE AHEAD

Four new commercial development districts have been created in the West Midway area that is the Creative Enterprise Zone. The St. Paul City Council Feb. 21 created the districts, following a public hearing earlier last month at the Capital Region Watershed District offices.

The council action will allow up to nine new on-sale liquor licenses to be issued

among the four districts. Commercial development districts are a mechanism the city uses to issue on-sale liquor licenses in wards where none are available.

While city officials in recent years have loosened liquor regulations to allow restaurants to obtain license outside of the per-ward cap, not every business wanting an on-sale licenses has qualified.

The notion of allowing more liquor licenses in the Creative Enterprise Zone began last year when Paikka, an event center at Vandalia Tower, sought commercial development district status so it could obtain a liquor license. That led to discussions of putting all or part of the Creative Enterprise Zone in a district, to promote entertainment options. The zone itself was created more than a decade ago as a means of promoting vibrancy and support for the arts community in the area.

The original proposal was for one large district. That was amended to create four smaller districts.

The four new districts take effect this spring.

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**COMO PARK
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**
BY ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher


A 26-year-old St. Paul City Conference record was broken by the Como 200 Medley Relay team at the city meet in early February 2024. Cougar seniors Oskar Helegn, Kai Sackreiter, Kyle Kosiak, and sophomore Joey Schumacher combined to swim the four different required strokes in 1:40.64.

Coaches Jon Tufte and Steve Conery channeled the momentum from conference competition into training for the Section 3A Meet on Feb. 23, where the Cougars took third place overall (out of 13 teams) and qualified eight swimmers for the Minnesota State Meet. (The top three finishers for each event at sections advance to state.)

Kosiak became the section champion in the 100 Butterfly, finishing first and setting a new school record of 52.43. Kosiak set another school record in the 100 Backstroke while finishing in second place with a time of 55.72.

Schumacher also earned a section championship, winning the 100 Free. Sackreiter advanced to state with third place finishes in both the 50 Free and the

Swimmers set conference record, advance to state



The Como boys' swim team concluded their season with outstanding results in the Section 3A Meet and another appearance in the Minnesota State Meet. (Photo by Gwen Kosiak)

100 Breaststroke. Helgen qualified for state in the 200 Individual Medley.

Two relay teams also made it to state: the 400 Free with Garrett Seppanen, Adi Toe, Ian McKea, and Noah Williamson, plus the combo of Sackreiter, Schumacher, Seppanen and Kosiak in the 200 Freestyle.

Notable finishes in the state meet included Sackreiter who placed eleventh in

the 50 Free, Kosiak who medaled with a sixth-place finish in the 100 Butterfly, and the 200 Free Relay team that placed tenth.

"I'm eternally grateful for what this team and family has brought me," Kosiak said. "My teammates and I will be forever thankful that we were Como swimmers."

MURAL ENHANCES ENTRANCE

A new colorful mural reflecting the Como community has been painted on a long wall that welcomes people into school at the front entrance. Courtney Veszi is an artist and first-year Como teacher who designed the mural.

Veszi has 19 years of teaching experience and has created several public art pieces in a variety of locations including restaurants, businesses, and city projects. She coordinated her effort with Como's Family Engagement Committee. Students, staff, and parents were able to pitch in and paint during after-school sessions.

"Beautifying the world around us is a passion and I love having the opportunity to do that," Veszi said. "Especially if it can involve students and those that aren't normally traveling in the art world."

Similarly, a mural representing Como Athletic teams was painted last spring in the lobby outside the gym that welcomes guests for Cougar games. Yusef Davis serves as Como's Restorative Practices Coordinator and is also an artist. He designed the athletics mural in the school colors and included an outline of St. Paul's skyline.

Students were proud to help paint with Davis' encouragement and guidance, appreciative of being able to leave a legacy at their school.

PEACE BUBBLES

BY MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com


"Nobody's free until everyone's free."
Fannie Lou Hamer

Hello Monitor readers,

How was your February Leap Month and day? How was your Black History Month; did you discover something new or read any Black-focused books or watch a Black documentary or movie? And, how did you cope/deal with the rollercoaster drama of the weather, the horrors of the different wars, the start of the Presidential Election primaries and caucuses, as well as hearing and seeing the honest and in-our-faces unethical and dishonorable federal lawmakers.

**"PRAISE THE POWER THAT HATH MADE AND PRESERV'D US A NATION!
THEN CONQUER WE MUST, WHEN OUR CAUSE IT IS JUST,
AND THIS BE OUR MOTTO - "IN GOD IS OUR TRUST,"
AND THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER IN TRIUMPH SHALL WAVE
O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE."**

Black History Month is always inspiring for me for obvious reasons, and for the ripple effect of fresh air to breathe some truth into our traumas and pain and to do some repairing, acknowledging, healing, restoring and appreciating that we are all related and share both our own and collective stories. For instance, Black History Month provides a space and opportunity to stretch and let go of our denials and angers and start slowly opening up to the fact that we all have been misled at times and have intentionally been taught that White is Right and Mighty and Black, Red and Brown is bad, ungodly, and thieves and rapists. I'm so thankful that these old-fashioned, self-ish, and greedy stereotypes and prejudices are fading, and that more and more people are looking behind the curtain of the corrupt, racist, sexist, and other isms institutional structures and systems.

Keep energizing this Leap Year and the gift of our extra day to transform our blue and green planet starting with ourselves

TRY A MORNING RITUAL FOR WELL-BEING

and taking extra breaths to feel empathy for others. Let us all take a deep breath for our recent fallen/murdered first responders. Let us continue to send our condolences and heartfelt energy to their families and dear friends. Let's also find room to extend our sympathy to all who are experiencing unbelievable loss, darkness, and hopeless. Please join me with sending a message of peace and comfort out to the universe in your own manner. Let us visualize and believe that we can create spaces and places of peace and safety. Let us be part of the solution that brings relief to all the negativity and crime in our communities. And, let us work together with neighbors, lawmakers, law enforcement, health care providers, first responders, essential workers, educators, and others, including lawyers, one-percenters, farmers, and scientists.

Please enjoy the following expressions from previous contributor, Princess Titus, who offers good food for thought and great insights for pro-actively synergizing your humanity with others.

MORNING STEPS TOWARDS WELLBEING OR MORNING RITUALS MATTER

Waking up each day can be peaceful and paced or it can be heavy with high energy. You can awake and activate gratitude for life, hydration to break your fast and seek alignment of your steps. Or you can wake up and jump back on the same ole' ride that dumped you off at your bed the night before, exhausted and feeling unaccomplished. Being intentional with the way you start your day can make a difference in your mindset, productivity, and overall well-being.

Do your days seem like you start them feeling the need to rush, followed by afternoons of not being able to get your head in the game, concluding with evenings of reflecting and deciding you have not done enough. Starting off thinking of all the tasks ahead of you as well as the ones you have left behind, that are now long overdue, create feelings of anxiety. Does glancing at your calendar can incite feelings of depression and dread?

What would be different if your day began with deep breaths of gratitude? Open ended prayers of "Who? What? When? and Where?" to keep you surrendering to the will of your purpose and divine assignment. Try to transition your body into the awakened state with random new-

born baby stretches, or the Vipanta Karani, a yoga pose that is simply placing your legs up the wall. Take some time to enjoy getting ready for the day, handle your hygiene like an honor not a chore. Allow your time in the mirror to incorporate looking into your eyes, and massaging your temple and face. Definitely celebrate the feet, thank them for carrying you through the last days and rub with shea butter before placing them into socks and shoes, then ordering them to lead the way, again.

These acts of self care are simply the loving kindness that you deserve and need in order to create the type of internal environment necessary to support you through what needs to be done. If your desired result is to be well, productive, and seek balance. Stop and stop, celebrate all that has been done thus far, and make your morning rituals matter. - Princess Titus

AND, A POEM/SPOKEN WORD:

Is it ok if I am different?
Is it ok if my family doesn't know?
Will it be ok if I tell them?
Will I be ok if I don't?

Why should I have to worry about asking these questions,
If they promised my safety?
It feels as if their words will be weapons
Will I tell my friends? Maybe

Is it ok that I am scared?
Is it ok that they might hurt me?
Will it be ok if I change what I wear?
Will it be ok if I stop worrying?

When will it be ok to be myself wherever I am?
Or will I always speak in code?
Cause right now I'll talk to whoever I can
For when I get home,
I'll talk in my "it's fine, I'm normal" mode

Hello, I am Piper Williamson. This is an important poem to me because I wrote it from the perspective of an LGBTQ+ child who is afraid to tell their parents because they are afraid of being hurt (with one of my best friends in mind). The poem points out the issues LGBTQ+ kids have to face everyday, and why it is important that we give them a way to feel comfortable. I hope that those who have not experienced the feeling are able to read this and understand the



Melvin Giles received the 2023 Watershed Citizen Award from Capitol Region Watershed District for demonstrating a personal commitment to citizen engagement, project initiation and exceptional leadership that supports CRWD's mission. He was praised for being a connector, and advocating for goodness in every conversation.

hardships of their lives.

When this goes out I hope that it will help show others why it is always best to never judge someone of the LGBTQ+ community or any in that case.

THANK YOU, PRINCESS AND PIPER FOR SHARING YOUR TRUTHS.

I invite others to use the Monitor to express your feelings and your truth through the Letter to the Editor space or within my column. I am grateful that the Monitor gives me the privilege to share information with an abundance of people; and, my Black cultural mentors, elders, and ancestors have encouraged me to share and spread the privilege opportunities to others. Have a fantastic March; enjoy the acknowledgement and learnings of Women History Month, respect and have a cheerful St. Patrick's Day, and embrace all the other goodness of March transitioning into spring and bringing more daylight, truth, and justice to our Beloved World. RIP Police Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, and firefighter and paramedic Adam Finseth.

May Peace Be In the Rondo, Frogtown, Hamline/Midway, Como, and Surrounding Communities... May Peace Be In Our Homes & Communities... May Peace Prevail On Earth (MPPOE)!

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~ Anna Eleria, Capitol Region Watershed District

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HOW EMPTY NESTERS CAN REPURPOSE BEDROOMS

Converting a child's bedroom into an area for adults may take some planning. It can be exciting to regain space, but at the same time, it can be disheartening to convert a child's bedroom once and for all. When the time comes and homeowners are emotionally ready to tackle bedroom conversions, these tips can help the process go smoothly.

- Repurpose the space for them. Give a childhood bedroom an adult spin without changing too much.
- Create extra storage. The bedroom can be transformed into a walk-in closet or dressing space. There's a bonus if the layout allows the space to connect to the owner's suite or bathroom. This is a major overhaul, so homeowners should enlist a professional contractor.

- Make a fitness center. A bedroom can be turned into a home gym to make working out more convenient. Homeowners should take inventory of equipment they may have and then figure out where existing and new equipment will go. They may need to consult a structural engineer to ensure that the flooring can bear the weight of additional equipment.

- Create a work space. One of the best ways to transform adult children's bedrooms is to convert the spaces into home offices. Those who have been setting up "desks" at dining room tables or elsewhere may be excited about the prospects of finally having a private, dedicated space to work from home.

- Turn it into a craft room. The bedroom can be converted into a space to explore hobbies and various other interests. A dedicated craft space, a reading nook, a place to store photography equipment, or another function can serve as a useful way to repurpose an empty bedroom.

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