

SOUTHWEST Connector

NEWS FOR EVERYONE, DELIVERED TO EVERYONE • APRIL 2024 • VOL. 3 • NO. 5 • 25,000 CIRCULATION



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THE SPICE OF LIFE

By **J.D. Fratzke**
SAVORING THE 612



I've been traveling a lot lately. Over the last nine months, I've been on an airplane more times than I have in the previous 15 years. The trips I'm taking typically involve seminars and training on new lines of kitchen equipment, not necessarily gastronomic voyages of discovery. Though after 30 years behind restaurant stoves, the opportunity to see the country – even if it is mostly its frontage roads and office parks – is a welcome adventure.

I do, however, lament the food on many of these trips (the less said about that, the better). So when I arrive back in the 612 area code, usually one of the first things I want to do is prepare a meal of food I actually want to eat.

Being an American male of a certain age, my desire to access flavorful, fresh food in on-the-go settings – particularly food that is at minimum benign to my cardiovascular system and waistline – has become the White Whale to my forlorn Captain Ahab. Don't get me wrong. Snobbery deferred – I'll crush a grease burger with so-called 'cheese' of questionable origin any day of the week, just not EVERY day of the week.

Road cuisine in the U.S. of A. seems to be subject to The Jim Jarmusch Rule (originally applied to his filmmaking):

"Fast, cheap or good. Pick two, cuz that's all you're going to get. If it's fast and cheap it's not going to be good. If it's good and cheap, it's not going to be fast..." et cetera.

Despite the fact that Minnesota's own Jorge Guzman has an outpost for his exceptional talents in Dayton, Ohio – a restaurant called Sueño – my colleagues and I were only able to make one night's dinner of its inventive, flavorful menu and superlative service. The remainder of the trip's meals were rife with hapless proteins of dubious provenance and heartbro-



PARTNERING & SHARING



Gina Rautenberg of LHINC and Karen Binkowski of SWBA say collaboration while Linden Hills node is closed during street construction is just the start.

By **Eric Ortiz**

With many organizational budgets being slashed, businesses and residents need to band together to thrive. Gina Rautenberg and Karen Binkowski are leading by example.

Karen Binkowski of the Southwest Business Association (left) and Gina Rautenberg of the Linden Hills Neighborhood Council are excited about plans to reinvigorate local businesses and get people out more to boost the local economy. (Photo by Tesha M. Christensen)

Rautenberg is the executive director of the Linden Hills Neighborhood Council, and Binkowski is the manager of business development and marketing for the Southwest Business Association. They got connected earlier this year for the first time and were immediate kindred spirits. Now, ideas are flowing back and forth, especially with the climate for local businesses today in southwest Minneapolis and Linden Hills.

"It's still tough," Binkowski said during her "Let's Connect" event with Rautenberg on March 8, 2024. "It depends on the business and where it's located.

They're still struggling a bit with having people come out and shop because I think they're used to shopping a lot online still. Just as much of an issue for them is all of the road construction that's going on and how that impedes, with lack of parking and with residents and visitors not understanding what is available to shop in. It's something actually that Gina and I have been talking about and working on together."

They are excited about their plans to reinvigorate local business and get people out more to boost the local economy.



'OPPRESSIVE' EXPERIENCE: 57 HEARINGS, 80 COURT ORDERS, 12 PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES



**VOICES AGAINST
FAMILY VIOLENCE**

By **Tesha M. Christensen**

Family court judges haven't been able to solve issues, and now mom on welfare is paying for special master

What do you do when 11 judges and referees, 20 therapists, 12 mediators, two parenting consultants (with 37 directives), one custody evaluator, and one guardian ad litem haven't been able to resolve a family court case?

Lexi* would like to be out of family court after 57 hearings over 12 years. Instead, she's seen the Minnesota Who's Who list of family court professionals since she filed for an order for protection and a divorce when she was three months pregnant with her second son.

Despite being well below the federal poverty level, Lexi has been ordered by a Ramsey Court judge to pay for a special

master to resolve parenting time disputes. Essentially a private judge, special masters charge \$400-\$500 an hour. Lexi's two sons, now 15 and 11, have refused to see their dad for nearly three years. They've been refusing to get out of the car at drop-offs far longer.

When the boys started running away from school to avoid being picked up by their dad and police were called to retrieve them and enforce parenting time, they added another family therapist to the mix of professionals. She began by meeting only with the parents. From those meetings, she ordered their dad to complete a number of steps to better his parenting

skills and take responsibility for his actions.

He has not completed them.

Instead, he has filed multiple motions with the court requesting new professionals to review the case. In the last year alone, they've had seven judges and referees assigned to their case, and an order from over a year ago has yet to be written. He asked for – and got ordered – a brief focused assessment with a psychologist at a cost of \$5,000 and a special master, who required an initial deposit of \$7,000. Their last parenting consultant cost \$18,000 to get fully caught up on the case, and the



THOSE WITH LIMB LOSS PUSH BACK AGAINST 'NOT MEDICALLY NECESSARY'

Photo & Article by **Margie O'Loughlin**

There are over 35,000 Minnesotans living with limb loss, and thousands more living with limb difference and mobility impairments. Many are unable to access prescribed orthotic and prosthetic care due to a lack of insurance coverage, forcing individuals and families to incur huge out-of-pocket costs.

Some of their stories were shared at the state capitol on Wednesday, March 13, 2024.

The day-long event, called "So Every BODY can Move Minnesota" drew more than 100 advocates for two bills affecting people with limb loss and limb difference.

The goal of the two bills is to change the climate of insurance denials for orthotics and prosthetics prescribed by physicians for the health of their patients.

Five years ago, she was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer that required a full leg amputation. She received a prosthetic leg with a microprocessor knee, which was expected to last five years. Keeler loves to paddle in remote places like the Boundary Waters Canoe area. Her first prosthesis began to wear out after three and one-half years. When her doctor wrote a prescription for a replacement with a waterproof micro-processor knee, the claim was denied as "not medically necessary."

Like many advocates throughout the day, Keeler told stories about non-disabled relatives who received hip and knee replacements routinely so they could maintain their previous lifestyles. Artificial hips and knees are internal prosthetic devices. Keeler said, "People needing external orthotic and prosthetic devices should have those same privileges, too."



NOT MEDICALLY NECESSARY

Elsa Keeler is a retired pediatrician.

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LET'S Connect COFFEE TIME

2 PARTNERING

"One of the things that Karen and I connected on is there's going to be a pretty large closure of the primary intersection [at 43rd and Upton Ave. in Linden Hills] beginning in May and continuing for at least 10 weeks, if not longer into the summer. And so that's going to be really, really challenging for local businesses who already have a parking challenge here," Rautenberg said. "Karen and I had talked about that a few weeks ago, and we shared a plan that the council has been coming up with to do a sort of an online campaign to encourage non-car activity into and out of Linden Hills during this closure. There will be a QR code at each of the individual businesses that they can scan to enter into a giveaway for gift cards and other prizes if they have not taken a car to get into Linden Hills."

"Karen and I have been speaking on that and trying to figure out how we could fund it to ensure that the businesses that are already burdened by this closure aren't also responsible for the gift cards that we'll be getting away. So we want to make sure that this is something that's just a net benefit to them even despite of kind of the real challenge of the street closure that they'll be facing."

The Southwest Business Association will be sponsoring the Walk, Bike, Roll to Linden Hills initiative financially and then also helping to execute it by working with the small businesses.

"For the business association, this is a direction we're really excited to take," said Binkowski. "In the past, especially with the funding that we're able to secure through the city, it generally has to be spent on individual businesses. And we are seeing a need to work on marketing our nodes. So these major shopping in-



Eric Ortiz (center) of the Southwest Connector interviews Gina Rautenberg of the Linden Hills Neighborhood Council (left) and Karen Binkowski of the Southwest Business Association. The Let's Connect series is hosted by the Southwest Connector with the goal of bringing people together.

▶ ENTIRE INTERVIEW @ SWCONNECTOR.COM

tersections, and this is the perfect opportunity to try something where we can use some of our funding to support this initiative and see how this helps with the loss of traffic and help them generate sales."

This is just one of the many ways neighborhoods and businesses can work together. Collaboration and creative thinking, Rautenberg and Binkowski both agree, are vital going forward.

"We're we're designed to support the businesses, the neighborhood associations are designed to sort of support the residents, but really you know it's the same thing in our opinion," explained Binkowski. "You need both to survive so the direction for sure going forward is a lot more partnership and sharing of resources."

Rautenberg is excited about the possibilities and what the community can accomplish when everyone works together.

"It does feel like there's a lot of potential for each of those links," said Rautenberg. "If we aren't all in a partnership together, if any of those links break, it could be really, really difficult for us to pull off really solid community building work in

our neighborhood. But right now I do feel like there is a real spirit of collaboration and partnership because so many budgets are being slashed everywhere that everybody's sort of like, what can we do to all stay connected with one another and to make sure that things don't get lost. It's a really solid way to turn this from a challenge into an opportunity."

Today, the Southwest Business Association has about 120 business members. Their goal is to add 50 more businesses. It's \$195 a year, or \$17 a month. With that, you get support from Binkowski. You get support from their board. You get access to all of their education resources and no cost opportunities, like grants. The more members they have, the more work they can do.

"I just hope that we can grow the profile of these associations as nonprofits and that we're here to support the community, we're here to support the residents and our businesses," summed up Binkowski. "And I'm just really excited for what we're gonna be able to do in the future."

They can't do it alone.

WATCH THE WHOLE INTERVIEW

You can watch the "Let's Connect" conversation with Mark Rivard on the Southwest Connector website, www.swConnector.com.

WHAT'S NEXT:

Our next "Let's Connect" is with Lee Syndergaard on Friday, May 3, 11 a.m. to noon at The Eloise at Wirth on the Woods, our presenting sponsor. He'll be sharing tips on simplifying your life, starting with your home. Does the thought of downsizing and moving overwhelm you? Then you'll want to attend this event. Let us know if you want to sponsor an upcoming event or have ideas for speakers.

"I agree 100 percent," said Rautenberg. "In terms of the neighborhood associations and Southwest Business Association, sort of every organization is undergoing a lot of budget cuts right now. So the funding is really tight. It's becoming a massive challenge. And so what we're really trying to talk about as folks offer us ideas is to say, thank you for the idea. Will you also help us execute? That's a much bigger ask. We recognize that not everyone is in a position to do that, but I do think the work of creating and sustaining and building a community does require everyone to get involved. There are so many fantastic ideas out there."

Watch the full interview by Eric Ortiz with Karen Binkowski and Gina Rautenberg at www.swConnector.com.

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WE NEED TO MAKE KIDS AMERICA'S TOP PRIORITY

Young people face unprecedented challenges and deserve a stronger foundation of support.

It's hard to get a consensus on anything in the United States these days. But one issue unites the whole country.



By Eric Ortiz

According to "The State of Kids and Families in America 2024," a report from Common Sense Media, everyone has concerns for the future of America's children.

"Contrary to conventional wisdom, voters across party lines favor investment in kids and families, see a role for government, and think that politicians are failing to deliver," says the report. "And teens don't disagree— they want more from their schools and their leaders, and worry that the lives their parents lead today may not be accessible to them in the future."

Lake Research Partners and Echelon Insights conducted two surveys in English and Spanish for the research, one of 1,000 likely voters and one of 884 kids and teens age 12 to 17. The survey showed their worries, hopes, and proposed solutions for change.

These were the key findings:

- 1) Kids and families are fundamentally linked in voters' minds to concerns about the economy and rising prices.
- 2) Voters and teens agree that our



Minneapolis students at a community solutions event organized by the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation. (Photo by Eric Ortiz)

elected leaders are failing young people.

3) There is clear bipartisan support for more government investment to support children and families.

4) Voters believe mental health for young people is in acute crisis, and teens see mental health as their top challenge.

5) Both teens and voters think our schools are not currently up to the task of preparing kids for the future or economic stability.

6) Kids, teens, and voters think we are in a crisis now, and less than a majority believe things will get better in the future.

Being a parent or kid is not easy today. Some people are questioning if the kids of millennials are already doomed. These kids are part of "Generation Alpha," born in 2010 or later, with over 46 million alpha children in the United States and rising.

These youth have grown up with digital devices, lived through a pandemic, are heavy YouTube and TikTok users, and have unique challenges. Over 60 percent of them not reading proficient, they have reduced attention span and concentra-

tion, less development of creativity and imagination, and more social emotional development issues, including increased depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

I have seen these challenges firsthand in Minneapolis. As the parent of three kids (age 16 and under) and the executive director of the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation, a youth and community development organization that works with students (grades K-12), the issues are real.

Many kids are addicted to devices. They prefer being on phones and tablets to reading books or playing outside. They lack empathy and do not have the same inherent respect for elders as previous generations.

It's not their fault. Our world, in its current state, is not conducive to positive learning.

A pandemic, distance learning, and social media have accelerated the age of "act wrong." Many kids 14 and under don't know how to act right. In general, they are not getting enough education.

Many parents don't have time to provide guidance. They are struggling to make ends meet (sometimes working multiple jobs). Most U.S. public schools don't have the necessary resources. Teachers are undervalued and underpaid. Good teachers are in short supply and need more support.

Many youth are growing up with YouTube and TikTok influencers and video games as their role models. Some of these influencers and video games have little to no value. They are junk food for the mind, garbage for the soul. Many youth follow these digital influencers. As a result, many youth have behavioral issues and don't know how to treat people with respect or

kindness.

Many kids today are navigating life like a rudderless ship. We need to help steer them in the right direction.

This is why the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation started a community solutions with youth program and partnered with schools in Minneapolis to provide more educational and economic opportunities.

As part of our community solutions program, we developed a youth journalism program. Our first school is Ella Baker in Uptown. We created an online school newspaper called Ella Baker News to give youth the opportunity to learn journalism skills.

We can continue to course correct.

As Common Sense founder and CEO Jim Steyer writes, legislation provides a chance to fix our missteps on regulating social media and hold tech companies accountable. Two key bills in New York, The SAFE for Kids Act and New York Child Data Protection Act, can serve as a model for protecting children online.

It's not too late to educate the public about cybersecurity and AI risks and install guardrails.

It's not too late to build a world where all young people can thrive.

It's not too late to put kids and families first.

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

STORIES & JOURNEYS

So far in 2024, I have been showing up for more meetings and events in-person or via Zoom. In person showing up has been enabled by three factors. 1) The mild winter weather enabling me to be out and about. 2) My health issues staying in the background of my life. 3) Transportation support from friend and former co-worker Samuel Fadina. Here a few encounters and conversations that stand out for me so far. But first things first.



By Donald L. Hammen

Virginia J. has reached out to me via Tasha@tmcpub.com to tell me her Medicare story. Here are some quotes that capture my take away. "Hi, I've been following your columns in the Messenger and agree with you about Medicare Advantage Plans.... My husband and I intend to stay in traditional Medicare. Some of my concerns are whether the supplement will get too expensive or whether the doctors will all become parts of groups owned by insurance companies and will decide not to accept traditional Medicare." Note: I share those concerns.

ENCOUNTER AND CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH POSSIBLY

Dear reader: what in your life experiences promotes/constitutes conversations/dialogue with youth out side of family.

ENCOUNTERS AND CONVERSATIONS

Tell yourself, tell others or tell me via tasha@tmcpub.com. And if you have read this far you have taken the plunge into the river(flow) of life experiences which is Stories and Journeys.

A ZOOM MEETING AND LONGFELLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL OPEN HOUSE

On Thursday, Feb.29, I attended a Zoom meeting of a sub-committee of the Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council (AFL-CIO) Committee on Ageism. The conversation explored how are conversations/dialogue with youth possible in our culture and how does conversation with youth come about in the context of the MRRC or in general throughout our community.

Later on the same day, I stopped by the Longfellow Community Council Open House. There I encountered and conversed with Trever Born. Turns out he writes online Longfellow Whatever: Neighborhood News So Specific, It's Only Interesting to Us. I also encountered and have had two conversations with Ben Hower, LCC Community Organizer. Turns out that he believes there is possibly an opportunity for elder-youth conversation/dialogue in Greater Longfellow. Stay tuned.

ENCOUNTERS AND CONVERSATIONS AT THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AGING

Samuel Fadina has been transporting me to the state capitol for the last two

(Feb. 9 and March 8) of these monthly meetings. Representative Ginny Klevorn is chair. Senator Kelly Morrison is vice chair. A report to the legislature is intended to come out of these meetings. With people over 65 constituting the fastest growing segment of the population in Minnesota, there seems to be growing interest within the task force for creating a Minnesota Department on Aging. Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council President Leif Grina delivered a well-received testimony advocating for the creation of a department on aging, which drew applause from those in attendance (including me) at the March 8 meeting.

I belong to three organizations that have been showing up at these task force meetings, so it's highly likely I will keep showing up as long as I stay healthy and have transportation. They are the Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council (AFL-CIO), the SEIU Health Care for Minnesota/Iowa Retiree Council, and All Elders United for Justice.

OPEN HOURS WITH REPRESENTATIVE SAMANTHA SENCER-MURA AT DOGWOOD CAFE

I made my way to this event thanks to Metro Transit. There was a small group. Among other things, I got to make my point about people over 65 being the fastest growing segment of the population in Minnesota. She got to make her point about the importance of attending my Pre-

cinct Caucus Feb. 27 at South High, which I did thanks to transportation from Samuel Fadina.

THE PROGRESSIVE POPULIST ARRIVED

Two articles jumped out at me. One by Hal Crowther, a journalist, who has won writing awards too numerous to mention here. The article is entitled "An Incurable Disease? The Mystery of MAGA." In this article, he raises the following question: "How is it possible that people cheer and celebrate the most transparent fraud, the most outrageous liar, the most straightjacket-ready psycho ever visited on the body politic?"

The other article is by Jake Johnson, a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams. This article is headlined, "Trump Allies Plan to Privatize Medicare Draws Alarm and Outrage."

The Progressive Populist is an independent journal published out of Storm Lake, Iowa. Check it out at <http://www.populist.com>

Reminder: Social Security and Medicare are not entitlements and do not contribute to the national debt. Also, Elder Voices (Telling Our Stories/Sharing Our Journeys) continues to meet the last Friday of each month, 10 to 11 a.m. at Turtle Bread, 4205 E.34th Street. Look for the table with the Elder Voices sign.

In gratitude always.

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

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SPRING BRINGS CELEBRATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Many events planned for Neighborhood Day on May 11

By **Cam Gordon**

People throughout Southwest Minneapolis will be celebrating Neighborhood Day on May 11 this spring to connect residents and business owners to the work of neighborhood organizations in the area.

Both city and neighborhood leaders hope it will increase awareness about (and participation in) all the city-recognized neighborhood organizations in the city. There are 22 that serve the southwest area.

“Our hope is that Neighborhood Day encourages community members to seek out their local neighborhood association and to start building connections within and across their neighborhood’s diverse community to collaboratively build a safe, vibrant and sustainable neighborhood,” said Lyndale Neighborhood Association Executive Director Sami Smetana.

Steven Gallagher is the city’s neighborhood programs manager. He was working with the city in 2019 when the idea was approved as part of the new Neighborhoods 2020 plan. The idea was inspired by a program in Los Angeles where neighborhoods would hold board elections on the same day with support from the city aimed at improving election turnout.

Minneapolis’ first annual Neighborhood Day was held in 2021, when neighborhood organizations were encouraged to hold board elections or host other community activities to increase resident participation. In 2021, according to Gallagher, only five or six of the city’s 70 official neighborhood groups participated. In

2022, he said that the number was closer to 20, and he is hopeful it could surpass that this year.

According to a city announcement, typically fewer than 1% of potential voters actually vote in neighborhood organization board elections. Neighborhood boards manage the organizations. They set priorities, weigh in on city decisions, and control the neighborhood organization’s budget. Voting in board elections is seen as an important way to make sure that the board members represent the residents of the neighborhood.

“There was time when a lot of neighborhood boards were not representative of their populations,” said Gallagher, “but I have seen a huge increase of boards trying to get underrepresented groups involved and they are doing a great job.”

EVENTS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

This year several southwest neighborhood organizations are using the day to help get more residents involved in their work.

The Kingfield Neighborhood Association is hosting a Garden Tool Swap at Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park from 9 a.m. to noon.

The Cedar Isle Dean Neighborhood group is hosting an event at Cedar Lake South Beach where they will have a bike tune-up station available and other activities where people can picnic and enjoy time with their neighbors.

The Kenny Neighborhood Association is having their annual meeting and board elections. People are invited to visit their office between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to learn more about their association, plans for the year ahead, as well as their programs, goals and financials. The day will kick off



It is the smallest form of government in Minneapolis, and it’s a great way to create a sense of place and pride within a neighborhood.”

Steven Gallagher



featuring the LHiNC executive director.)

The Kenwood Neighborhood Organization (KNO) is hosting two engagement activities on May 11: their annual East Cedar Lake Beach Clean-Up from 8:30-11 a.m. – and a Safety Walk & Clean-Up that starts at Kenwood School at 9 a.m.

Perhaps the most remarkable, and largest, Neighborhood Day event is being done by Citizens for a Loring Park Community. In the morning of May 11, starting at 10 a.m., there will be a memorial tree planting to honor Robert Skafte, the long-term resident, dancer, Steven Square’s farmers market founder, and a creator of the La Salle Community Garden who was tragically killed last December while working at the Oak Grove Grocery store. The memorial will be followed by a “Peace in the World” concert featuring JD Steele and the Mill City Singers, Sarah M. Greer and Dean McGraw, the Ukrainian Village Band and more.

their board elections, which will run from May 11-17.

The Linden Hills Council (LHiNC) will be hosting their annual community garage sales day on May 11 with dozens of households, businesses, and even the Linden Hills library participating. (Read related story beginning on page one in this issue

“May is Tangletown Neighborhood Association’s busiest month,” said their executive director, Andrea Siegel. While they are not planning events for May 11, she said, “We have taken two of our long-standing May events – our compost distribution fundraiser and our neighborhood Spring Spruce Up – and combined them into one event and added the Neighborhood Day branding.” These events will be held on May 18, from 10 a.m.–noon in the Mayflower Church parking lot.

Board members and committee volunteers will be there, sharing information and helping people learn about upcoming board elections and about serving on the board themselves. Their board elections will happen the following Monday at their annual meeting on May 20.

The Lyndale Neighborhood Association (LNA) is not hosting a specific “Neighborhood Day” event, but they are hosting several events in May including a Wheels & Bike Rodeo, with skate demonstrations, a bike skills course, food trucks, a bouncy house, facepainting and art activities on May 4, from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. at Painter Park. The Lyndale Garage Sales Day will take place on May 18.

FUNDING A CONCERN

Since the Neighborhood Revitalization Program funding ended several years ago less money has been provided by the city for neighborhoods, and the county stopped funding them completely. There was an increase last year of \$5,000 in funding from the city for every organization but still, Gallagher said, “The unknown state of stable funding is what I hear from most neighborhoods as a concern.”

He added, “Ideally the county would step up. Back when we



THANKS FOR YOUR COVERAGE



Thanks to Cam Gordon for his coverage of the March 2 rally on Lyndale Avenue, and the contrasting viewpoints of the two participating groups on the reconstruction of Lyndale, scheduled to begin in 2027.

Livable Lyndale, a project of Move Minnesota, favors removing parking to create bike and bus lanes. Vibrant Lyndale, a coalition of 72 Lyndale Avenue businesses, favors a road shared by all without eliminating parking.

I was at the rally and spoke with Sam Rockwell, director of Move Minnesota. He and other lobbyists for bike lanes are not wrong about the climate crisis. It’s here, and we must end our dependence on fossil-fueled cars, trucks and buses.

What baffles me is that their vision of how we do that is so retro. If this is our one chance to reconfigure our streets for the next 50-70 years, as Rockwell notes, shouldn’t we think beyond bikes and buses? EVs are here with more on the way and after that, who knows?

Going at a slower pace by bike is a lovely romantic vision, just not a realistic one. We need to think like the Jetsons, not the Flintstones! Visit VibrantLyndale.org to learn more.

Susan Lenfestey, Minneapolis

WE NEED INCLUSIVE POLICIES

Parents should have the ability to participate in choices about their child’s education. This is crucial for parents of children with disabilities, who need to be involved in decisions about their child’s education, accommodations, and services. However, disabled parents of children with disabilities are not always given this opportunity.

Children with disabilities participate in creating Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) each year, addressing their strengths, challenges, necessary supports, and goals. This process involves collaboration between the student, family, and educators. However, there is no requirement for IEP meetings to offer reasonable accommodations for parents with disabilities. While many schools strive to accommodate parents, it is not mandated nor universally implemented.

Inaccessible systems and or the lack of resources prevent parents from receiving the support necessary to parent their children, often compelling them to defer power to grandparents.

This issue holds profound implications for our community. Without equitable access to education planning, parents with disabilities are disproportionately disadvantaged, hindering their children’s academic success and perpetuating cycles of inequality. The failure to address this issue undermines our collective commitment to diversity and inclusion.

A bill introduced to the House in 2021 requires school districts to provide reasonable accommodations to parents with disabilities participating in their child’s IEP, representing a step towards addressing this issue. The proposed legislation emphasizes the importance of reasonable accommodations tailored to facilitate parental involvement without imposing undue hardship on school districts. Despite the initial introduction of the bill, further progress has been stalled, highlighting the ongoing challenges in enacting supportive policies for parents with disabilities.


I urge readers to join me in advocating for inclusive education policies that empower parents with disabilities to actively participate in their child’s education planning. By fostering a more inclusive educational environment, we can create opportunities for all parents to meaningfully participate in their child’s education.

Sienna Coskran, Lynnhurst


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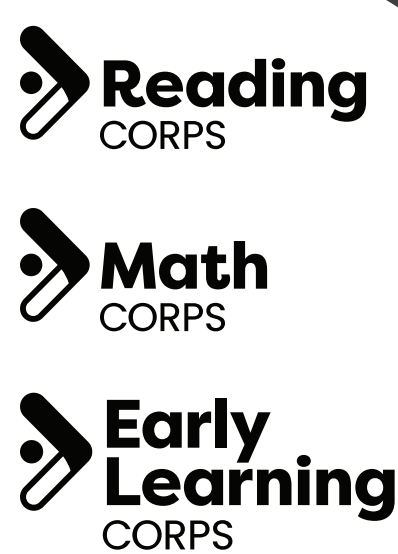
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RECYCLE YOUR LEFT-OVER PAINT WITH PAINTCARE

PaintCare accepts all brands of paint, stain and varnish

By Margie O'Loughlin

Did you know there's an option for recycling leftover paint in Minnesota? That's right, recycling, not just disposing of leftover paint.

Since 2014, the non-profit PaintCare has been partnering with local paint stores in Minnesota to reclaim and recycle paint products through more than 260 drop-off sites across the state – and more than 100 of those sites are in the seven-county metro area.

The American Coatings Association (ACA) is a national trade association representing the industry, including manufacturers. ACA created PaintCare as an alternative to paint disposal 14 years ago. Think of it as an industry-led paint stewardship program.

Oregon was the first state to establish a PaintCare program. Since that time, California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Maine, Minnesota, New York, Rhode Island, Washington, and Vermont have enacted legislation to do the same, and Illinois will soon join the ranks.

A key element of the legislation is that all retailers in participating states must charge a fee that covers the cost of collecting and managing left-over paint.

Look at your receipt next time you buy paint or another coating product; the fee is based on the size of the container purchased. It is often, but not always, listed separately on a printed receipt.

- 1 gallon or smaller: \$ 0.49
- 1-2 gallons: \$ 0.99
- 2-5 gallons: \$ 1.99

FIND A DROP-OFF SITE

Go to the interactive map at www.paintcare.org/drop-off-sites to find the drop-off location nearest you.

Jacob Saffert is the PaintCare program



Jill Carmody is a senior manager at the Habitat for Humanity's Minneapolis ReStore. They are both a drop-off site for leftover paint products, and a retailer for the Amazon brand of recycled paint. Carmody said, "PaintCare has made it easy for people to recycle their left-over paint, which is the right thing to do for the environment." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

manager for Minnesota and Illinois. He said, "Leftover paint is typically the largest volume product collected by municipal household hazardous waste programs. From the data we filed with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency last year, PaintCare collected about 900,000 gallons of paint across Minnesota in 2022. That's pretty typical for us."

In Minnesota, PaintCare's contracted waste haulers transport paint to a recycler in Fridley to process the paint they collect. There the paint is sorted by color, filtered, and blended to create an assortment of standard colors. The gallon and five-gallon containers of recycled paint are mostly sold to Habitat for Humanity Re-Use Stores; the colors cannot be re-tinted.

When asked about why the paint industry was early to get on board with a paint stewardship program, Saffert said, "One benefit the industry saw was that if you're proactive, you get a seat at the table to make sure the final program is one that works for everyone."

DEALING WITH OIL-BASED PRODUCTS

According to Saffert, about 80% of paint products collected by PaintCare are water-based and 20% are oil-based.

Oil-based products are more complicated to dispose of because there aren't any recyclers that can deal with them. Household Hazardous Waste sites make efforts to resell them, but Saffert estimates that only about 10% of what counties collect actually gets re-used by consumers. Oil-based paint that can't be reused is typically burned for energy.

8

▶ 1 SPICE OF LIFE

ken side dishes languishing in puddles of commercial butter substitute. Suffice it to say that after five days in central Ohio, I craved fresh vegetables and bold, layered flavors.

I arrived back in South Minneapolis hell-bent on therapeutic stove time in our home kitchen. As our college freshman daughter was home for spring break, I decided on a family favorite – coconut vegetable curry over brown rice with a hefty fillet of center-cut organic salmon.

As I arranged my ingredients and implements, I noticed that my wife, Lisa, had finally hung a spice cabinet in our kitchen that she had rescued from an antique store on 50th and Penn Avenue a few weeks earlier. The cabinet was an adorable piece of Americana. Three shelves of cedar covered by a flat, hinged door and a modest flourish of scrollwork on top.

Bolted above the cutting board of my work station, it had been stripped of its original mottled varnish and sanded down. Lisa had painted it in two lovely shades that complemented the design of our kitchen, as well as a pair of Moroccan salt and pepper jars my sister gifted us 20 years ago.

Curry is built the same way one builds all of life's truly important things: the right layers in a thoughtful order on top of a solid foundation.

The layers I needed in this case were no longer in the drawer an arm's reach from my cutting board; they were in the rehabilitated work of art staring down at me. I opened the door to the cabinet and



browsed through the shelves, looking for my Madras curry blend, cumin, paprika, ground ginger, toasted chilies... My chef's brain looked past the sweet gesture Lisa had made by filling the shelves with my spice library and immediately made plans for organizing the flavors by geographical region, then in alphabetical order – a sort of gastronomic Dewey decimal system.

Mentally filing away my intention to organize the cabinet to my personal specifications at a later date, I drizzled avocado oil in a saucepan over low heat and added minced garlic, fresh ginger and diced onions, stirring them together until they were

dressed in an even sheen. While the distinctly exotic aroma of that Ayurvedic trio began to bubble and crisp in the pan, I reflected on Lisa's decision to pursue real estate as an occupation rather than interior design – which she had originally intended.

Curry is built the same way one builds all of life's truly important things: the right layers in a thoughtful order on top of a solid foundation."

JD Fraztke

The little touches that hang on the walls throughout our house, or hold our office supplies, or augment shelves and furniture, are certainly functional and easy on the eyes, but overall, as parts of a greater whole, provide a sense of calm and well-being in our home; one visitors regularly compliment.

I would say it's because that is the sensibility with which Lisa finds these ephemera. Her discoveries aren't born of a transactional deadline or a signed-and-dated agenda; they simply speak to her while she gives herself time to indulge her heart in environments that comfort her.

When the onions began to turn translucent and brown a bit, one at a time I shook out contents from the dried spices I had culled from the cabinet into the pan and stirred them into the mix. As they toasted a bit, I stirred – unleashing their aromas into the kitchen. What I smelled

and would taste was robust, but it wasn't rounded. An acidity seemed to be missing. It wouldn't work as well if added later in the form of lime juice or rice vinegar. I recalled that while looking for the spices I knew I had, that Lisa had also included a shaker of taco seasoning. Perhaps inspired by my trip to Jorge's dining room in Dayton, and maybe because I knew I wouldn't have to explain to a paying customer why I had dared mix the sacred flavors of two ancient cultures from opposite sides of the Earth, but mostly just out of a sense of 'what's the worst that could happen?', I flipped open the cap to the shaker and doused the masala with about a teaspoon of Old Mexico.

An hour later, after fish sauce and chickpeas and lime juice and coconut milk and vegetables had simmered, the brown rice had steamed and the salmon had taken a short ride in the oven until pearly pink and tender in the middle, Lisa and I sat down to the fruits of my bewonderment.

"Wow, babe! This is one of the best you've ever made," Lisa gushed after the first spoonful.

I let her know that her and her work on the spice cabinet were mostly responsible. She paused and gave me a quizzical look.

"How's that?" Lisa asked and spooned up another helping.

"You keep helping me to rediscover all the good things I forgot I have."

Without looking up from her bowl, Lisa blew on her curry, grinned and asked, "You're just noticing that now?"

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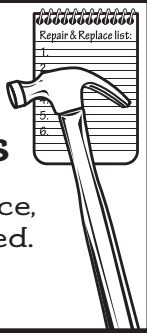
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6 PAINT CARE

Oil-based paints have higher levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and stronger odor than their water-based counterparts. Oil-based paint clean-up requires chemical solvents, and turpentine and paint thinner should never be poured down the drain.

The industry is phasing out oil-based paint products for these reasons.

BETTER STORAGE, LONGER LIFE

Paint lasts longer when properly stored. Choose a dry location that won't be subject to extremes of temperature and humidity, and make sure containers are sealed.

PaintCare sites accept all brands of leftover house paint, stain, and varnish.

At the ReStore, there are 20 different colors of recycled paint to choose from at \$18/gallon or \$90 for a five-gallon pail. Colors cannot be re-tinted. Carmody said, "Sometimes you just don't need all those choices. We sell two shades of white, three shades of grey, and a nice selection of 15 other colors at a great price." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Containers must be five gallons or smaller, and customers may not drop off more than five gallons of paint per visit. Leaking, unlabeled, and empty containers are not accepted at drop-off sites. Make sure all paint containers have original lids and labels. The program includes container recycling for both plastic and metal paint containers.

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HOW REAL ESTATE AGENT COMMISSIONS WILL NOW AFFECT US

Buyer's agents won't be getting a standard 2.7% commission anymore. This new policy is going to affect buyers and sellers.

TEAMING UP FOR GOOD

You've heard, I'm sure, about the court ruling and the decision by the National Association of Realtors:

Buyer's agents will no longer receive a "standardized" 2.7% commission on every



By Larry LaVercombe

residential real estate transaction.

As you can imagine: this is all anybody's talking about in my industry.

The new rule is that no where on MLS will a listing agent be able to offer a buyer's broker commission.

Since I started selling real estate in 1999, the "norm" has been that virtually every MLS listing guaranteed a buyer's broker payout of 2.7% that was paid by the seller.

Everything has changed, now.

The Internet changed our industry about 25 years ago. Realtors went from publicizing their listings in the paper-bound "MLS Book" published once a week (available only to realtors) to listing data, photos, videos, floor plans online.

That was a big change, and so is this.

One of the fears out there is that first-time buyers, particularly in the low-priced brackets, will not have the "extra amount



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MUSICIAN FOCUS OF LOCAL FILMMAKER'S MSPIFF FILM

'Laurel Massé: How Can I Keep From Singing' took nearly two decades

By Jan Willms

A film that has been long in the making premiered during the Minneapolis Saint Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) running April 11-25 at the Main Cinema, 115 SE Main in Minneapolis.

Local filmmaker Reilly Tillman has crafted a long and growing connection with a member of the vocal jazz group, the Manhattan Transfer, into a film that explores her early career, her time with the group, the challenges she has faced and the redeeming qualities of her voice and perseverance.

Tillman has footage that he started shooting 18 and a half years ago to create the documentary "Laurel Massé: How Can I Keep From Singing?"

"My first exposure to the Manhattan Transfer was when I was a freshman in high school," Tillman recalled in a recent interview. "Their song, 'Single Operator,' was playing in the top 20. I loved that song but did not explore the group any further." In his junior year, Tillman was part of a swing choir that did a version of "Java Java," a song from the Manhattan Transfer's first album. In college, Tillman said he was visiting a friend and heard someone playing their album. "I couldn't believe I had not discovered how great they were," Tillman said. "I ran out and purchased the album and found that all the members of the group were fantastic singers with a distinctive style. Laurel's solos, the purity of her voice, and the lushness of her tone resonated with me. I started reading about them and found that Laurel had left the Manhattan Transfer. It was not until five years later that I found a copy of her first solo album in New York. Then I was really hooked."



Reilly Tillman (at right) started filming over 18 years ago for his recently released film on Laurel Massé (at left). The documentary will be shown during this year's Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival April 11-25. (Photo submitted)

That summer, Massé performed at a jazz club in Minneapolis half a block from Tillman's home. By this time he had attended enough of her concerts that she recognized him, and she joined him and a friend at their table. "I thought 'Okay, now we are friends.'"

Tillman completed his first documentary film on a drum and bugle corps. "In 2004, I was looking for a new project," Tillman said.

"I had bought some of Laurel's CDs, and her tour de force solo album called 'Feather an Bone.' It was mostly a Capella, recorded in a beautiful music hall in upstate New York. She sang ancient hymns and spirituals, mostly unfamiliar songs. It was different from what she had done. She took poems and put them to music. The very last song had bagpipe music, and at one point Laurel sang like a bagpipe. She vocalized to sound like an instrument."

Tillman said he started thinking that Laurel, her life and music would be a wonderful subject for his next film. "I knew her music and career and a lot of her story, so I sent her a copy of my first film,

and she was just on board. It took no additional coaxing," Tillman said.

He started shooting in 2005 at her home in New York. Tillman was introduced to her friends Jay Unger and Molly Mason, whom he called world-class American Roots musicians. "They run a summer music camp where Laurel teaches, and so in 2018, I went with her to the camp and spent a week filming.

"I thought it would make a nice foundation for the film to span the week's activities in the camp throughout my film, but in different split-up segments. It gives it more apparent structure," Tillman said.

He said Massé was a dream to interview. "I got so much interview footage."

Tillman has acknowledged a proclivity to music-themed projects. His previous documentary is "Madison on Tour," a film about a two-time world champion drum and bugle corps. Tillman joined a brass drum and bugle corps in Minnesota after he completed the film. "I have a lot of choral singing, musical theater, symphonic and marching experience in my background," he said. Tillman graduated

MSPIFF 43 RUNS APRIL 11-25, 2024

The 43rd annual Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) at the Main Cinema, 115 SE Main in Minneapolis will include 140 feature films from more than 100 countries and cultures, according to MSP Film Society Executive Director Susan Smoluchowski. Finding that selection of films and preparing for the festival is nearly a yearlong process. "We get well over 1,500 submissions for MSPIFF through the platform we use, or people we know and don't know just send us films," Smoluchowski said. "We watch all of them."

Of the 140 features selected for the festival, only about 20 percent of them are submitted. More at mspiff.org.

from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a B.A. in communications with an emphasis in radio, TV and film. He is currently the deputy director and education director at Film North in Saint Paul.

"There is something to be said about filming what you know," he commented. "Initially I was going to hire someone else to edit my film on Laurel, and this person helped me sort through the footage and was going to start editing, but was overwhelmed with work. I realized I knew Laurel so well, and her story so well, that of course I had to edit the documentary. And that worked out for the best."

Tillman said he had to pick a subject for his films that will keep him so engaged and interested that he will not get tired of it. "I have to be willing to make sacrifices I would not normally make. With this film, I never get tired of looking at the footage, and I am so grateful that is the case." Tillman's next steps with the film are to work on distribution. He said he plans to go through the BBC, since Manhattan Transfer was a superstar group in Great Britain and most of Europe.

10 COMMISSIONS

of cash" to bring to the table such that their agents will be paid. The fear is that without extra money to pay the agent, the buyer will either not buy or go unrepresented, and that would be a disservice to buyers.

My opinion: the mortgage industry will not let that happen. The mortgage industry will immediately begin to offer programs that will roll the buyer's broker commission into the mortgage financing.

What I think will be different is that buyers will become price conscious, not only about the price of the home but the price and value of their real estate agent.

One the listing side, sellers have always carefully interviewed three or four seasoned professionals before listing their house. And during every one of those interviews, listing commissions is a topic of negotiation. Meanwhile, buyer's agents have been getting 2.7% fresh out of high school.

MY OPINION: This is the biggest change in residential estate sales since the Internet.

The U.S. Department of Justice has issued a "Statement of Interest" in response to the Real Estate Board of New York's Set-

tlement with regard to this Class Action/Anti-Trust Issue. In it, DOJ clearly states their position that sellers should no longer pay for the buyer's agent.

The statement declares, on page 3 of the 33-page document, that they would look kindly on "an injunction that would PROHIBIT sellers from making commission offers to buyer's brokers at all."

Buyers will be responsible for paying their agent's commission. That's the new deal.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE REAL ESTATE MARKET? FOR CONSUMERS? FOR REAL ESTATE AGENTS?

Will it lower prices in Minneapolis? My opinion is no. Will it lower prices in Blaine? Probably.

Will buyers still be able to buy? Yes. Absolutely. This ruling will not affect that.

Who is affected most? Inexperienced and part-time real estate agents will be affected the most. I am expecting a 20% attrition almost immediately.

One reason for this is that buyers will become more choosy about who they work with now that they are paying their own agent. They will interview more agents, just like sellers do. And they will negotiate commissions, just like sellers do.

With buyer's agent commission rates now entirely negotiable, inexperienced buyers' agents will have a hard time "competing on price" with experienced agents.

The stronger buyer's agents will likely keep most if not all of their "customary" 2.7% commission, and for that, they will deliver strong representation in what has already become a "permanent single-family housing shortage" in Southwest Minneapolis.*

The less experienced, part-time, "brother-in-law" agents will no longer be able to count on a 2.7% commission, thus making the occasional sale far less lucrative.

Meanwhile, many confident, educated buyers will go directly to the listing agent and present themselves as "self-represented." They will either choose dual agency, or something else, but with eyes open. They will enter into a negotiation with a distinct spending advantage compared to the buyer who is paying their agent 2.7%.

They won't have the smarts of a good buyer's agent on their side... but they will have an extra few thousand dollars.

Buyers will become far more choosy in selecting who they want to represent them.

NOTE:

*The Southwest Minneapolis real estate market will always be competitive. There will never be enough single-family homes ever again in Southwest Minneapolis.

Many of my previous columns have addressed our projected rise in city population, and the 2040 Plan that encouraged the consequent construction of large rental buildings. (See past columns at www.swConnector.com by searching for Larry LaVercombe.) Given the ratio of rentals to single family homes - combined with the old adage that "we can't make more land in the city" - there will now and forever be a shortage of single-family homes here. Just like in the best neighborhoods of other "compacted" and cosmopolitan cities nationwide. Minneapolis has arrived. The housing shortage is permanent.



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.

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▶1 OPPRESSIVE

fees grew from there.

Lexi has lost track of the exact total she's spent over the last 13 years paying for attorneys and professionals (which included a few stints where she represented herself to save money), but it is over \$300,000. One parenting consultant alone cost \$48,000.

"I have \$200 in my bank account right now," she stated.

Lexi has found it hard to work around the varying parenting time schedules (they've had 11) and court hearings. It isn't something employers want in an employee, and so she's been doing part-time work from her home.

"I want my life back," said Lexi. "They keep me trapped in this chaotic place because they want him to parent. But they have taken away my constitutional right to parent. I wasn't the one who did anything wrong and neither did the children."

HOW DOES A CASE LIKE THIS START?

Derek* and Lexi met at a party in 2002. She was 26 and he was 28. They dated two years and married in a lovely September ceremony. They welcomed their first son in 2008, and lived on a quiet Roseville street. Inside the house, however, it was anything but peaceful. "He'd go red," Lexi recalled. "He started throwing things at me and made threats to my life." She never left Ethan* alone with him.

In January 2012, after discovering massive amounts of child and adult pornography on their home computer, she fled to her sister's house. He called her 97 times in less than one hour, making threats on the recordings. She was granted a two-year order for protection (OFP). He broke it immediately, continuing to call and text her. "There were absolutely no consequences," Lexi said.

She moved, entered the Safe at Home program and got an extension on the OFP, hoping that would protect them. Lexi slept with all the lights on in the house. While some professionals called her "hyper-vigilant," the therapist she saw trained in domestic violence (DV) conducted a lethality evaluation with her and determined her safety fears were justified. A man's threats and past behavior are the surest indicators of future violence, according to domestic violence experts.

As with most couples who divorce in Minnesota, Lexi and Derek used a mediator to iron out the details of their financial split and custody issues. They agreed to use a parenting consultant (PC) to resolve additional disputes, a process that grew in popularity in Minnesota at the time to keep families from returning to court over various issues such as school choices, vacation schedules, and extracurricular options.

The PC didn't think that Derek could manage parenting both kids at the same time, and so he ordered that Ethan see his dad for three-hour stretches followed by a one-hour stretch with Mason*. Lexi was responsible for the considerable transportation back and forth, and paid for the necessary supervisors. The kids spent a lot of time in the car traveling back and forth. Holidays involved the same hectic schedule.

"I spent my whole holiday catering to Derek's holiday," Lexi observed. This meant that neither she nor the kids could spend holidays with her family in South Dakota or even see her sister's family one hour outside the Twin Cities.

At one, Mason was diagnosed with rare, non-malignant mass. He was in and out of the ICU with treatments that lasted seven days at a time. In addition to caring for her sick baby, she also had to balance care for her four-year-old son – and still make sure that Derek got his supervised parenting time in.

And despite being on immune suppressants with a doctor's order to avoid groups of children, the PC and Derek in-

sisted that Mason attend ECFE classes with his dad in the neighboring city, exposing him to the many germs there. He kept getting sick and running fevers that were over 104 degrees, requiring further hospitalization.

Their PC at the time ordered that Derek could contact Lexi by phone and text in order to talk about the children, despite the order for protection that prohibited it.

"The PCs almost polarized things more rather than helping," Lexi remarked. "They tell me it will make him a better parent. I'm still waiting for that better piece."

INTERVENTIONS HAVEN'T HELPED

Over the years, Derek has gone through domestic violence programs, including one through Tubman. A therapist was brought in to teach him age-appropriate environments for children. He's attended parenting classes. They've both been ordered to attend the Bridging Parental Conflict class, and they use the locally-owned Our Family Wizard app for communications.

"None of it has helped," said Lexi.

A mental health evaluation found Derek had a thought-processing disorder, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive issues, and a personality disorder. He's like a poorly-wired computer that can't be re-wired.

Their second PC testified that Derek was focused more on his own needs – fairness and what he was entitled to – as opposed to what was in the kids' best interests.

There were no issues discovered during Lexi's mental health evaluation. Yet, over the last 13 years, Derek, his attorneys and other professionals who never even met her have said she is "high conflict." Few of the professionals have had training in domestic violence as it wasn't previously required in order to be certified as a mediator, custody evaluator, parenting consultant, judge, referee or special master. Instead, most have training as attorneys.

A federal law, termed Kayden's Law after a child killed by her father, would require judges, referees and others working on family court cases to have training in domestic violence, child abuse or coercive control, but it has yet to be implemented in Minnesota.

"What is 'fair?'" asked Lexi. "The courts have put undo financial stress, ordered me to pay for supervisors, phones, Our Family Wizard, and medical insurance. They imputed me with a salary I have never made. All the while, he sold our family house and made money and bought a bigger one, and his business is thriving. Is that fair? The constant money-draining litigation has hurt the whole family over the last 12 years. Even when they found that he is a vexatious litigant and ordered him to pay, he didn't and there were no repercussions. Our judges never revisit that.

"If the roles were reversed, I wonder if I would be treated the same. I cannot pay for a Special Master or a BFA. The retainer for both cost more than what I make in half a year. And yet I am ordered to do it because the courts refuse to hold him accountable. The courts are a pay-to-play game."

HE STARTED BITING THROUGH GLASS

Ethan was three when he bit through a water glass while talking to his dad



Family law remains primitive in the belief that children are always best served by having a relationship with both parents regardless of the child's right to safety and autonomy."

Dr. Catherine Barrett

on the telephone. He started chewing through his shirts. Between ages six and eight, paid transporters dropped Ethan off at his dad's house. He laid on the floor when he got back and wouldn't get up. Mason left a vibrant kid, and returned such a different kid that the transporters questioned if his dad was drugging him, and shared their concerns with the PC.

Ethan began having trouble reading, and showed signs of having a brain injury that required OT and PT. By second grade, he had fallen behind in reading and math. He was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of the domestic violence, and an individualized education program (IEP) was created at school. After supervised parenting time was lifted and he began doing overnights with his dad, he was diagnosed with Persistent Depressive Disorder, anxiety, and Child Affected by Parental-Relationship Stress.

Mason also had an IEP focused on speech and stuttering.

Their PC ordered them to do exchanges at a family friend's house six times a week because her ex-husband accused her of being intimidating at exchanges. The PC didn't check with the homeowners before making the order.

"He writes stuff that sounds plausible, but it is all fiction. If any of the professionals would look at the facts instead of taking it at face value, they would see that it isn't real," remarked Lexi.

Then a guardian ad litem ordered exchanges at a police station .9 miles from Ethan's school. It would take Derek 30 minutes to drive less than a mile to pick up Mason, making Lexi late to work.

He wouldn't remember to bring their son's medication or to give it to him. She'd have to arrange to meet him again to get the medication. He didn't return winter jackets. One year, they went through 12 jackets. "Thank goodness for Cornerstone, family and friends," she said. "They kept giving me more jackets."

Later, they started doing exchanges in a gas station parking lot, and then things were switched to Derek's home. Lexi was ordered to open the doors and leave the car so her ex-husband could talk to the kids, despite a therapist pointing out that she was at high-risk due to Derek's past threats against her life. She tried to always bring a third party to witness things, and Derek accused them of intimidating him, as well. (When she started taking video of the exchanges to show what was actually happening to people who weren't there, she was court-ordered to stop.) The boys shut the doors and refused to go while she stood outside and encouraged them to go. Exchanges lasted hours.

'A FULL LIFE IN 50% OF THE TIME'

"We've lived every schedule in the system," said Lexi.

For many years, the boys had a different parenting time schedule and saw their dad at different times. It was tough on their relationship. The times they saw their dad varied according to the day, and transfer times ran into meals and bed-times.

Ethan's therapist stated that he needed a sense of stability and predictability, which included

FIERCELY EMBRACED

A new Minnesota non-profit is working to reform Minnesota's family court system. Fiercely Embraced is led by survivors who provide support to others.

COERCIVE CONTROL IMPACTS CHILDREN

- Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten victims.
- Though often thought of as a precursor to physical violence, coercive control can include physical

tactics such as assault.

- The impact of coercive control on children mirrors that of the mother. Like the mother, children experience the male batterer's imposition of rigid gender roles, low levels of sexual abuse and physical abuse (e.g. touching), and isolation that fly under the radar of social services, doctors, and other professionals.

- A major tactic used by abusers engaging in coercive control is to "weaponize" the children by having them spy on their mother or taking custody from the mother in court. Mothers are frequently put in the position of choosing between their own safety and the safety of their child.

- Within family court, perpetrators can adeptly use coercive control to unjustifiably manipulate narratives, turning the tables on their victims and, in many cases, successfully skewing the court's perception of events.

- Perpetrators of coercive control are more likely to be deficient, if not abusive, as parents. Children whose mothers had been assaulted by their male partners are more likely to be directly abused.

- Coercive control has a negative impact on children's school performance due to trauma and a resulting inability to engage in socially complex behaviors because of rigidly controlled gender roles.

- Coercive control does not necessarily end with separation of the parties. Domestic violence may escalate after separation or take new forms such as increasing emotional abuse or financial abuse. And sadly, can even lead to murder by the abuser.

LIFELONG IMPACTS ARE PREVENTABLE

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), a long-running study at the University of Minnesota, has found that children who grow up in environments that expose them to abuse, as a witness or as the abused, that experience toxic stress or are exposed to untreated mental illness or substance abuse are more likely to have mental illness or substance abuse issues as adults.

CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR ESCALATES

- Offenders who exercise control over their partner's daily activities are more than 5 times more likely to kill them than other domestic abusers.

- In a remarkable 20 percent of domestic homicides, the murder was the first act of physical violence – but these were almost always preceded by coercive and controlling behavior.

- In Minnesota, 11 children whose parents were involved in family court cases have died since 2008. These include Autumn Hallow of Elk River and brothers William and Nelson Schladetky of Minneapolis.

- Mikayla Olson was murdered in 2007 during her first unsupervised visit with her father.

- Shannon Cortez Gooden of Burnsville shot and killed police officer Paul Elmstrand, officer Matthew Ruge and firefighter/paramedic Adam Finseth on Feb. 18, 2024 with seven children in the house. He had been in family court with two former partners who both requested orders for protection that were denied.



REFORM FAMILY COURT

Fiercely Embraced believes family courts in Minnesota need to change to make a better society for everyone. They point to ongoing domestic violence and a Pay-to-Play mentality that are not benefiting families. They want to stop seeing orders that force people into homelessness and poverty. "Once you are in, there is no end until a child turns 18," say Fiercely Embraced advocates. "The cottage industry of paid professionals ordered by family judges are detrimental. Judges need more training in domestic violence and coercive control, and so do guardians ad litem (GALs)."

Information from Fiercely Embraced, www.fiercelyembraced.org

▶ 12 OPPRESSIVE

a consistent schedule, regular bedtimes, fewer transitions, and consistent visits with his brother, as well as the ability to resume his regular activities which were being interfered with by the inconsistent parenting time schedule.

In 2016, a judge ordered 50/50 parenting time with a 5-2-2-5 schedule, keeping sole legal custody with Lexi.

Their dad didn't allow them to attend parties on "his time" or see their friends. They couldn't attend Boy Scouts events or do other activities during "his time." He took their phones away and wouldn't let them use their school tablets to contact friends or family.

Ethan told his mom, "I have to live a full life in 50 percent of the time."

"That was hard on him," said Lexi. His friends tried to rearrange their birthday parties and events so that they fell on mom days.

'PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME GO'

Ethan told his principal that his dad drove the kids to Wisconsin, bought a knife, and set it on the center console where the kids could see it. It scared him. He pushed Ethan sometimes, and trapped him at other times. He

punched Ethan in the chest. He'd threaten to take things away if he told anyone what happened.

Ethan wrote on school assignments, "I can't go to my dad's. Please don't make me go." He asked his therapists to not make him go. He told his school principal that he was scared to go to his dad's house.

Mason reported to his therapist that his dad hit him and his brother with a closed fist.

Two child protection cases were opened. Like many cases that involve parents in family court, CPS staff determined they could get services in family court and family therapy was ordered. The CPS cases didn't prevent Derek from having parenting time.

In September 2020, both boys walked to their mom's house. They described their dad's behavior as bizarre, erratic, and frightening.

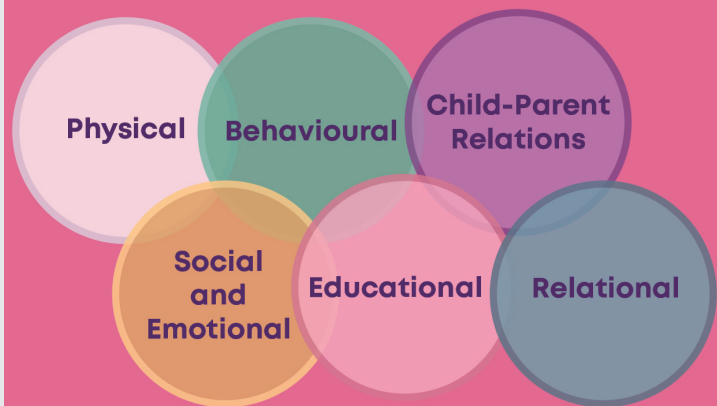
Two and a half years ago, the boys started leaving school to avoid going to their dad's house. Their dad got a court order for police to retrieve them.

The younger boy was told by school staff and a police officer that he would be placed in a foster home or a facility, and not able to see his mom if he didn't go with his dad. He went that day. But the next time he was supposed to go to dad's house, his older brother came to school and snuck him out. Two law enforcement agencies and a state patrol helicopter joined 30 school staff to search for the boys, who were located four hours later at a friend's house.

Law enforcement was called eight times in September 2021 to assist Derek in exercising his parenting time.

Eventually the school and law enforcement filed motions with family court to move parenting time exchanges away from the schools, citing safety concerns and the use of resources.

After these incidents, Mason struggled with feeling safe at school, and it was difficult to get him to school on time. He had 17 tardies in two months.

Coercive control impacts all areas of a child's life**WHAT IS A SPECIAL MASTER?**

A special master in Minnesota family court cases is a legal professional appointed by the court to assist in the resolution of complex cases. They act as a neutral third party. Special masters are responsible for managing and coordinating the various aspects of a family law case. They gather and evaluate evidence relevant to the case, and make rulings. They charge \$400-500 an hour.

WHAT IS A REFEREE?

Under the Minnesota Rules of Civil Procedure, a referee is essentially an appointed judge. They technically operate under the supervision of a judge, who must sign off on their orders, but there are rarely situations where they are not signed off on. Referees typically have experience in the area of law to which they are appointed (i.e. family, probate, juvenile, or other special court). In comparison, judges are either chosen in nonpartisan elections or appointed by the Governor of Minnesota when there is a judicial vacancy.

WHAT IS A PC?

Parenting Consulting is an alternative dispute resolution process authorized by MN Statute Rule 114.02 (a) (10). PC decisions are binding on the parties. Often, PCs are also attorneys but some are licensed therapists. PCs are not mandated reporters of child maltreatment. Fees range from \$250 to \$500 an hour.

CONDUCT RULES

Judges and referees in Minnesota are not prohibited from belonging to the same professional organizations that attorneys, mediators, Guardian Ad Litem (GALs), custody evaluators, Parenting Consultants, Special Masters, and others who charge for their services are. This is standard in other states to maintain impartiality and avoid kickbacks. Professional organizations include The Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC).

CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND FORCED CONTACT

The boys have since refused to go at all. They want to know when they get to say they've had enough. They want the court to let them make the decision to be done with parenting time at their dad's house. In Iowa, a child's opinion is factored in at age 11, but there is no policy in Minnesota for when a child's preference matters. Instead, court rulings continue to prioritize contact with parents, with one going so far as to imprison a mom from Iowa whose daughter refuses to see the dad she said sexually abused her. (See past Voices Against Family Violence stories detailing Dani's case on our website.)

The rulings of forced contact from those involved in family court go against standard psychological advice, according to clinical forensic psychologist Dr. Catherine Barrett of Los Angeles, Calif., who has spoken nationally about reunification therapy and camps.

"Nowhere in the literature of psychology does it state that forced compliance improves a relationship. When a parent persists that a child should be forced to reunify against their will, the best interest is not in the child," stated Dr. Barrett.

She points to a confirmation bias in family court that believes women coach children to make up allegations of abuse, and then acts on that belief that children are lying about abuse. "We need to listen to kids," said Dr. Barrett. "Kids don't make this stuff up." According to a study by Dr. Joan Meiers and George Washington University Law School that was funded by the National Institute of Justice, in family court allegations of abuse are not believed 75 percent of the time. "The confirmation bias is that victims are lying," said Dr. Barrett.

"This is the generation of voice and technology," she observed. "These kids aren't being coached."

Dr. Barrett serves as an expert witness in family court and has read through many custody evaluations in the eight years she's been doing this work. The reasons why children don't want to see a parent are usually in those reports, she observed, but the evaluator reaches different conclusions from the data and pathologizes the parent the child wants to be with (who is usually the mother). "The behavior of the father isn't even on the table to look at," she said. "It gets completely ignored."

Dr. Barrett is concerned about the harm that courts are doing by not understanding coercive control. She said, "It is undeniable as proven through research that a child's right to be safe is undermined by the minimization of abuse reports. Courts often maintain the parent-child relationship at all costs, contributing to the perpetuation of abuse by choosing to ignore it."

"Family law remains primitive in the belief that children are always best served by having a relationship with both parents regardless of the child's right to safety and autonomy."

SUPPORTING DAD

Derek and his string of attorneys have regularly accused Lexi of "alienating" the boys from their father.

Professionals stated that both parents needed to learn to get along, and said that both were creating the problem. Her therapist was disregarded because he sided with her and believed her when she detailed the power and control dynamics of the relationship during and post separation.

When Lexi brought up issues or asked that Derek follow the rules in place, she was scolded. "I'm creating issues because I'm trying to hold him to things," she said.

Two years ago, Lexi learned from a letter written to her attorney that Derek was getting remarried. The letter demanded that she drive the kids to his house, leave the 12 year old and eight year old in her car, hand the keys over to him, and find a way home.

She was told to lie to the boys and not tell them where she was driving them

when she brought them to an exchange.

Lexi worked with therapists and came up with a plan: she drove the boys three hours north to attend their dad's wedding. She walked them in and then waited in the hotel lobby, far from the ceremony. Derek later wrote in an affidavit to the court that she interfered with his wedding and wrecked his day.

"The kids are not going, but it isn't me that made that decision," said Lexi. "They're just done."

They've also had to attend therapy to repair the mother-child relationship because the kids have been angry at Lexi for not listening to them, and for "forcing" and coercing them to go to their dad's.

They have pointed out that there's something wrong if their dad needs to involve the police to get them to go with him.

"How much is enough?" asks Lexi. "I have done all the things. I've had the top of the top on my case. When do they decide enough is enough? I can't afford it. It would be one thing if any of this stuff has helped. But it hasn't."

WHAT IS A SPECIAL MASTER?

Minnesota is testing out a new program using special masters in complex family court cases. Essentially a privatized judge, a special master has the authority of a judge and fees are \$400-\$500 an hour. They aren't supposed to be used for cases like Lexi's, but that didn't stop a judge from ordering it.

Lexi has in forma pauperis (IFP) status with the court in recognition of her low wages and need for state assistance programs. She was ordered to pay \$2,450 to the special master immediately as a deposit and \$1,750 for the brief focused assessment. That's a substantial part of her annual income.

She provided documentation of her income to the special master, who ordered the payment to herself and the therapist doing the BFA be made anyway. In court filings, Derek accused her of blocking the process and keeping him from his kids because she didn't make the payments.

Lexi doesn't own a house and isn't sure how she can pay her rent. Her retirement accounts are empty, in part because she had to assume the \$170,000 in medical bills from Mason's medical issues. She's on a payment plan with her attorney.

Meanwhile, Derek lives in a \$550,000 house that he owns, and has three cars. Derek pays \$162 a month in child support, although she's had the two boys full-time for nearly three years.

"I want to rebuild my life and be financially stable, but the court orders keep preventing that," she said. "I have literally nothing left and he does - and they keep adding all these other professional fees. Is that justice? Or is that abuse perpetrated in a different way?"

AN 'OPPRESSIVE' EXPERIENCE

"This whole experience has been oppressive," said Lexi.

They've come full circle again, as he's been ordered to go through another psychological exam, one that looks at his inability to retain information and learn if there is a biological reason for why his narrative keeps changing.

"They need to come up with some kind of solution so we can be out of this chaos loop," said Lexi. "There are no checks and balances."

She added, "This will be the 57th hearing I've had. And it doesn't look like it will end anytime soon."

**Editor's note: In writing the articles in this series, I have reviewed dozens of court documents, and reports by professionals. In recognition of the sensitive nature of these articles, we have opted to refer to people by their first names or aliases, and have not used details that can be used to identify the family.*

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► 5 NEIGHBORHOOD DAY

had the TIF [Tax Increment Financing] they put in a lot of money."

CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

When asked about the value of neighborhood organizations, Siegel said, "Number one for me is the ability to cultivate such hyper-local connections and communications. Many of us know our immediate neighbors, but having events and volunteer opportunities in our immediate communities helps us connect with even more of our neighbors. Also, for Tangletown, it's given community members a chance to connect with and work on meaningful projects based on neighborhood interests, such as environmental projects like our e-waste grant series, and in an organized way with other neighborhoods, such as our pollinator pathway project."

"Value and challenges of Neighborhood Organizations is a bigger discussion," said KNO Board Chair Courtney Cushing Kiernat. "I personally think they are important, but for neighborhoods that can't afford a paid staff, their success is really at the whim of who is willing to volunteer and serve on the board."



Sami Smetana of Kingfield Neighborhood Assn.

"It is the smallest form of government in Minneapolis," said Gallagher, "and it's a great way to create a sense of place and pride within a neighborhood."

"Neighborhood organizations play a vital role in Minneapolis' civic ecosystem," said Smetana. "Through our newsletters, board and committee activities, and community outreach, we engage our neighbor-

22 SOUTHWEST NEIGHBORHOODS

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Armatage | Loring Park |
| Bryn Mawr | Lowry Hill |
| Cedar-Isles-Dean | Lowry Hill East |
| East Bde Maka Ska | Lyndale |
| Ska | Lynnhurst |
| East Harriet | South Uptown |
| East Isles | Stevens Square |
| Fulton | Tangletown |
| Kenny | West Maka Ska |
| Kenwood | Whittier |
| Kingfield | Windom |
| Linden Hills | |

Find all the neighborhood organizations' websites and contact information at <https://nrp.org/R2/index.html>.

hood residents and business-owners about city plans and neighborhood trends and provide a positive vehicle for residents to channel their energy and ideas for Minneapolis' future."

Smetana added, "LNA believes that community members – through their ideas, time, and energy – are the neighborhood's most important asset."

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

SWHS ROBOTICS TEAM

Southwest High School's robotics team is headed to Houston, Texas, to compete in the FIRST Robotic World Championship April 18-20, 2024. FIRST Robotics Competition is an international high school robotics competition. Each year, teams of high school students, coaches, and mentors work during a six-week period to build robots capable of competing in that year's game. With only weeks to work on it, Southwest's team designed, prototyped, built and programmed their robot, then trained drivers and human players. Said Southwest Principal Ed Bennett, "We're so proud of our robotics team for making it to the world championships, but we're also proud of the STEM learning, the problem solving and teamwork that went into developing our robot."

MPS GETTING MORE ELECTRIC BUSES

Whittier students campaigned for electric buses, writing letters to leadership explaining how clean buses are better for the environment. The Minneapolis School District showed off its electric school buses on April 9 and announced it is getting two more through a Clean School Bus Program grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Highland Electric Fleets. MPS Superintendent Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams said, "We know electric school buses will save MPS money in operating costs and repairs, but more importantly, research shows clean buses have many benefits for students: Children who breathe lower diesel gas emissions are healthier, miss fewer days in school and tend to have better test scores. ... What makes these buses even better is the fact that MPS students wrote letters asking the district to buy them."

PLANS FOR VACANT YWCA BUILDING

Tending the Soil, a coalition of five local nonprofits and labor organizations, wants to create a job training center with administrative offices and a public gathering space within the vacant YWCA building located on Hennepin Ave between Isles Bun & Coffee and Walker Library.

FIRE AT 19 BAR

On Friday, March 22 at 1 p.m. a garbage truck hit a power pole which fell onto the 19 Bar at 19 W. 15th St. Hot wires caught the roof on fire. All employees and customers got out without injury. During the time it takes to rebuild the 19 the staff will be out of work. A fundraiser was put together by Bubba Thurn due to a call to action from the community as a means to support the employees financially while they are out of work.

TASTE OF LINDEN HILLS

Taste of Linden Hills, a fundraiser for LHINC, is returning again on May 21, 2024. Tickets on sale until sold out. More at linden hills.org.

CITY BRIEFS

HENNEPIN AVE. CONSTRUCTION

The reconstruction of Hennepin Ave. between W. Lake St. and Douglas Ave. Construction began in April. It will take two years to complete. This year Lake St. W to 26th St. will be completed with work from 26th St. to Douglas Ave happening in 2025. Utility work, however, is already underway from Franklin Ave. to Douglas Ave. Business access will remain open during the construction but people can expect increased noise, vibration, and dust; closed traffic and parking lanes, as well as pedestrian and bus detours. There will be an online weekly stakeholder meeting every Friday, 10 – 11 a.m. To learn more and join the meetings, visit www.minneapolis.gov/government/projects/hennepin-ave-s/.

UPTOWN ART EXPERIENCE

The Directors of the Uptown Art Fair have announced the cancellation the 2024 Uptown Art Fair that was scheduled for Aug. 2-4 due to road construction and the closure of Hennepin Ave. Instead, they will conduct a new neighborhood-wide event called "The Uptown Art Experience," that will go throughout the summer and include art installations, events, and public art competitions.

LRT AND BRT CONSTRUCTION

In April, lanes and sidewalks were closed on West Lake St. between Chowen Ave. and Market St. for sidewalk and station entrance improvements to be made that include a barrier between road and sidewalk. Bus Rapid Transit B Line construction in the West Lake St. bridge area is expected to increase in the months ahead with bus station construction,

sidewalk and median work, and roadway resurfacing. Traffic delays are predicted throughout 2024.

NEW CITY PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey has nominated Southwest Ward 13 resident, Timothy Sexton, to be the next director of the Minneapolis Public Works Department. Sexton currently works for the Minnesota Department of Transportation as the assistant commissioner for sustainability, planning and program management. He also served as a volunteer commissioner on the city's Community Environmental Advisory Commission from 2018 - 2021. The city held a hearing on the nomination in April, and the council is expected to approve the appointment later this month.



SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET CUTS

In March, the Minneapolis school board started reviewing the superintendent's proposed 2024-25 budget. It anticipates a \$110 million dollar budget reduction due to rising costs, fewer students, and the end of federal funds. Staff predict that 413 fewer students will enroll next year. The proposed budget cuts \$47 million through reductions in staff and some programs, but no school closings have been announced at this point. They propose to cover the remaining costs by using \$55 million from the district's fund balance reserves and another \$13 million by not hiring people for currently unfilled positions.

STATE REP 61A ELECTION

There are five candidates running in the Nov. 5 election for the open State

House of Representative District 61A seat now held by Frank Hornstein. That includes Jared Brewington from Bryn Mawr, Toya López from Eliot Park, Katie Jones from Lowry Hill East, Will Stancil from Lowry Hill, and Isabel Rolfes from East Isles. All but López, who is endorsed by the Green Party, are running with the Democratic Farmer Labor (DFL) Party and will be competing in the Aug. 13 DFL primary election. The winner of the DFL primary will be on the Nov. 5 ballot along with López.

WATER MAIN PROJECTS

The Minneapolis Public Works Department has scheduled a water main renewal project in the 13th Ward. This project will begin in April and is scheduled for completion in November. The purpose of this project is to remove the mineral deposits from cast iron pipes and install a lining to prevent future mineral build up which can limit proper water flow. This cement lining is certified for use in potable drinking water pipes. Work will be done in Linden Hills, East Harriet and Lynnhurst.

WORK IN LINDEN HILLS

Beginning Monday, April 15, the intersection at 43rd and Upton will be closed to car traffic for about 10 weeks. Pedestrian walkways will remain open. During that time: Minneapolis Public Works will replace 200 feet of clay pipe from 1919 at the intersection. Metro Transit will use this time to begin construction on METRO E Line stations at the Northeast and Northwest corners of the intersection, and to add pedestrian improvements at all four corners of the intersection.

▶▶ Briefs compiled by Cam Gordon.

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NEXT AD DEADLINE: Monday, May 6 | PUBLICATION: Thursday, May 16

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Call the Minnesota Day One Crisis Hotline at 1-866-223-1111 if you or someone you know is seeking shelter due to a dangerous relationship or needs to create a safety plan.

HOUSECLEANING

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Tuesday, May 14th
Noon-6:30 pm

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3450 Irving Ave. S. (in the Great Hall)
Minneapolis

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GardenClubMpls.org/2024PlantSale



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Volunteer In Your Community

Lutheran Social Service of MN is seeking volunteers age 55+ in your area to provide companionship to older adults or mentor school-age children. Volunteers commit to regular weekly hours for a tax-free stipend and mileage reimbursement. Please contact Brinn at 218.536.9939 or Brinn.Krabbenhoft@lssmn.org for more information and to make an impact in your community.





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- Golf simulator
- Club rooms & rooftop sky lounge
- Greenhouse, courtyard, grill, fire pit, and pond
- Underground parking

Residents will also enjoy walking paths connecting to Theodore Wirth Park, Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, an on-site playground, and so much more.



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