



Valerie Geary instructs students who are part of the certified nursing assistant (CNA) program at the International Institute of Minnesota. (Photo submitted)

## New jobs for new Americans

At IIMN, they're working to fill the certified nursing assistant shortage

By JAN WILLMS

There is an increasing need for health care workers in the United States, especially since many left the medical profession after the challenges of COVID-19.

The International Institute of Minnesota, (IIMN), 1694 Como Ave., Saint Paul, is working to fill that need by providing Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes specifically for new Americans.

The classes, according to program manager Julie Garner-Pringle, have been going since 1990. Garner-Pringle has worked with the program for the past 15 years. With a background in teaching, she taught English in Hungary and Egypt before coming to IIMN to teach English to adults. Other support staff for the CNA program include English language teachers from IIMN, and a nurse is responsible for teaching the program content.

Garner-Pringle said two tracks of the CNA training are taught: an intensive seven-week course and supportive eleven-week course. "We let the students know

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## Show combines neurodiversity, art and science

'Thresholds' performer Michael Wolfe seeks to explain how autistic brain comprehends things

By JAN WILLMS

Anxiety, restlessness, being a superpower and feeling free and unchained are some of the emotions Saint Paul actor Michael Wolfe experiences while waiting for a bus.

Wolfe, who identifies as a Black, queer performer with autism, will share the feelings he goes through on a daily basis at a performance June 2 at the Parkway Theater, 4814 Chicago Ave. S. in Minneapolis.

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"Thresholds" is supposed to explain to multiple audiences how the autistic brain comprehends and takes in sight, sound, smell and touch as opposed to the non-autistic brain," said Michael Wolfe.

## PODCASTS SHINE LIGHT ON RONDO

By JANE ST. ANTHONY

Rondo - St. Paul's vibrant Black community - was torn in two from 1956-1968. Wrecking balls demolished roughly 700 homes and 300 businesses. With the center of the community cleared, excavators rumbled around the clock as Interstate 94 was completed to accommodate travel between the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The other option for the freeway - along abandoned railroad tracks near Pierce Butler Route- was scratched in favor of displacing residents of Rondo.

Today a youth-driven podcast, "Voices of Rondo," collaborates with the nonprofit

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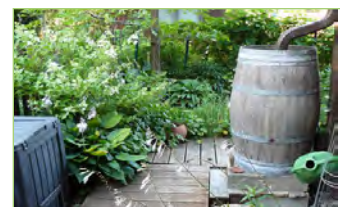
SUMMER IN THE CITY  
Trilingual Cinema gears up for another season

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Forest Wozniak's sign-painting skills are more popular now than ever

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HOME & GARDEN  
Small things in your yard add up to big differences

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## RECOGNIZING BRITTNEY BAKER

Brittney Baker began her career in 2012 by attending the Saint Paul Fire EMS Academy, and began working in the Basic Life Support Unit, Regions Emergency Medical Services, and Mercy Hospital in the emergency department. She is passionate about "Not just opening the door, but making sure the door never closes again" through teaching and instruction. Baker is also currently instructing the Saint Paul Fire Department EMS Academy and teaching at Century College. She is the President of Firefighters United, and Secretary of the North Central Region of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters.



## Fewer people submitting projects for CIB funds

By JANE MCCLURE

It's time again for community members to seek funding for 2025-2026 Long-Range Capital Improvement Budget (CIB) projects. Improvements to Horton Park and bike facilities along Pierce Butler Route are among ideas in the mix.

But one worry for city leaders and CIB Committee members is the low number of projects submitted overall and how to better get the word out about the ability to seek funding. Committee Chairman Darren Tobolt said that outreach has to be looked at.

With just 20 projects coming in city-wide, and none from Ward 7, the process is being questioned. Twenty projects are far fewer than the 86 projects submitted for the 2023-2023 funding cycle.

Even years are for the CIB community process, in which community-submit-

ted projects vie to split \$1 million. A poll allowing community members to rank projects was online and open until April 29. Poll participants could select up to 10 projects and rank them in order of preference.

The CIB Committee is to hear community project presentations at 5 p.m. Monday, May 13 at Rondo Community Library, 461 N. Dale St. The committee is to rank projects and publish preliminary recommendations June 4, with a public hearing at 5 p.m. Monday, June 10 at Arlington Hills Community Center, 1200 Payne Ave.

Initially 25 projects were submitted, said Nichelle Bottko-Woods, CIB Committee staff.

Seven Parks and Recreation projects are still under consideration. Seventeen Public Works projects were submitted, but only 13 are eligible.

Anyone could submit a project. Proposers were not all named in the poll.

Proposals need to be related to infrastructure owned and maintained by the city, and last 10 years or more. Another requirement is that any proposal incorporate ideas from a city program called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, known as CPTED.

Hamline-Midway neighborhood has two projects in the running. Hamline Midway Coalition proposes the design and installation of a park entry plaza in Horton Park, where Hamline Avenue meets Minnehaha Avenue. Also proposed is replacement of the light fixtures along the west side of Hamline between Englewood and Minnehaha avenues. The plaza would include informational signage, landscaping, seating, trash and recycling containers, a bike repair station and bike racks in order to draw more people to the park to increase natural surveillance in the area.

A second neighborhood proposal is for a one-block bicycle route connection on the south side of Pierce Butler Route, to provide a safer off-road connection from an existing bike path to a nearby street.

Projects also came in from St. Anthony Park. One is for multi-panel shade structures at Westgate Commons Park and Robbins/Transitway lighting and access improvements. Improvements are sought to promote safer access to the University of Minnesota transitway by bike, from South St. Anthony Park.

A two-way, protected bicycle facility for Wabash Avenue in West Midway is proposed, for an improved Grand Round connection to Pelham Boulevard.

Union Park district residents have been proactive with requests in the past and this year is no exception. One request is for "double" street lighting at intersections, with Hague Avenue and Saratoga Street in Snelling-Hamline neighborhood as a pilot. The proposal is for a second street light at all city intersections that currently lack sufficient lighting, to enhance nighttime pedestrian safety.

Pedestrian safety improvements are sought between the Skyline Tower high-rise and Midway Peace Park, including improved lighting.

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### CNA JOBS

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that the training will be like a full-time job," she explained. "The seven-week course is Monday-Thursday and the 11-week is Monday-Friday."

According to Garner-Pringle, the state requires a minimum of 75 hours completed for CNA certification. "IIMN has 150 hours in the intensive class, and 300 hours in the longer supportive class, so we are way over the minimum hours required."

She said there is a pretty thorough screening process for students. They must verify they are from another country but have permission to work in the United States. They need to have an intermediate level of English. They need to be fully vaccinated and complete a phone interview.

"We want the students to have a real desire for healthcare work," she added.

Garner-Pringle said some of the students come from countries where others languages are the primary languages, and some come from countries where English is mainly spoken. "Some also have advanced degrees but have to start all over when they leave their country," she noted.

"Being a CNA is a good place to start if someone wants to advance in a health career," Garner-Pringle said. She said IIMN is very supportive of students going out and finding a job upon completion of



"We know health care is a very rewarding career," said Julie Garner-Pringle, a teacher in the certified nursing program at the International Institute of Minnesota. (Photo by Jan Willms)

their training, but also supports those who want to continue their health-care education.

The CNA students are able to do their classroom training, as well as clinicals at

IIMN, and they can also take their state tests at the same location. "This is very helpful," she said.

"Students don't have to worry about finding a new address on the day of their

test, and here they know where all the supplies are. It is just a more comfortable setting."

There is plenty of space available for classes, since IIMN recently underwent an expansion, doubling its size. The building has been under construction the past couple of years.

Garner-Pringle said the ideal CNA class is about 12, and classes range from 10 to 14 in student numbers. "We try never to go over 14 in a class," she stated. In 2023, there were 10 groups of cohorts, and, in 2024, IIMN is hoping to have 16 groups. "It's very exciting," she said. "If we can offer more, we don't have to wait for the next class to start."

She said there is usually a waiting line, and the classes include both males and females. Since its inception 33 years ago, the program has certified over 3,000 students.

"We know health care is a very rewarding career," Garner-Pringle said, "but we want to make sure that our students have the desire to be in it. That desire is very important."

As well as seeking students, IIMN is also seeking more staff members to work with the CNA program.

IIMN has recently celebrated 100 years of welcoming immigrants and refugees to America and assisting them with training, English, immigration services and much more.

## City, citizens head to court over library demolition

### Court rules that Hamline Midway Library is a natural resource

By JANE MCCLURE

The debate over saving the Hamline Midway Branch Library continues. Preservations are celebrating a win in a Ramsey County District Court case centered on the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act and the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act. That ruling sends the matter to trial in May.

The case was filed in summer 2023 in Ramsey County District Court. The group Renovate 1558 sued the city of St. Paul and St. Paul Public Library. The group wishes to block demolition of the historic Hamline Midway Library/Henry Hale Memorial Library before environmental reviews of the 1930 building are completed.

The library closed in May 2023. The library honors Henry Hale, a St. Paul attorney who owned many properties in the city. Hale had a clause in his will that left a bequest for the City of St. Paul to use funds from his estate to build a free library and a free medical dispensary or hospital.

The gift took longer to materialize than planned due to declines in the properties' values.

Architect Carl H. Buetow designed the library in 1929, providing three designs for city officials to choose from.

Construction on the new library building began in January 1930. Its formal dedication was held on Oct. 9, 1930.

City officials and supporters continue to call for a new library, saying the 95-year-old facility doesn't meet modern user needs and lacks disability access.

Renovate 1558 has called for city officials to either renovate the library or sell it for reuse, and explore options to do so. The group contends that the city is planning to demolish the building while an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) is pending.

The city's response was to file for summary judgment, asking that the case be dismissed with prejudice. That would mean that the court case would be permanently dismissed and could not be brought back to court again.

In mid-April, a Ramsey County District Court judge issued a ruling denying the city's motion. That ruling included several conclusions. One is that the Renovate 1558 group has estimated what is called a prima facie case that the city's plan to demolish the library would ad-

versely and materially impact a natural resource as defined under the state environmental rights act.

The court also states that the physical structure known as the Hamline-Midway Library is a natural resource under state law.

Renovate 1558 leaders stated, "Obviously, we're delighted with this outcome, and especially grateful to our pro bono legal team, led by attorney Cicely Miltich, for their excellent preparation work and effective presentation before the court in January. Thanks to their unwavering efforts, we now look forward to a trial in May in which the city has the burden of showing that renovation of the Hamline Midway library is not feasible - and that no other alternative use for the building exists."

A library spokesperson didn't respond to a request for comment.

The preservation advocates continue to raise funds for court costs, filing fees and transcriptions, brought in more than \$8,500 toward an anticipated need of more than \$10,000. They continue to argue that replacing the library will cost more than the \$8.1 million figure released in 2021.

They also added, "Most importantly, destruction of the current Hamline Midway Library will represent one more exam-



Renovate 1558 members outside the Hamline Midway Library.

ple where City Hall ignored the wishes of the community . . ."

A second court case was argued before a three-judge Minnesota Court of Appeals April 4, with a decision pending as of the Monitor deadline.

That case centers on the EAW that was completed to support the decision to demolish the library. The EAW's key conclusion was that a more detailed study, called an environmental impact state or EIS, wasn't needed. That decision is supported by the city. But preservation advocates in court criticized the record of decisions on library demolition, calling them insufficient.

The court is expected to rule within 90 days of hearing oral arguments.

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## PEACE BUBBLES

BY MELVIN GILES  
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Hello Monitor readers,

This month I am creating space for an important Mother's Day message from Princess Titus. Please read her compassionate and loving message in the Opinion/Editorial page. In the meantime, have a great month of May and stay grateful and optimistic! Continue to honor and acknowledge our local outstanding First Responders, our courageous Soldiers & Wounded Warriors, and our under-paid Essential Workers that keep us striving and living in an already Great Country. Keep faith for better days and bending the Arc of Justice forward for our beautiful children, our amazing planet, and for our present moments of truth, love, healing, and peace. Be well, all. Keep Hope Alive.

*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)!*

### FROM PRINCESS TITUS

I feared writing about this topic, but I wanted us to be seen, heard and cared for without judgment.

The truth that I face every day gets hard around holidays, but especially Mother's Day.

I have birthed three children and one, Anthony is now my 16-year-old ancestor. Losing Anthony has left me with the feeling of being penalized by the stigma, and abandoned by my peers because of their fear of an unknown grief. Imagine the solitude during a time when you most need to be tended to and cared for. I call it "bitter cup," that mothers who have lost children have no choice but to accept and hold in their hands forever. Hands that once held tiny hands and wiped tears, hands that would rather apply a bandaid and kiss it better for the child that physically lives no more. That cup we hold is both scorching hot and below freezing cold. That "bitter cup" burns and freezes simultaneously when spring approaches. Informing us that April showers will bring May flowers and May will bring that Mother's Day pain. Today, I sat down my "bitter cup" to pick up my pretty marker to write our ugly truth. I will create a space for us to see the many ways that mothers experience grief from the loss of a child. I will share the secrets to solace that I have harvested from women on this journey. I will

## FROM A MOTHER WHO LOST A CHILD

acknowledge how hard it is for our loved ones and will invite them to just be present for those of us who see Mother's Day in a different way because of the loss of life of our children.

First, when we talk about mothers, I am including the people who cared for children that they did not birth. I have seen grief groups and families invalidate the sadness of a step-mom or grandma who has cared for a child because they are not the birth mother. Second, mothers who have children who suffer from mental and physical health issues, or children who are incarcerated see the transformation of their child's life as a type of loss. Some may say, "Well you can see and touch your child," but these women grieve, as well. Thirdly, when a child is missing or passes away from health complications, car accidents or something that does not appear to be the fault of the child or the family, there seems to be empathy for that mother.

Then there are mothers like me, after I mention that Anthony was hit by a bullet for another child, I see the wrinkled forehead and with the head tilt, then the daunting question, "Was he in a gang?" We must remember that if a child is shot, abducted, sex traffic, aborted, adopted, miscarried, has overdosed, or commit suicide – those complex situations complicate the grief of the mother, and we often endure those things alone. I have found that I must offer myself what I need in my unique situation: compassion, understanding and appreciation that I am willing to show up for my loved ones living, different and deceased, and more importantly myself.

When Anthony was 11, he made me the cutest Mother's Day card. I have it with me as I write. It is a complicated trifold, pink and red with black Sharpie and scotch tape. One of the lines said, "If you aren't the most successful, young, talented, beautiful, nice, mean, growing, smart, adventurous, goofy, fun, funny and cool mom I know the IDK who is LOLZ." This made me smile and close my eyes, seeing his face, searching for his scent and then I stumbled into the guilt. "He said mean, was I mean to him?" Two weeks after Anthony turned 16 on Father's Day, he was hit by a bullet intended for another child on the 4th of July and passed away. It is hard for me to say he is dead or was murdered. Those are words I don't like to hear from others, unexpectedly reminding me of his absence and therefore I don't use them. I attempt to seek and model a softer language in our hard times. I don't say, "I'm hanging in there, I will shoot you an email or I'll take a stab at it." These words and other words can stir up (or trigger, which I don't use either) pain for a mother, teetering on the lines of tears in the work-

place.

For the last 12 years, I have approached Mother's Day and many other holidays wishing Anthony was here to make it alright and to kiss the tears away. Instead people futilely ask, "What are you doing for Mother's Day?" I normally engage thinking my prayers will be answered. In Anthony's absence, maybe someone will be with me on this holiday. I have expected my other children and family members to step in and tend to the pain. Or, maybe they will use some of the energy they have to purchase matching outfits and buy plants, cards, balloons and charcoal to acknowledge that I am without one of the people that makes me a mother.

Then, when Anthony does not step in, nor show up in a dream, I put my mask on first. I look at pictures, watch home videos, and recreate recipes. These things bring tears that help me release, and smiles that partner with the tears to help grow through what I am going through. My gift is solitude, sprinkled with stigma and tied to broken promises, in a room filled with empty seats. As Mother's Day arrives uninvited, and leaves a lingering taste in my mouth, I attempt to give people grace. My pain leaves little room to be upset and sometimes that little room is all I need to destroy a relationship in the name of grief. But I know they know. They hear my silence and sadness as loud as the fire truck behind them in traffic, and I acknowledge that they fear my unknown grief.

Being the mother of a child who has been lost is not an easy feat. You are expected to continue to live and like it for the public eye, for the job, for the children, for your mate. People don't want to see you sad. They want you to be okay.

It's okay not to be okay. In any situation of any loss, there is a natural ebb and flow of life that we attempt to disrupt, and often fail and break. That experience when given the space can be prime real estate for growing through what you are going through. Giving yourself grace, helping people know what you need, and sharing the sacred way you celebrate the memory and grieve the loss of your child's life.

My whole life I have been learning from seeing my Sheroes grieving. I saw my mother go to the hospital to have twins only to return home and remove their baby pictures from the photo album. Probably too hard for her to see them in a photo, but not in her arms, although the gaping holes in the photo album were reminders for me of Shaun and Sheba, the siblings I never got to play with. The world showed us Mamie Till who was definitely not going to remove Emmitt's pictures but she demanded that they be printed and distributed for all to see. I saw her fight. I saw her not give up and I



saw her tears. The video versions of her story were not showed until 67 years after her son was lynched and 19 years after she herself passed away. So, we Mothers who have lost, have to create the culture that sees us, hears us, lets us break and rebuild. We must create a culture of celebrating the fact that we are doing the best we can. Today I am sober and self harm isn't of interest to me. That was not my truth for the first two years after July 4th of 2010.

If you are a mother who has lost a child that is reading this, I too know that pain inside of the cry that we hold back because it hurts bad that you are sure you will die. I have allowed Anthony's light to take me to a place of that painful cry, until my lip split and I experienced a presence, a sort of life energy that held my heart and offered a sort of spiritual massage inside allowing my broken heart with a hole in the bottom to continue to beat. I am here today with the courage to write because I survived that cry. Since I survived, I revel in moments inside myself when I remember feeling his heartbeat, seeing his face. I can even see the tiny hairs on his skin and inhale the joy of remembering his scent and feel the closeness to Anthony.

If you are a person reading this and you know a mother who has lost a child, acknowledge but do not say, "I don't know what I would do if I lost a child." Moment by moment, we don't know what to do either and we pray that our worst enemy does not have to deal with this bitter cup. Be present and hear their stories over and over again if that is what it takes. See their courage and speak their child's name in the present. It may delight them and it may make them sad, but they are willing to accept all of the emotions. We have no other choice.

Parenting does not come with a handbook and neither does losing a child. Please let my attempt to bring light to this peculiar time in my life be received as a few tears in the river of many tears of mothers who live unique, indescribable, and extremely painful lives after the loss of their children.

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- 3rd place - Longfellow Nokomis Messenger: "Residents Speak up to Say 'No'" by Tesha M. Christensen ([LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com](http://LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com))
- 3rd Place - Southwest Connector: Best Original Photography for Loppet Luminary by Tesha M. Christensen



Established in 1955, Midwest Free Community Papers (MFCP) is the oldest Free Community Paper association in the nation. MFCP was founded to help its members with every aspect of their publishing business. MFCP is led by an elected board of directors whose focus is on providing the utmost value to members.

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# Planting People Growing Justice book awards promote literacy and diversity in books

## PLANTING SEEDS

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



Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute (PPGJLI) is committed to building inclusive communities. This is a daily journey that begins with growing futures – one child at a time and one diverse book at a time. Diversity in books is vitally important since it creates both mirrors and windows. These mirrors provide children of color with a positive representation of themselves on the pages of books while the windows help to build cultural bridges across differences.

“When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human,” Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop wisely stated.

Despite the benefits of diverse books for all children, there is still a lack of diversity in books. You are more likely to see a black bear or black dog on the cover of a book than a Black girl or Black boy. Only 12% of children’s books feature a Black character, according to the Cooperative Children’s Book Center.

PPGJLI launched a book awards program to celebrate Black authors who are creating mirrors and windows. It has unveiled the winners of its inaugural children’s picture book awards, recognizing exceptional works by authors and illustrators of African descent. This groundbreaking initiative is a significant milestone in

the organization’s commitment to celebrating Black artists, showcasing rich cultural histories of the African diaspora, and providing opportunities and resources for children and families to access often-absent narratives.

The announcement comes after a successful submission period that ended on Feb. 1, 2024, that saw an overwhelming response from talented Black artists across the United States. The winners were officially announced on March 29, 2024, and an award ceremony is scheduled for May 18, 2024 at the Rondo Community Library at 3 p.m.

PPGJLI’s children’s book awards aim to promote literacy and diversity by uplifting the voices of Black authors and honoring the creative genius of Black illustrators. The competition categories encompassed various themes, including Best Illustration, Book of the Year, Social Change, and Black History, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives.

Among the Minnesota-based winners, Lanesa Bejnarowicz’s delightful illustrations in “Nap Time” secured the Best Illustration award. Pioneering educator Nasra Noor’s motivational story, “My Mommy is a School Teacher,” was named the Book of the Year. In the Social Change category, Isaiah Allen’s “A Smile” received an honorable mention, and Rose McGee’s “Can’t Nobody Make a Sweet Potato Pie Like Our Mama!” captured the hearts of readers and judges alike. Mizz Mercedes’s poignant work, “Going Back to Rondo,” emerged as the winner in the Black History category. This book honors the historical roots of the vibrant Rondo community. Winning artists will receive cash prizes and promotional support from Planting People Growing Justice.

On the national stage, Portia Bright Pittman’s “A Bright Day at the State Cap-

itol: There Ought to be a Law,” and its accompanying activity book claimed the Book of the Year honor. This book serves as an invaluable learning tool for civic engagement. Lesley Bracero and Natoia Franklin’s “BJ Doesn’t Cry” and Elise M. Washington’s “Tika Speaks” both received honorable mentions.

The PPGJLI children’s book awards not only celebrate the artistic achievements of Black authors and illustrators, but also serve as a powerful platform to amplify diverse narratives and promote cultural understanding. With the recognition of these talented creators, PPGJLI aims to inspire the next generation of readers and writers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable literary landscape.

As the award ceremony approaches, anticipation builds for the opportunity to honor these remarkable artists and their contributions to the literary world. PPGJLI’s commitment to promoting literacy, diversity, and social justice through the power of storytelling shines brightly, paving the way for a future where all children can see themselves represented in the books they read.

### PPGJ BOOK AWARD WINNERS

#### MINNESOTA AUTHORS

##### Best Illustration

- Lanesa Bejnarowicz, “Nap Time”

##### Book of the Year

- Nasra Noor, “My Mommy is a School Teacher”

##### Social Change

- Rose McGee, “Can’t Nobody Make a Sweet Potato Pie Like Our Mama!”

- Isaiah Allen, “A Smile,” \*honorable mention

##### Black History

- Mizz Mercedes, “Going Back to Rondo”

##### National Book of the Year



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• Portia Bright Pittman, “A Bright Day at the State Capitol: There Ought to be a Law” + activity book

• Lesley Bracero and Natoia Franklin, “BJ Doesn’t Cry”, \*honorable mention

• Elise M. Washington, “Tika Speaks,” \*honorable mention

For more information, please visit <https://www.ppgjli.org/ppgjli-childrens-book-awards>

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**THRESHOLDS** >> from 1

"Thresholds: Art, Science and Neurodiversity" will offer two short films and a live performance featuring Wolfe. Neuroscientist Guadalupe Astorga will talk about her research on the neurodiversity of visual perception. Both Wolfe and Astorga will share insights about their unique processes. The event is being presented by Beth Graczyk Productions (BGP). Graczyk is the director.

Wolfe said he has wanted to have a career in movies and television since he was a child watching Batman films. "The one starring Michael Keaton, as well as other movies, sparked my interest in acting," he said. "Every time I watched a movie that I loved, I told myself that I could do that some day. Unfortunately, I was born on the mental disability spectrum with autism, so all of a sudden I had a problem. How could I get a career in the entertainment industry, when no one wanted to work with someone on the spectrum? It was kind of a curve ball thrown to me."

Wolfe also said that he has been singing his entire life. "When I was a kid I would sing to myself all the time," he said. "It would often annoy others around me. I was very introverted and kept to myself. But then I joined the choir in high school and began to take singing more seriously. I thought maybe I could have a career in singing, too."

After graduation, he joined the Metropolitan Men's Choir in 2007 and has been singing with the group ever since.

"In 2012, my mom looked up the Interact Center online. It is a professional theater company that employs performing artists who are on the disability spectrum," Wolfe explained. "At first I didn't want to join, because almost everyone there looked more disabled than I did. But I decided to swallow my pride and try it, and I am very glad that I did. Interact has become a very important part of my life,



and I am happy to have it."

It was during a workshop that Graczyk was doing at Interact in 2018 that she met Wolfe. Graczyk is a choreographer, performer and scientist who has created her own production company. She has collaborated on over 60 productions nationally and internationally. She and Michael started working together.

"This led us to creating a production called the Hear Them Now project," Wolfe said. "It explored the members of the disability and LGBT+ community." Wolfe said Aaron Gabriel, a generative theater artist and theater/dance composer, connected the two again for the Thresholds project.

"Beth gave me an assignment," Wolfe said. "She asked me to come up with movements that I do while I am waiting for a bus. She asked me to then exaggerate those movements and make them bigger."

"Part of the project is to invite people to share experiences, whether they are on the spectrum or not," Graczyk said. "It's the idea of what Michael does on a daily basis and amplify what he is already experiencing. We developed a lot of material in studios and other spaces in Minneapolis. And we took it outside. Where Michael narrates his movements is really special. He describes what he is thinking and feeling."

Wolfe said the minimal movements

**THRESHOLDS: ART, SCIENCE AND NEURODIVERSITY**

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Thresholds is a project of Beth Graczyk Productions. BGP offers complimentary tickets to those who identify as part of the neurodiverse community.

that he makes while waiting for the bus become bigger and bolder and become a kind of dance, and this is shown in one of the short films. Thresholds is supposed to explain to multiple audiences how the autistic brain comprehends and takes in sight, sound, smell and touch as opposed to the non-autistic brain," he said.

Wolfe said it is easier for him to communicate his feelings through a performance than through ordinary conversation. "I have a little bit of difficulty expressing my needs to people who can do something about those needs," he remarked.

Graczyk said she has been collaborating on this project since 2020 with Wolfe, Gabriel, Astorga and Hanne Vaughn as video editor. "Hanne was a crucial part of our film making. And Michael grew so much in his ability to express his needs, as well as put in this performance.

"Communication starts with how we are experiencing the world; we do not give ourselves the time to share (those experiences.) We don't understand how we perceive things differently or similarly," Graczyk continued.

Wolfe explained that he sees autism as a gift, although it has hindered him in a lot of ways. "A lot of things people without autism can do, I will never be able

to do," he said. "But at the same time, it has enlightened me. I do plenty of singing in Interact. I would like to record my own album some day and tour all over the world and sing songs from that album. It all comes down to the same thing. There are not a lot of people in the music industry who want to work with somebody who has autism."

According to Graczyk, much has been done over the past 20 years regarding the area of autism. "It's not so much a lack of awareness," she said. "There are a whole bunch of people on the spectrum who do not want to be medicalized. It's similar to being a queer person and finding the world is not accommodating. It's not being given a chance because of stigma or a sense of difference. The more we can talk about it, the more we can understand rather than putting people in categories. The more dialogue we have, the more we can erode the differences."

Wolfe recalled the bullying he faced when he was in elementary school and middle school. "A lot of people in the world tease and taunt and make fun of things just because they don't understand those things they are making fun of," he said. "I have a bit of resentment about that."

Graczyk said she believes her interests of artistry and science are very similar. She stated, "In both, you observe and then develop an experience."

Wolfe said he is grateful to be a part of the Threshold project. "This is the very thing we need in order to help audiences understand what having autism is like, and to understand what having a disability is like."

Graczyk said she is looking forward to presenting the live performance and films at the Parkway. "We've been working on this for two to three years, and it feels like a beginning, an opportunity to grow with the community. Hopefully, each audience member will feel like they are on their own journey and find out about themselves."



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# Trilingua Cinema offer indoor and outdoor shows

*Founders aim to build community over movies in multiple languages, including English, Spanish and Hmong*

By JAN WILLMS

Trilingua Cinema is about bringing together lots of different kinds of people who maybe wouldn't mingle in their everyday lives. And they are brought together to share the experience of film.

The nonprofit offers films in English or Spanish or Hmong on the east side of Saint Paul, since those are the predominant languages spoken in the neighborhood.

"I started Trilingua Cinema back in 2019," said Geordie Flantz. "Sid Stuart and Ismail Khadar joined a little bit later." The three are now co-directors of the nonprofit.

Flantz said he moved to the East Side in 2018 with his partner and a couple of friends. "We all bought a house together," he said, "because we loved this neighborhood. And I also loved to go to movie theaters and did not find any currently in the area."

After doing some research, Flantz found that there had been a theater on Arcade that now is an antiques and auto parts store.

"From the 1920s to the 1970s, there had been three theaters in the area," he said. Over 1,000 movie seats were available.

However, when Whirlpool and 3M moved out of the neighborhood, things went into decline, according to Flantz, and the theaters closed.

"So I was thinking about that, and I had an idea," Flantz continued. "This has always been kind of an immigrant community, and it would be good to focus on films with languages for the people who live here."

He was put in touch with Ben Werner, who at the time was working at the Freedom Library, 1105 Greenbrier Street. The organization showed its first movie in the summer of 2019. In winter of that year, Flantz received a grant from the Metro Regional Arts Council.

"Then COVID hit, and we collaborated with the Freedom Library and held a screening outside on its front lawn," Flantz explained. "From the beginning we have tried to collaborate with social action groups on the East Side," he continued. "Partly because I was new here and didn't want to jump in and do something others were already doing."

Early on Trilingua connected with Mary Anne Quiroz from Indigenous Roots and did a festival of short films by local filmmakers on East 7th. Dayton's Bluff



*The co-directors debate about what films to show, and other times field suggestions from their audiences. The films can range from current top movies such as "Past Lives" and "Oppenheimer" to a 2015 film about the Amazon, "Embrace of the Serpent?" which featured up to 10 different languages. "Every event is an ongoing experiment, and we keep evolving our theory of what people want to see and what works," said Geordie Flantz. (Photo submitted)*

Housing Services had a parking lot where films were shown.

"From there, we slowly grew every year," Flantz said. "We connected with Sia Vang who puts on Hmong American Day, and we have been collaborating for the past three years. Last year we showcased Southeast Asian film directors."

Stuart said she came on board Trilingua Cinema while she was working part-time at Freedom Library. "I talked with Matt at Caydence Coffee and Records about a car show they were collaborating on," said Stuart. "I told Ben, and he said I should meet Geordie. I thought I would do this movie thing, too. We all were just friends with Ben." Although he has moved to New York, Werner is a member of the board of directors for Trilingua Cinema.

"Last summer we showed films twice a week at Sculpture Park near Swede Hollow. We brought hot dogs and lemonade and gave away free food with every screening. It was a nice way to meet the neighbors and show films," Stuart said. "Sometimes we had a deejay come out and play music pre-screening. There was a graffiti festival, and we set up to show a movie."

Flantz added, "We tried to host a hip hop festival at the Arlington Library. It was a great way to build a following. Early on, we would put on these elaborate events and then get people to watch a movie afterwards."

Stuart said films were shown every other week last summer. This winter there

were screenings twice a month indoors at the Freedom Library, which continued into spring.

"We show films in a variety of languages," Flantz commented. He said the type of audience is dependent on the type of movie being shown.

He said the films shown last summer, with grilling outdoors and families and children in attendance, drew a very diversified crowd of all ages.

"Folks from Cambridge 55 plus apartments came out and sat across the street and watched movies," Stuart said.

Because Spanish, English and Hmong are the predominant languages on the East Side, Flantz said the organization has focused on films in those languages. "It is a little harder with Hmong, because there are fewer films, but there are a lot of local Hmong filmmakers," he stated.

Stuart said the co-directors debate about what films to show, and other times field suggestions from their audiences. The films can range from current top movies such as "Past Lives" and "Oppenheimer" to a 2015 film about the Amazon, "Embrace of the Serpent?" which featured up to 10 different languages. "Every event is an ongoing experiment, and we keep evolving our theory of what people want to see and what works," Flantz said.

"I don't know if we have met our goal of building community," Martin noted, "but every time we show a movie and people come, it is an awesome experience. We



*Geordie Flantz, Sid Stuart and Ismail Khadar co-direct Trilingua Cinema, a nonprofit that offers films in English, Spanish in Hmong on the east side of St. Paul. (Photos submitted)*

see what it's like to watch a movie with other people as opposed to streaming it at home. You react to something with other people in the room, and that's kind of special."

Flantz said the ultimate goal of Trilingua Cinema is to open a brick and mortar theater on the East Side. "We've talked about starting a youth job training program to help youth learn what it's like to work in a theater," he said. "We have also talked about the idea of having an employees cooperative. We have a lot of ideas. We're always trying to get the word out and build a bigger audience."

Stuart said the nonprofit is always trying to do things collaboratively with other organizations from the East Side.

Flantz added that Trilingua Cinema is all made up of volunteers. "We can always use more financial support," he said.

Stuart said that Ismail grew up on the East Side, and she and Flantz reside there, so they feel it is important to be doing something that can benefit the community.

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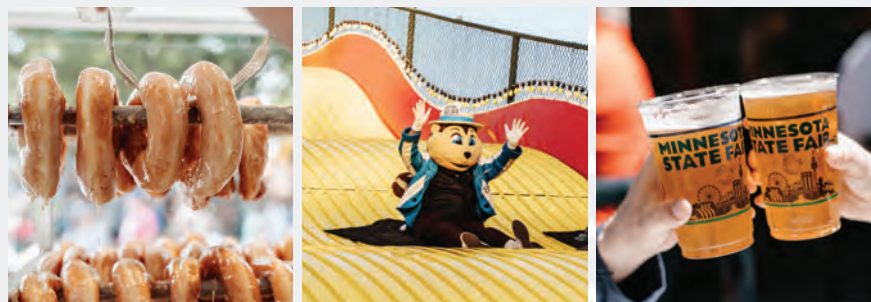
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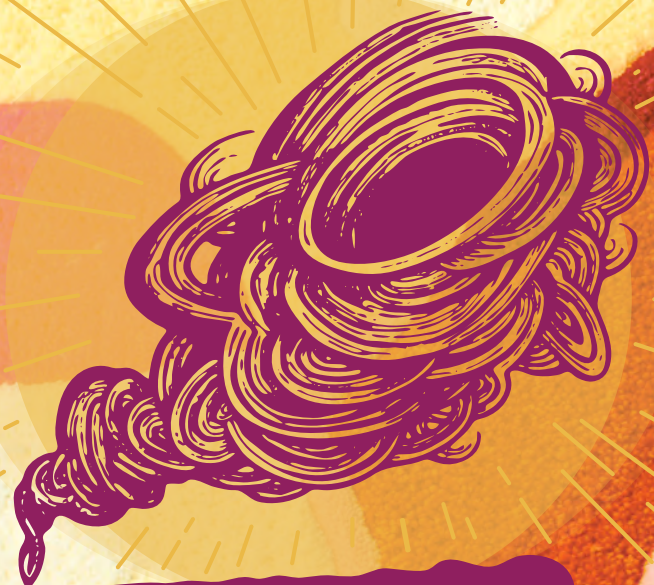
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# CLEAN UP THE NEIGHBORHOOD YEAR ROUND

by RENNIE GAITHER  
Frogtown Green

Ah, spring! Many celebrated Earth Day this year by participating in the annual Citywide Spring Cleanup. Individuals, friends, families, even businesses and community organizations shed their winter hibernation blues and came out to clean up litter in our parks and neighborhood streets. Why not extend the celebration beyond a single day? Two familiar programs readily come to mind. And both easily accommodate those environmentally committed or curious.

Adopt-A-Stop and Adopt-A-Drain are programs comprised of volunteers who add value to city infrastructure via routine light care and observation. They're fun ways to keep neighborhoods safe and attractive. I recently adopted two light rail stations for the Adopt-A-Stop program, while I continue to help maintain five storm drains in St. Paul I adopted several years ago.

The Adopt-A-Stop program initiated by Metro Transit evolved from a bus shelter adoption program back in 2010. The program eschewed adoption of bus rapid transit, light rail, or unsheltered bus stops. Relunched in 2019, the program adoption choices expanded. All available bus stops – sheltered and unsheltered – along with light rail stations are adoptable.

The program affords communities myriad benefits. Adopters help keep bus stops, shelters, and stations safe and clean, bettering everyone's welfare. For example, recently I entered a Green Line station near my home where I noticed one of the large windows was damaged. Hazardous shards of glass littered a wide swath on the platform. I went home, returned with



Rennie Gaither doing his "adopt-a-drain" volunteering. (Photo submitted)

broom, dust pan, and bag, and removed the debris.

Adopting a stop or station is easy. First, fill out an online application with your choice of stops or stations. Metro Transit will install a sign with the adopt-

er's name, group name, or a short slogan, upon request. This is a great way to publicize a business or organization.

Metro Transit provides volunteers with gloves, safety vests, and bags upon request, along with 10 free rides per month!

Operationally located at Hamline University, the Adopt-A-Drain program provides adopters with opportunities to reduce water pollution. Volunteers remove leaves, trash, and other debris from storm drain surfaces. Volunteers enter information online about the content and weight of removed litter. This data tracking assists with impact assessment and planning.

What makes storm drain cleaning impactful? Mainly, drain cleaning helps reduce runoff pollution and flooding. Phosphorous in organic matter such as leaves, grass, and dirt feeds algae that can bloom in lakes. Reducing this debris aids in algae reduction. Drains clogged with trash can cause street flooding. And removal of other pollutants can assist with public health efforts in the community.

According to Adopt-A-Drain's website, volunteers removed over 360 tons of debris, with over 22,000 drains adopted and 12,700 adopters on board across the state at the time of this writing.

We all can make a local impact. These two programs offer groups and individuals easy and fun opportunities to make a measurable impact. They improve environmental sustainability, safety, and visual appeal, which translates into healthier, wealthier, more vibrant living spaces. Learn more about Adopt-A-Stop at: <https://www.metrotransit.org/adopt-a-stop>. Check out how residents can help reduce water pollution by via storm drain adoption at: <https://mn.adopt-a-drain.org/>.

*Frogtown Green is a resident-led and volunteer-powered environmental initiative in St. Paul's most diverse neighborhood. They plant trees, cultivate gardens and work toward a healthier environment. If you'd like to know more, browse [frogtowngreen.com](http://frogtowngreen.com) or call 651-757-5970. Rennie Gaither is a Frogtown Green volunteer.*

## Bike plan gets positive reception at council

By JANE MCCLURE

An extensive update of the St. Paul Bicycle Plan won city council approval April 24, 2024, with support greatly outweighing opposition at council and planning

commission public hearings.

The plan's various project are expected to roll out over many years, creating more than 160 miles of new bike facilities. In most cases bike-related improvements will be made when a street is rebuilt.

The April 17 hearing drew more than 20 testifiers of all ages, and dozens of written comments. Most concerns came from foes of the planned Summit Avenue bike trail.

Other speakers supported the plan, as did advocacy groups including the St. Paul Bicycle Coalition and the Sierra Club, and St. Anthony Park Community Council.

The youngest speaker was 11-year-old Espen Krogstad, who lives in Hamline-Midway. He spoke for separated bike lanes, saying, "We need more protection than painted lines."

He was joined by several other Hamline-Midway residents, including veteran cycling advocate and longtime bike commuter Paul Nelson. Nelson, who has spoken for cycling improvements for decades, praised the plan and asked that it be adopted.

Several people said their families have just one motor vehicle or no vehicle at all, and that they rely on bicycles for transportation. One message they had is that cycling in part of city doesn't feel safe, especially with children. That is where separated lanes often come in.

Another point speakers addressed is the need for improved facilities maintenance, which is a problem in winter and when streets are resurfaced without bikes in mind.

Zack Mensinger, a leader of the city's Bicycle Coalition, cited the plan's attention to connecting the various bike facilities as being among its attributes. He also praised the efforts to create a comprehensive network for cyclists.

Merriam Park resident and longtime cyclist Terry Brick echoed Mensinger's comments about the need for the bike network to be better connected. He rode to the meeting along Summit Avenue, but had to do some twists and turns to get to the downtown Capital City Bikeway.

Everything is focused on getting more people onto bicycles. But that is not simply adding to the bike network.

Key aspects of the plan call for making bicycling in St. Paul safer and more

comfortable, said Jimmy Shoemaker, senior planner in the St. Paul Department of Public Works. That brings more separated trails. In some places the recommendation is to build "next best" trails that can be used until a separated trail can be implemented.

More focus on bike facility maintenance is sought, as are connections between facilities to be improved. An overarching plan goal is to get more people onto bicycles.

Many proposals are marked on Midway area streets, including improvements to Hamline Avenue, Territorial Road and Pelham Boulevard.

The plan was originally approved in 2015, and had a few updates in 2017. "This is a much broader update," Shoemaker said. City staff used experiences from the past eight years to shape the current set of changes.

The plan has had a strong response from the public, over the two and one-half years it was reviewed in the community. An online survey had more than 1,900 responses. Shoemaker appeared at 17 community events, and hosted 36 virtual presentations on the plan.

What the plan doesn't include is a specific funding source for each proposed bike facility, something that has met criticism. Shoemaker said that is by design. The planning commission made amendments to suggest potential funding sources but those wouldn't be finalized until planning for as each route is further along.

The city typically adds bike facilities when a street is rebuilt, or mill and overlay work is done. Shoemaker noted that the city has the "common cents" sales tax program, which began collecting taxes April 1, and that should support some future projects.

Shoemaker said there will be community process and input sought before each project goes forward.

The St. Paul Planning Commission in March recommended approval of the plan.

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# THE SIGN PAINTER

Forrest Wozniak's skills are more popular now than ever

By JAN WILLMS

The Great Depression was over long before Forrest Wozniak was born. But that time period serves as a backdrop to his career as a sign painter.

Wozniak, who was born and raised in South Minneapolis, said that as a kid coming of age in the '90s, he and his friends were exposed to a lot of vibrant color in the city. "Me and my friends would find rusty objects and paint them with garish designs and have art shows," he recalled.

Simultaneously, Wozniak said he was inspired by the Woody Guthrie era. "You could ride the rails or hitchhike or travel across the country with a sign painting kit," he said.

"I don't have a traditional art upbringing and did not go to school for art," Wozniak stated, "but I was inclined to do art my whole life growing up." He started by working with a furniture company while still in high school. He built Scandinavian Modern furniture, now called router furniture. "It is really boxy, with built-in cabinets and drawers," he explained. He worked in masonry, roofing, as a handyman, and then in construction.

However, the art of sign painting continued to appeal to him, and he began working with it as a part-time opportunity. "I was doing sign painting 30 percent of the time, and the rest I was doing construction. But in 2009, I made the leap to full-time sign painting, and I never looked back," he said

## ROADTRIP THROUGH THE SOUTH

Although Wozniak did not have formal training in his field, he credits the mentors he has had throughout his career with being important factors in his professional life. "I had great mentors in masonry, construction and sign painting," he said.

Phil Vandervaart, a noted Minneapolis-based sign painter, has been a great influence in Wozniak's profession. "We worked together for 17 years, and we are still great friends," Wozniak said.

He began by painting signs for friends "Fortunately, I learned to sell my body of work like an old-fashioned business person, by word of mouth."

Wozniak said one of his first jobs was with his friend, sign painter Ira Coyne. "He has a lot of natural talent, and I had enough common sense that I could help him," he noted. It was for a bookstore, and Wozniak said Coyne painted the sign, and he filled in with books and clouds.

He and Coyne hitchhiked and rode freights to Nevada, New Orleans and New Mexico. Wozniak painted a sign for a place called Whitey's Bar in New Orleans. "The sign was at the end of a baseball field, and featured a ball player in an old baseball uniform hitting a home run. If you hit that sign with a home run, you could drink at Whitey's for the night for free," Wozniak recalled.

## HIS FIRST PROFESSIONAL SIGN: MAYDAY CAFE

He considers his first professional sign to be one he worked on for the May Day Café at 13th and Bloomington in Minneapolis. "A friend had bought it, and I was going to replace the old signs," he said. "I painted them and showed them to Phil. Phil said they were terrible. He said to come over to his house and follow his directions." Wozniak and his friend, Sven



"I don't have a traditional art upbringing and did not go to school for art," said Forrest Wozniak, "but I was inclined to do art my whole life growing up." Below are the signs he painted for Hope Breakfast in St. Paul and Hayes Window Restoration in Minneapolis. (Photo by Terry Faust)

Lynch, went over and completed the signs with Vandervaart's guidance. "That was my first professional sign, and it is still in my portfolio today."

Reflecting on some of the strangest signs he has ever painted, Wozniak said he was painting for the Basilica Block Party. The Fallon Design Agency was promoting the concert and had hired a helicopter so the work-in-progress could be filmed.

"We were painting the entire roof of a beautiful old building that has since been torn down. Fallon was doing a stop motion filming, and we were painting the words 'Confession to God' within M.C. Hammer's pants."

Wozniak said the painters were wearing white gloves because of the extreme July heat. "That was one of the weirdest signs I remember."

He said the roof was coated first in a sort of skin used to protect women's shoes. "It's like a movie set product. You can coat a school bus with it and paint on it, then peel off the whole skin. For that roof, we had 40 bags of that skin peeling when we were done."

Another strange sign painting experience Wozniak recalled is when he worked on a sign for an animal rendering service. Semi-trucks would carry dead animals that were transformed into bone meal and pig meal.

"I can't unsee what I have seen," he said. He said he had an aerial view of the animals and a constant smell of the ammonia that was used. "It was disgusting," Wozniak said of the odors and views. "I painted beautiful cow heads and turkey silhouettes, but that job lasted for weeks, and it was traumatizing."

## 'PACE YOURSELF, REST YOURSELF AND TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY'

Wozniak said his signs consist of a lot of his original work, as well as restoring old signs.

He just completed a job for an architectural firm, which required him to go 45 feet up in the air.

"The higher you get, the safer you are in the way your equipment gets more and more sophisticated," he said. "I have painted silos that reach 200 feet." In such jobs he is harnessed in and uses OSHA-oriented safety precautions. He is on a platform that can hold 600 pounds.

"The most dangerous jobs are when you are only 16-20 feet in the air, where



you do your own rigging," Wozniak said. He said painting from heights high above the ground comes with the job. "If you want to make a middle-class living from the trades, you have to do certain things. Part of my obligation is working from heights, painting in extreme weather and using chemicals."

He said the patterns of his work are somewhat cyclical. Many of his jobs are delivered and completed now. And he is in his workshop setting up future contracts.

"I am more organized now as a business person, so I don't do outside winter jobs if I don't have to," he noted. "I do a lot of big board signs and interior signs during the winter."

This past snowy season found him

making interior signs for Huxley Eyewear. He also does consistent interior jobs for purpose-driven restaurants, such as Hope Breakfast Bar – signs that read 'Believe in Breakfast' done in gold and black.

According to Wozniak, the career of sign painting can be physically exhausting, but he has no complaints. "You pace yourself, rest yourself and take care of your body," he said.

He teaches a continuing education class in sign painting at Minneapolis College of Art Design (MCAD) and said he has adopted some interns from that course.

"An intern is highly valuable in the modern transformation of my skills," he said. "I don't have computer skills, and what an intern can do in 20 minutes with Photoshop would take me six hours."

Wozniak said he has a lot of support between interns and a sign company called SignMinds in northeast Minneapolis that builds signs for him. "Sometimes an intern apprentices with me, but I do the sign painting

myself. Typically my help is on the back end."

Wozniak said that when he started, there were fewer sign painters in the Twin Cities. "Sign painting has always been a dying art, but at the same time poor people, common people, urban people, small town people, community people have always needed sign painting and sign painting has always survived in these little nodes of micro-commerce. In some ways there is this microcosm so there's a tendency for art culture, socioeconomically a little wealthier, to feel like they have found something because they found it. So, sign painting's never been dead.

"It is only now popular."

**COMO PARK  
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**



BY ERIC ERICKSON  
Social studies teacher

# STUDENT EXPLORE CAREER OPTIONS



Students explored potential training programs and postsecondary opportunities at the Career and Trade Fair in the Como Gym on April 17. (Photo by Eric Erickson)

**CAREER AND TRADE FAIR**

Over 50 representatives from a variety of employers, institutions, and trade groups gathered in the Como gymnasium on April 17 for the annual Career and Trade Fair.

Aisha Mohamed serves as the Career Pathway Center (CPC) Coordinator at Como. She noted that this year's event was larger and featured several new vendors in addition to a core of returners who have enjoyed educating Como students about postsecondary opportunities in their respective fields.

Participants included but were not limited to Blaze Credit Union, Climate Generation, FedEx Ground, HealthPartners Clinics, MnDOT (Department of Transportation), Monarch Healthcare Management, the Ordway, Saint Paul Fire Department, Saint Paul Police Department, and Warners' Stelian.

Como Park junior Ana Thao remarked the event was motivating. "It opened up ideas for us. For me, I'm interested in a nursing career and a couple employers are providing training and nursing assistant

positions this summer."

**MINNESOTA VIKINGS HONOR SCHUNA**

Como senior lineman Denzel Schuna played four years of football for the Cougars and left a legacy of leadership and spirit. He was awarded the National Football Foundation's Stacey Robinson Award – an honor bestowed upon only two players in the state of Minnesota.

It was a thrill for Schuna to be recognized and receive his trophy at the Minne-

sota Vikings' TCO Performance Center on April 14 as part of the Minnesota Football Honors. The ceremony is scheduled to be televised on Bally Sports Network in August during the NFL pre-season.

Coach Kirby Scull explained that Schuna deserves to be honored at this level for the impact he's made as a leader on the field, in the classroom, and the community.

"Denzel's leadership skills and positive energy influence everyone he came

in contact with during games, outreach events, and classroom activities," Scull said.

Schuna will be attending Tuskegee University next fall, a renowned HBCU (Historically Black College and University) with plans to be an education major and become a high school teacher.

**AP EXAMS**

After a year of rigorous college-level learning, Como students in AP (Advanced Placement) courses are taking AP Exams for subject-specific courses from May 6-17. Collectively, Como students are taking hundreds of exams covering content from 14 different courses with a goal of showing what they know and potentially earning college credit.

**PROM**

After the AP Exams are complete, Como Park juniors and seniors will celebrate the 2024 Prom on Friday night, May 17 at the Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. This year's theme is Grammys Red Carpet.

**GRADUATION**

The commencement ceremony for the Como class of 2024 will take place downtown in Roy Wilkins Auditorium on Wednesday, June 5 at 8 p.m. The final day of school for 9th, 10th and 11th graders is June 10. Staff will close out the academic year on June 11.



**CITY INFRASTRUCTURE FOCUS OF ANTHROPOLOGY CLASS**

Pavement to walk to class. Electricity to charge a laptop. Water to stay hydrated and focused. These are resources college students rely on every day, but rarely does anyone take time to look at how their life interacts with these essential parts of the environment. But that's not something David Davies, professor of anthropology at Hamline University, takes for granted. In fact, it's his field of study – and now he's helping Hamline students build a greater perspective of the city around them through his Anthropology of Infrastructure class, which takes a granular look at the human-built environment that makes everyday life in St. Paul possible. "One of the things that anthropologists do is make invisible things visible," Davies said. "One of the inspirations for this class was discovering what these forces are that impact us every day, who organizes them, and where do they work?" The class analyzes St. Paul as a central case study with frequent visits to local infrastructure sites, including Saint Paul Regional Water Services, the Recycling and Energy Center, the Saint Paul Wastewater Treatment Plant, The High Bridge Electrical Generating Station, and the Saint Paul Asphalt Plant, among other places. Above Ben Rosenberg '24, a computational data science major, repairs a street.



**GALTIER STUDENTS READ TO THE FINAL FOUR**


The Galtier Gator third graders have had an exciting late winter. Of more than 250 schools statewide, Galtier students placed third in the "Read to the Final Four" program as part of the Final Four basketball tournament hosted in Minneapolis. The students' hard work and dedication resulted in reading 3,618 books or more than 45,000 minutes of reading. Mayor Melvin Carter visited Galtier to cheer them on in the final weeks, and representatives of the third grade attended a ceremony with Governor Tim Walz at the State Capitol. They were honored on the court along with the other three schools at the Final Four Fan Fest, and just had a blast. Special thanks to teachers Anna Clickenger and Jon Van Wyk for inspiring excitement about reading. Neighbors can view Earth Day-inspired art by Galtier students at Groundswell. As part of the art installation, third graders were able to go and see their art on the walls, and have cookies and lemonade. May will bring more COMPAS arts residencies to work with all students pre-k through fifth grade, including dance and performance, story telling, photography and animation. Field trip season is in full swing, with outings planned to the Dodge Nature Center, University of Minnesota arboretum, Minnesota Zoo, Bell Museum, American Swedish Institute, and Base Camp.

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► Stay tuned for updates on summer outreach.



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Youth Council members include (left to right): Moises Soto Puente, Stone Williams, Javier Soto, Claire Nybeck, Firdows Mohammed and Erica Lee. (Photo by Tim Hunt)

## STUDENT PODCASTS >> From 1

ReConnect Rondo to illuminate Rondo's rich history as well as its losses.

"History is not just about the past; it is a dialogue that informs our future," said ReConnect Rondo Executive Director Keith Baker. "Our commitment to youth voices reaffirms that they are the stewards of our shared history."

Born more than a half-century after Rondo was sliced in two, a group of high school students are determined to present the plight of Rondo via podcasts and other mediums. At the beginning, the team had little or no knowledge of Rondo's plight nor the systemic racism in American transportation policy. Now they do.

Baker intentionally chose candidates who live near a freeway, as do current Rondo residents. High school principals were asked to choose students who expressed an interest in civics, politics and communication. The student internship builds skills including communication, video design, editing and community engagement.

In October 2023, the students produced the first "Voices of Rondo" podcast while interning at High School for Recording Arts (HRSA), a 25-year-old charter school nestled in the heart of old Rondo. Students are mentored in state-of-the-art careers as they work toward a high school diploma.

"We're documenting history," HRSA student said Stone Williams. "We want to find justice for the Rondo community, which was wronged. We want to involve the community. It's a way to give back."

"The podcast is a catalyst and a vessel for us to share the story of Rondo and to uncover the historical racism within the U.S.," said Erica Lee, a Brooklyn Center High School student.

Prior to the destruction that began in 1956, Rondo prospered. Over the years, the community of upper-class, mid-

dle-class and working-class neighbors enjoyed a choice of three local newspapers, as well as theater and music venues. Luminaries of Rondo include Earl Wilkins, newspaper editor and elegant editorialist, who wrote of the neighborhood as "alive with feeling;" his son, Roger, a Pulitzer Prize winner; Roy Wilkins, at the helm of the NAACP for 22 years; photographer Gordon Parks; Lou Bellamy, founder of the Penumbra Theatre Company; and playwright August Wilson.

Eventually the thriving community began to crumble, intentionally. Scare tactics were used to clear Rondo's center: lowering a wrecking ball balanced over an occupied home; a 24-notice to vacate; property devalued due to cracks in the foundation.

The grandparents of St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter fled the violence and hatred of the Deep South. They chose Rondo as their community. And they lost it.

"My grandfather, Melvin Carter Sr., owned over a half-dozen properties in our historic Rondo neighborhood, which was destroyed to build the freeway just below us," said Mayor Carter. "That freeway cost my family everything."

Moises Puente, one of the "Voices of Rondo" students and a student at Brooklyn Center High School, conducted a survey.

"We took a look at the generational wealth lost from 1956 to 2018," he said. "Had those businesses and homes continued to exist in Rondo, they would have been passed on to the next generation at the sum of \$157 million."

"Some home owners were given a payout of 5% for their home. The community was given crumbs. We want to inspire people to know that history."

"I want people to be inspired by the fact that now Rondo is a pioneer in the field of restorative justice," said Erica. "We've researched many communities that have dealt with the same issue: New Orleans,

Houston, Detroit and more."

### THOUGHTS ON LAND BRIDGE

Is the proposed Land Bridge that will span the two halves of Rondo a token?

"No, I wouldn't say that," said Moises. "I would say that the land bridge is something that was advocated for by the community to use for the revitalization of Rondo. Justice includes the land bridge that will reconnect the two sides of Rondo."

### APOLOGY IN 2015

Apologies arrived seven decades after the highway was completed.

"The Minnesota Highway Department built an interstate through the heart of the Rondo Community," said Minnesota Commissioner of Transportation Charles Zelle in 2015. "We would never, we could never, build that kind of atrocity today."

That same day, former St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said, "Today we acknowledge the sins of our past. We regret the stain of racism that allowed so callous a decision as the one that led to family being dragged from their homes creating a diaspora of the African-American community in the City of St. Paul."

"Today as Mayor of Saint Paul, I apologize, on behalf of the city to all who call Rondo home, for the acts and decisions that destroyed this once vibrant community."

Harm was done. However, the students are intent on recovering memories of the community so that the harm is never repeated.

"Why do people suffer the effects of a highway?" Erica said. "I really want people, especially Black and Brown people in urban communities, to wonder why and to question the injustices around them. Why is there a highway in my community? A factory? Why is my children's school underfunded? Why is there lead and asbestos in my home? I really want people to start

### OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

#### PODCASTS AVAILABLE AT

<https://youtube.com/@RondoYouthCouncil?si=pJdm05qK0sJ6yfY6>

The audio podcast is available on all podcast streaming services and the video podcast will be available on YouTube. Visit <https://reconnectrondo.com/> to learn more.

#### DOCUMENTARY

"Rondo Beyond the Pavement," a 30-minute documentary about the history of Rondo made in partnership with HSRA, SPNN and Saint Paul Almanac, is available at <https://www.amazon.com/Rondo-Beyond-Pavement-Margaret-Lovejoy/dp/B07SQ55HZ8>

#### OUTREACH CONTINUES

A list of student-run newspapers is being compiled and media kits for the "Voices of Rondo" podcast will be sent. Teachers of social studies, civics and history can request a podcast viewing that includes a panel discussion presented by the Rondo Youth Council. Contact [timh@reconnectrondo.com](mailto:timh@reconnectrondo.com)

questioning these things and to take action."

"We know that other communities have been impacted by highways," said Stone. "It's an ongoing problem. It's important to push that message out and possibly inspire other kids to do this if they live in a city that has been wronged. We're a new generation. It's on our shoulders."

## TIDBITS

### MAG STUDENTS TO UNIONIZE

The student workers of Macalester College are proud to announce that they have started the process of filing for a union election with the NLRB. On Feb. 7, they made themselves public, and have since moved into the process of a card drop. If they were to win their election, the Macalester Undergraduate Workers' Union (MUWU) would become the first

undergraduate workers union in the state of Minnesota.

This announcement follows the recent trend of undergraduate workers' unions that has been set at institutions such as Kenyon College, University of Oregon, and Dartmouth College. This novel form of organizing operates on the understanding that student employees are granted the full rights of any employees, and are therefore protected under the NLRA when it comes to union organizing. Every Sunday at 2:30 p.m., the organizing committee meets in Old Main. More at [muwu.org](http://muwu.org).

### STUDENT IN 'MATILDA'

Stages Theatre Company is excited to announce that St. Paul Conservatory for the Performing Arts 11th grader Addie Winesett plays Mrs. Wormwood in Roald Dahl's "Matilda the Musical JR." This is their debut at Stages, located in Hopkins. They were previously in "Buddy: The Buddy Holiday Story" at the History Theater, as well as a teaching artist, educational assistant, and costume designer for ETC Productions. The show runs through May 19.



## BILL WILL HURT SMALL NEWSPAPERS LIKE US

A proposal to create a statewide recycling program financed by paper and packaging producers is included in the House & Senate Environment Omnibus bills (HF 3911/ SF 3887). However, unless there is an exemption for ALL news publications, this bill will affect the Midway Como Frogtown Monitor with its circulation of 23,500 and its sister publications, the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger (circulation 22,000) and Southwest Connector (circulation 25,000).

The Minnesota Newspaper Association secured an exemption in the Senate version for ALL news publications from the requirements, but the House version only exempts publications with circulations lower than 20,000.

**PLEASE REACH OUT TO YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATORS TO LET THEM KNOW YOU SUPPORT NEWSPAPERS AND SUPPORT THAT EXEMPTION.**

### DID YOU KNOW?

The focus of the proposal is packaging waste. Newspapers are not packaging and the amount of physical newspapers are not growing with the digital economy, as is the case for consumer packaging targeted by the bill.

The function performed by newspapers is very different from that of most other products in the waste stream. Newspapers provide vital news and information to residents of the state, frequently addressing environmental issues.

Given the current degree of disruption in the newspaper business and the stress on newspaper budgets, the kinds of additional expenses imposed by House bill would literally deprive residents of news and information.

Imposing the obligations and expense of compliance with this new program would have a severely negative impact on us, a small-family business owned by a local woman, Tesha M. Christensen. Having this kind of limitation could also disincentivize a newspaper to grow to avoid crossing the threshold.

**All states but one that have enacted producer responsibility-related laws have exempted newspapers. Minnesota should do the same.**

### NEWSPAPERS ALREADY CARE ABOUT RECYCLING:

- Newspapers are recycled at a rate of more than 64 percent, higher than any other product, and magazines have a similar success rate while recycling 100 percent of leftover retail product.
- Newspapers and magazines are environmentally friendly:  
Newspapers use soy-based non-toxic inks, so newsprint is fully compostable and biodegrades in a matter of months.  
Magazines use linseed oil-based non-toxic inks and soluble adhesives that do not contaminate or disrupt the recycling process and are similarly 100 percent biodegradable within months.
- Both newspapers and magazines can be recycled multiple times before the fibers become too short and weak to be reused.
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency, newspapers comprise only 1.7 percent of municipal solid waste and magazines comprise 0.3 percent.
- Newspapers and magazines encourage their readers to recycle and help inform and educate the public about waste issues through their news stories.
- Including news publications in the bill would yield minimal environmental benefits at a very high cost of compliance for Minnesota's newspapers.



## CONCORDIA RECOGNIZES MIDWAY CHAMBER

On April 19, 2024, the Midway Chamber received the Presidents' Community Partner Award, nominated by President Brian Friedrich for partnering with Concordia University to bring meaningful business experiences for our students. Most recently, the chamber recruited Concordia University students to assist in strategic planning efforts for a new vision for the Midway. Iowa and Minnesota Campus Compact strengthens the capacity of colleges and universities to fulfill the public purposes of higher education through its network of 56 campuses. Above are Friedrich (left) with Midway Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Chad Kulas. (Photo submitted)

## BUSINESS

### MARK DONEUX RETIRES FROM CRWD

After 21 years of service with Capitol Region Watershed District, Administrator Mark Doneux announced his upcoming retirement in May 2024. Administrator Doneux joined the District in 2003 as the first employee. During Doneux's tenure, CRWD has successfully maintained the century-old Trout Brook storm sewer system, adopted and evolved cutting-edge regulations, built the most groundbreaking and innovative stormwater management practices in the country, and Como Lake is now cleaner than it has been in over 20 years. All this was done while exploring new ways to use art to support CRWD's



work and pioneering the District's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Under Doneux's leadership, CRWD has made significant strides in the work to protect and improve water quality within the watershed, and in strengthening the organization to continue to do this important work well into the future.

### BLAZE'S DAN STOLTZ HONORED

Blaze Credit Union CEO Dan Stoltz was recently inducted into the Credit Union House Hall of Leaders in Washington, DC. Stoltz received the honor during the America's Credit Unions annual Governmental Affairs Conference held in Washington DC. Stoltz has been in the credit union industry for over 25 years. He was named CEO of Blaze Credit Union following the "merger of equals" between SPIRE Credit Union and Hiway Credit Union earlier this year after serving as CEO of SPIRE beginning in 2010.

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*Tips on small choices in your yard that add up to big differences*

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

What is a watershed?  
 What is our local watershed called?  
 Where does it begin and end?  
 What is the largest watershed in the U.S.?

According to board chair of the League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region, Mary Ellen Miller, "We all know our zip code and our area code. We should all know our watershed."

Everybody lives in a watershed, and ours is called the Upper Mississippi River Region (UMRR). The League held an educational session where listeners could learn more about UMRR on Tuesday, March 26 via Zoom.

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS AT WORK**

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan, grassroots organization working to protect and expand voting rights and ensure everyone is represented in American democracy. Additionally, they work in and around these other four key issues: the environment, health care reform, the census, and immigration.

Members of the League of Women Voters advocating for environmental issues this year are focused on reducing nutrient pollution in the UMRR. They are concerned about both surface and ground water in the Mississippi River, and the threats posed to the environment and to human health.

Miller said, "Some issues are best understood and dealt with on a regional level that transcends political boundaries. That's especially true for water issues, because water contamination doesn't stop at municipal or state lines. What goes into the Upper Mississippi River is determined by decisions, actions, and choices made by many people over a very large region."

**WHAT IS A WATERSHED?**

According to the U.S. Geologic Survey, a watershed is an area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall to a common outlet such as the outflow of a reservoir, mouth of a bay, or point along a stream channel.

The northern-most boundary of our watershed starts at the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Itasca State Park, Minn. It extends south to Cairo, Ill., where the Ohio River enters the Mississippi River channel. Along the way, it gains strength from major tributaries including the Mis-

# A WATERSHED MOMENT



A rain barrel collects roof runoff so you can save the rainwater for later use. Reroute downspouts away from pavement and onto grass, a rain barrel or a rain garden. (Photo courtesy of the University of Minnesota Extension)

souri, Illinois, Minnesota, St. Croix, Chipewewa, Black, Wisconsin, and Kaskaskia rivers, and creeks and streams too numerous to name.

UMRR is made up of five states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois. It is the largest watershed in the US. Its network of streams, floodplains, lakes and uplands comprise the largest area of contiguous freshwater wildlife habitat in the central United States.

**WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

The Mississippi River Valley is a vital migration corridor for 40 percent of North America's waterfowl and 60 percent of its bird species.

It provides habitat for more than 125 fish species and 30 species of freshwater mussels.

More than 30 million people live and work in the UMR basin and rely on it for food, transportation, power production, and drinking water.

**WE ALL LIVE DOWNSTREAM**

The cumulative effects of water pollution in the UMRR (and everywhere) are overwhelming. What can individuals do to improve the health of our watershed?

Whether urban, suburban or rural, our homes and yards are all connected through water. The effects of how we steward the places we live show up far beyond our property lines. Our small choices add up in the big scheme of things. As the gardening season approaches, consider doing

one or more of the following:

1. Plant native plants to help keep soil in place. To get through Minnesota's hot summers and (usually) cold winters, prairie grasses like big bluestem grow deep roots to reach nutrients and water below. These roots act like an anchor for garden soil. Native plants and grasses are more drought tolerant, benefit pollinators, are beautiful and low maintenance.

2. Aerate your lawn once a year to break up the soil so nutrients and water can more easily reach roots. Mulch your leaves or "leave the leaves" in place in the fall.

3. Install a rain barrel to collect roof runoff, and save the rainwater for later use. Conserving water and preventing runoff into the storm water system is a double-win. Reroute downspouts away from pavement and into grass, a rain barrel, or rain garden. Conserve water indoors too by fixing leaks, turning off faucets when lathering hands and brushing teeth, and generally being more aware of water consumption.

4. With climate change accelerating, when it rains now - it pours. If you have a lawn, you can help reduce runoff by keeping rain where it lands. Mow your lawn to 3' inch high, or more. The taller the grass, the deeper the roots; the deeper the roots, the more water absorption there is into the soil. Leave lawn clippings in place to encourage richer, more absorbent soil.

5. Spend time in and along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Learn to



Both Minneapolis and St. Paul are part of the Upper Mississippi River Region watershed and what happens in individual yards affects the entire watershed area. The Mississippi River flows through the Ford Dam, just north of the confluence of the Mississippi and the Minnesota rivers. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

love what is too easy to take for granted.

**WATERSHED RESOURCES**

Want to learn more about UMRR or get involved with organizations working to protect water resources in the Twin Cities? Here are three of the approximately three dozen watershed organizations at work in the metro area:

- St. Paul's Capitol Region Watershed District: [www.capitolregionwd.org](http://www.capitolregionwd.org)
- In Minneapolis, the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization: [www.mwmo.org](http://www.mwmo.org), and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District: [www.minnehahacreek.org](http://www.minnehahacreek.org)

Gretchen Sable is the League of Women Voters communications director. She said, "Water is the most important resource on our planet. The League of Women Voters works at all levels of government to build public awareness and understanding of water-related issues, so that citizens can engage in promoting positive solutions."

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