

SOUTHWEST Connector

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4 OPINION: We can do more about the opioid crisis



David Walcher of Urban Boatbuilders instructs Masyn May to lace ribs to the frame of a canoe. Urban Boatbuilders teaches youth how to build boats through paid internships. Gretchen Willbrandt of Urban Boatbuilders says they seek to let companies know they have employable youth. She cites COVID, global wars, and a mental health crisis as stressors that can make youth feel hopeless. (Photo by Terry Faust)

HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP YOUTH SUCCEED?

Veteran youth workers talk about problems and offer solutions

By **Jan Willms**

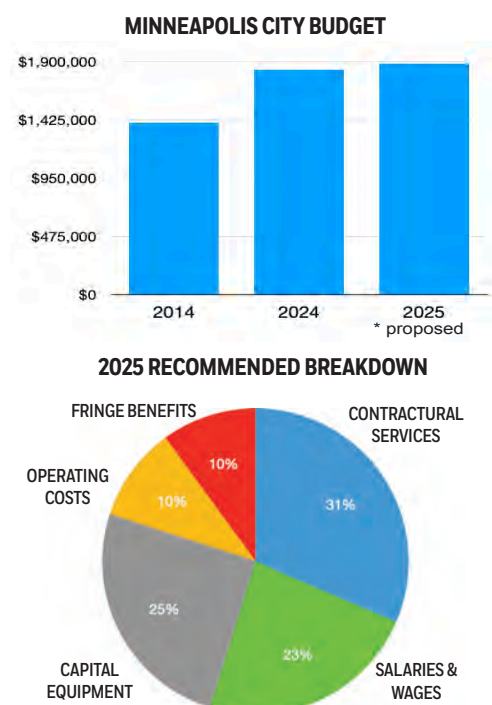
What are the biggest barriers to young people succeeding in the Twin Cities? Are there enough resources to assist youth facing overwhelming challenges? Are those resources readily accessible? And what

more can be done?

These questions were recently asked of some veteran youth workers who have been up close and personal with the challenges and barriers that are prevalent with many of the young people they engage with.

JEAN FAWVER

Jean Fawver is a special education teacher and work-based learning coordinator around transition and employment at Avalon School in Saint Paul. She is in her third year at Avalon and has taught special ed for seven years. Prior to that, she did youth de-



MAYOR PROPOSES 8.1% PROPERTY TAX INCREASE

By **Cam Gordon**

Reactions to Mayor Jacob Frey's recommended 2025 budget for Minneapolis may be varied but concerns about costs and taxes are rising to the top.

The release of his recommendation in August begins the city's months-long (and sometimes contentious) process of presentations, hearings, and amendments that concludes with a city council vote and final budget approval in December.

The mayor recommends raising the budget to \$1.88 billion and the total property taxes the city may collect (or levy for) by 8.1%, despite the mayor and council approval last year to cap it at 6.1% for 2025.

The total property taxes collected, (referred to as the levy) represents roughly 25% of the revenue the city receives and includes amounts for the Minneapo-

lis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB), the Municipal Building Commission, and the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority. Revenue from fees, fines, permits, and federal and state aid account for the remaining 75%.

Frey is also proposing to use \$19 million in reserve funds to help cover his proposed expenses.

"I know maintaining or decreasing the projected levy is a priority for Ward 11 residents," said Ward 11 Council Member Emily Koski.

"I don't feel that the mayor did enough work to identify opportunities to make cuts, and now that work falls to the Council," said Ward 7 Council Member Katie Casman. "I believe we can make some additional cuts to currently vacant positions to trim the budget while retaining the excellent staff we currently have."

In August, following up on a directive authored by Koski and Council Vice

Homeowners with median values to see \$207 bump in property taxes, residents in Wards 7 and 13 will see more

President Aisha Chughtai of Ward 10, the council received a report about vacant positions in the city that revealed dozens of positions that have been vacant but funded for as long as 12 years. Those funds often then remained in the departments' budget and used for other purposes.

WARD 7 UP BY \$338
WARD 10 UP BY \$169
WARD 13 UP BY \$449

Impacts of the levy increase will vary from property to property depending on their values



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►1 TAX INCREASE

and classification as industrial, commercial, residential or “multi-family” residential properties. A decrease in commercial property values this year will result in more of the tax burden falling on residential property owners and renters.

According to the city, most residential and commercial property values declined in 2024, with a larger decrease in commercial property values. Because of that, even with no increase in the levy, a homeowner with a median valued home would see a \$36 increase in property taxes for the year. The recommended increase of 8.1% will result in an annual increase of about \$207 to that hypothetical “median homeowner.”

“The median annual property tax increase for homeowners in ward 11 is just under \$300,” said Koski. According to the city’s website, the median-valued property in Ward 7 would see a \$338 increase, Ward 13’s would be \$449 and Ward 10’s would be \$169.

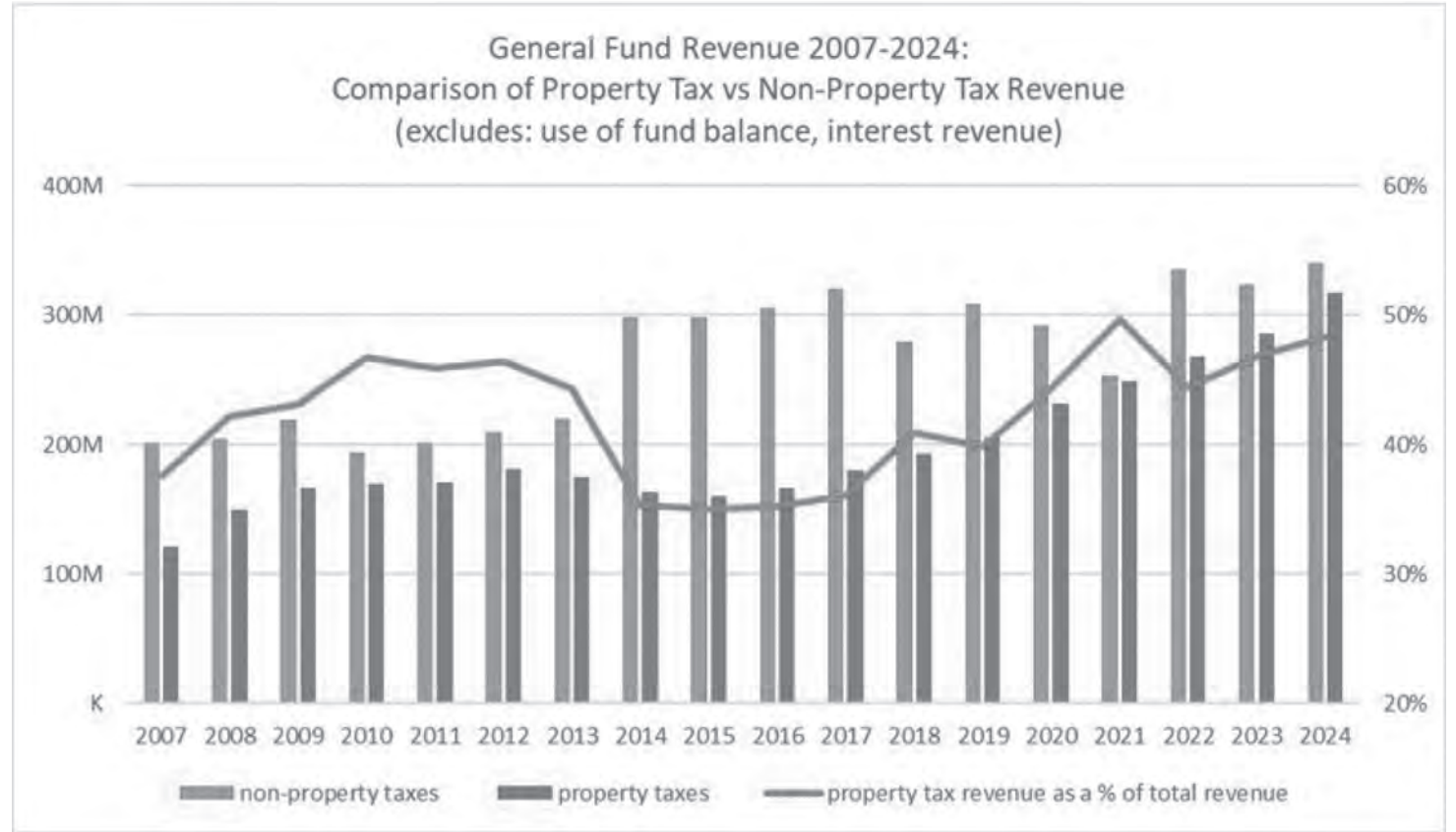
City officials have estimated that with the proposed increases the median homeowner will pay \$2,098 in 2025. Of that, \$459 (or 21.7%) will go to the police department, \$364 (17%) to parks, \$267 (12.7%) to debt service and infrastructure, \$172 (8.2%) to the fire department, \$151 (7.1%) to the public works department, \$21 (1%) for public housing, and \$598 (28.5%) to be divided among the estimated 21 remaining departments.

The city’s Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET) is the entity that sets the maximum levy, and it is unclear if it will support the mayor’s request when its members take their vote on it Sept. 18 (after the Connector went to press), following a public hearing on Sept. 11. Its members include Mayor Jacob Frey, Council President Elliot Payne, chair of the council’s budget committee, Aisha Chughtai, MPRB Commissioner Becky Alper, and two members elected by the voters, Samantha Pree Stinson and Steve Brandt.

“I haven’t decided how I am going to vote on the mayor’s proposal,” said Brandt. “I see things in there that could be cut.”

He noted that the increase in property taxes for many property owners will be more than 8.1%, due to increases in assessed value. For example, he said, the taxes on the median assessed home in Ward 12 will increase by 10.68% and in Ward 11 it will go up by 12.32%. The greatest increase will be in the northside’s Ward 4 at 16%.

He identified possible cuts in the \$1.4 million for vibrant store fronts, \$1.15 million for the Coyles Center, and money to implement the consent decree, including \$400,000 for data improvements and \$600,000 for training. “The consent decree hasn’t even been signed yet,” he noted.



Homeowners continue to shoulder more and more of the property tax burden. In 2007, homeowners paid a little over \$100 million towards while non-property taxes paid \$200 million. In 2024, homeowners paid over \$300 million in property taxes, slightly shy of the non-property tax share. This means that homeowners are paying about 50% of the general fund revenue.

Brandt also wants the city to explore other revenue sources. These include more state aid, a new city income or wealth tax and better use of the downtown asset fund and sales taxes which could fund more, like the new downtown police station. He said a 1 percent tax in the city on those who have at or over \$200,000 could raise \$40 million a year. Currently, however, the city is not allowed to collect payroll or income taxes and any local income tax would require a change to state law.

In his budget address the mayor highlighted investments in affordable housing, downtown revitalization, public safety, economic development, and climate action. He proposed spending approximately \$16 million in 2024 to comply with the legal settlements related to state and federal findings of unconstitutional and discriminatory policing practices. This includes 13 additional positions in information technology and the police department, improvements in police precincts and a new wellness and training facility for MPD.

“I appreciate his attention to these important topics, and I will continue to advocate for Ward 11’s budget priorities throughout the city council’s deliberations and considerations,” said Koski, “including prioritizing funding for the neighborhood traffic calming program, as well as auto-theft deterrence and prevention.”

In June, the city council formally approved budget priorities and forwarded

them to the mayor for consideration. It is unclear if, and what, council priorities are reflected the budget. Koski’s first priority, to maintain or lower the levy, was not.

Cashman said that she has surveyed some constituents. “We’ve also been discussing ideas at community and neighborhood meetings,” she said. “Public safety resources, traffic calming, and support for Uptown businesses and commercial corridor health are the three areas of most concern for Ward 7 constituents thus far.”

She is glad to see that the mayor included \$300,000 to support waste diversion and reduction, as well as funding to support Uptown businesses and the Hennepin Ave commercial corridor.

“One of the most common constituent requests I receive is related to neighborhood-level traffic calming measures to make our streets and crosswalks safer,” said Cashman. “There is an enormous backlog of over 700 applications for neighborhood-level traffic calming submitted in the last couple of years, and staff had capacity this year to enact just 23 of them citywide. This has not been addressed in the current 2025 budget draft.”

She also wants to see ongoing funding for safety ambassador programs. “The Downtown Improvement District’s ambassador program has been a proven complement to the police for well over 10 years now,” she said. “Commercial corridors across the city deserve to have that same presence. I’m specifically fighting for the

GIVE INPUT ON BUDGET

The city has scheduled hearings in the council chambers of the Public Service Center at 250 S 4th St. in Room 350 where the public is invited to share feedback on the budget.

- Sept 23, 6:05 p.m. before the city council
- Nov. 12 at 10 a.m. before the city council

On Thursday, Sept 26, Katie Cashman is hosting a community forum at the Woman’s Club (410 Oak Grove St) in Loring Park, with council members Aisha Chughtai and Emily Koski.

Hennepin Avenue corridor in Uptown.” Additionally, Cashman does not think there is enough funding support for the city council.

“I am viewing this proposed levy increase as a starting point,” said Koski, “and hope to successfully work in partnership with my council colleagues and the mayor to identify some additional places to trim down on spending.”

“I have some ideas for amendments and plan to discuss them with council colleagues and constituents in the coming weeks,” said Cashman. She is hosting a workshop on Sept. 26 for constituents to learn more and “evaluate trade-offs, particularly as we face a budget shortfall in the coming years.”

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WE CAN DO MORE FOR THE OPIOID CRISIS

Mental health and addiction are the root of many problems.

We have a growing problem that not a lot of people understand. Behaviors are happening on the streets and in schools that are unprecedented. Principals, teachers, and behavioral specialists can't explain it.



By Eric Ortiz

But there is an explanation.

I was talking to a veteran emergency room doctor the other day, and he told me that he is seeing things he has never seen before as a result of untreated traumatic stress, mental health, and fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid drug that is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine.

People are falling through the cracks, and the downstream consequences of untreated traumatic stress and mental health, self-medicated with substances, and in the setting of fentanyl, are punitive unlike anything in history.

Opioids are not a new problem. Since 2022, over 150,000 people have died from fentanyl overdoses in the United States. A global network is behind this fentanyl crisis.

A Financial Times story in November 2023 explained how the supply chain works.

"The 'precursor' chemicals used to make fentanyl are produced in non-descript factories in China and sold openly on the internet, sometimes for cryptocurrency. They are disguised by having their

chemical signatures altered, or labelled as 'dog food' or 'motor oil' and shipped around the world. When they arrive in Mexico, they are cooked in the secret labs of cartels, where the product is tested on humans with sometimes fatal results. The final drug – often laced into counterfeit pills – is smuggled into the U.S. through tunnels, on trucks and airplanes, and in backpacks. It is sold on the street at extraordinary markups, where it has led to the deadliest drug crisis in the country's history."

In April 2024, The Minnesota Star Tribune reported:

"In Minnesota and nationwide, the fentanyl epidemic has exploded in recent years into the most deadly drug epidemic in American history. In 2021, nationwide drug overdose deaths surpassed 100,000 for the first time, then climbed to nearly 110,000 in 2022, according to the CDC. The vast majority of those deaths were from synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl. In the 2010s, around 300 to 400 Minnesotans died annually in opioid overdoses. That number has skyrocketed, with more than 1,000 Minnesotans dying from opioid overdoses in 2022, according to numbers from the Minnesota Department of Health. Roughly the same number of Minnesotans died from opioid overdoses between 2020 and 2022 as had died from opioid overdoses in the past eight years combined. Earlier this year saw what law enforcement called the biggest fentanyl bust in Minnesota history, where 280,000 pills were smuggled here inside stuffed animals."

In early July, Sahan Journal published the first article in a series investigating the racial disparities in Minnesota's opioid epidemic. Instead of documenting overdose deaths just by race (say, Black or Asian), they looked at five years of data to see if

they could find patterns by community (such as Somali or Karen). Over seven months, they requested 240,000 death certificates from the Minnesota Department of Health and learned which communities suffer the most.

From 2019 to 2023, opioids have killed more than 4,000 people in Minnesota, and "Native Americans were at least 15 times more likely to die from opioid overdoses than White people. Somali Minnesotans were at least twice as likely to die from opioid overdose than their White counterparts. Latino Minnesotans were 1.5 times more likely to suffer fatal overdoses."

In-depth data helps communities gain a deeper understanding of the problem so they can help their community members. Research shows that culturally specific treatment is most effective.

As Sahan Journal reported: "If more people understood how opioids have devastated their people, according to Somali, Native American, and Southeast Asian leaders, communities could secure more funding and resources. Accurate data, they say, will convince people to pay attention and find solutions."

Opioid addiction is a reality many communities confront today. As community members deal with the impacts of substance use disorder, mitigating trauma for our children must be a central part of the conversation.

On Sept. 6, at the St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation and Conversaciones de Salud at Carmen Robles and Associates LLC hosted a youth community journalism town hall conversation on solutions for the opioid crisis.

Conversaciones de Salud has been leading a five-year effort to address the opioid crisis through an awareness campaign. This work has been supported by

SPNN, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative, Hue-Man Partnership, and a multitude of partners, supporters, and volunteers. The show on Sept. 6 solidified the inclusion of youth and community journalism. The purpose of "Youth Community Journalism — Episode 2: 5 Years of Opioids Awareness With Conversaciones de Salud" program was to raise awareness, share stories, and discuss solutions to the opioid crisis.

Students, ages 9-15, from the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation's Youth Community Journalism Institute led this important conversation with national experts, community leaders, and affected families. The conversation was in English and Spanish, and showcased two mothers who lost their sons to fentanyl.

"I would love a day where we don't have to have these conversations," said Bridgette Norring, whose 19-year-old son, Devin, died due to fentanyl poisoning in 2020. "But I'm honored to be here, and I thank you guys because I think you, the youth, the teens, the young adults, you guys are going to be a really big driving force in this."

More community engagement and education can save lives. We plan to do more.

Watch the conversation on solutions for the opioid crisis at the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation's YouTube channel. Contact Eric Ortiz at eric@strongmindstrongbody.org to get involved. Learn more about Conversaciones de Salud at issuu.com/conversacionesdesalud.

Eric Ortiz lives in the Wedge with his family. When he's not bonding, he is community building with the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation and writing bilingual children's books with his kids. Their first book, "How the Zookalex Saved the Village," is available in English and Spanish.

THE CCCA WOULD HARM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The Black community has faced many hurdles, yet we have shown remarkable resilience and unity in rebuilding and strengthening our neighborhoods. When I came to America from Jamaica as a young student, a network of family and community helped me find my footing and pursue opportunities that made my American Dream a reality. It's in this spirit that I founded Pimento Relief Services, a coalition dedicated to uplifting our community. Our organization works to support the needs of our community through economic, social, and political liberation for all Black people.



By Tommie Beevas

Legislative action and equitable policy are crucial to the success of Black-owned enterprises. My role as a community advocate demands that I challenge any legislation that might jeopardize the strides we've made.

The Credit Card Competition Act (CCCA), currently under consideration in Congress, could undermine gains made by Black-owned small enterprises and risk credit access for our communities while giving the nation's largest retailers a billion-dollar windfall.

Over a decade ago, Congress regulated debit card transactions. The result? Corporate retailers enjoyed a \$100 billion windfall, while small financial institutions suffered losses despite supposed protections. According to a study by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, nearly three-quarters of surveyed banks reported a significant reduction in revenue due to the regulations, with some reducing services or closing branches. Customers ended up with significantly less access to free checking accounts as well as higher fees, which particularly impacted already underserved communities.

A combination of hard work and luck helped my business partner and I win Food Court Wars, which jump-started our small business. But you shouldn't have to win a TV competition to get your idea off the ground. Community banks and credit unions are lifelines for underbanked minority communities and aspiring entrepreneurs who need capital to start their ventures. The CCCA would cut into the revenue that enables these institutions to offer crucial financial services to our communities. Both businesses needing credit access and their customers could lose access to affordable credit and credit card rewards programs if the CCCA becomes law. This could be devastating for Black and immigrant communities.

When Congress capped debit card interchange fees, the regulations had striking negative impacts on small businesses. The destabilization resulted in major cuts to lending and services by small banks to new entrepreneurs, hampering the development of startups in our communities. We cannot afford to repeat this mistake and deny entrepreneurs of color the opportunity to build their own financial future while helping their neighborhoods thrive.

The progress made within the Black community is hard-won, and the Credit Card Competition Act could obstruct our efforts to break financial barriers. We must retain the right to shape our community's future without compromising our opportunities for empowerment.

I urge our representatives to reject the CCCA and instead support policies that truly empower small businesses and marginalized communities. Our economic future depends on it.

Chef Tommie Beevas is the founder and chief strategic officer of Pimento Jamaican Kitchen, Pimento Foundation, Pimento Political Action Committee, and Pimento Relief Services.

CORRECTION



Lara Bergman

Greta Callahan

In the August edition of the Southwest Connector, we switched the identification for school board candidates Lara Bergman and Greta Callahan. Please fine the photos above with the correct names. We apologize for any confusion we caused. Thanks to all you readers who caught the error! Also, to clarify, Bergman has worked in Montessori preschools that have been a part of the child care system (not private schools).



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MAIA MAIDEN LEADS ORDWAY THEATER FELLOWSHIP FOR BUDDING ARTISTS

By **Talia McWright**

Tears streamed down 62-year-old Myra Curry's face as she sat in a circle receiving praise from her cohort fellows. One after the other, people took turns telling Curry how proud, and inspired they were by her.

"We did a speech where she told a story that was deeply personal, and it just felt like that speech needed to be heard by others," said 2024 GreenRoom fellow Imagine Joy. "I'm happy that she was brave enough to do that in this space."

GreenRoom is a six week, paid intensive musical theater training fellowship that focuses on uplifting intergeneration BIPOC artists in Minnesota at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in downtown St. Paul. Artists must have a background in either singing, dancing or acting. Development for the fellowship began in 2021, and the first official cohort was formed in 2022. Maia Maiden, director of arts, community and engagement and the Ordway, leads the fellowship, but it was Kelly Foster Wader who she says "planted the seed," for the program.

"The program is custom made to bring them [fellows] to their next level," Maiden said. "So it's going to be challenging, but it's well worth it."

A professional dancer, as well as a former medical laboratory technician educator at Rasmussen University, Maiden had the knowledge to build an impactful curriculum for artists interested in honing their craft. Along with help from supporters, Maiden fused her passions of program development and art to create GreenRoom.

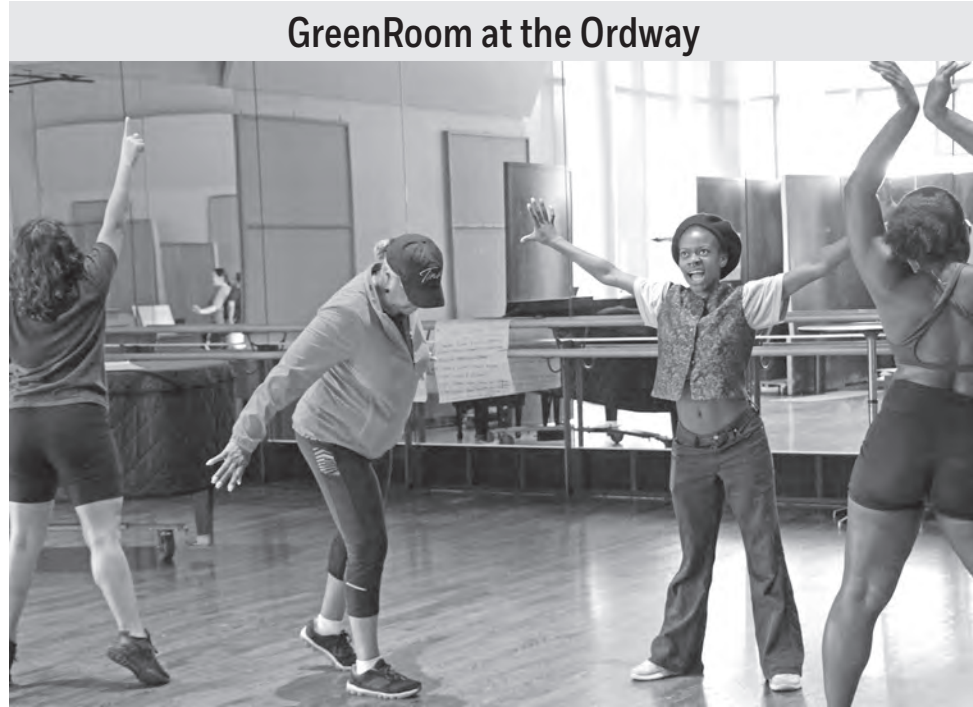
"By nature I am not a musical theater artist," Maiden said. "I'm a dancer. I come from a dance background, so you can imagine creating something that you don't do, but what I do know about myself is that I can create anything with excellence."

The application process consists of three steps: written application, video submission, and an interview with the faculty, Maiden and GreenRoom manager Oloade Gbadamosi-Alashe. Applicants must have less than three years of professional experience in the arts post high school. The process is highly competitive and, in 2023, 11 fellows were chosen out of 66 applicants. This year 10 artists were chosen to participate.

"I always dreamed of having the opportunity to access an education space in the performing arts, to be able to go to a school or conservatory, but that was never a reality for me," said 2024 fellow Paulina Morera Quesada, age 24. "Being able to be here and learn everyday in an environment that is not competitive or toxic has been incredible and rewarding."

Maiden named the program GreenRoom, because the GreenRoom is the space in a theater where people prepare. She said that "Green" represents newness and growth, while "Room" is about expansion and space. That is why the G and R are capitalized. The GreenRoom fellowship trains artists, equipping them with new skills and increased confidence to emerge on stage as even stronger artists than they were before.

To ensure that Maiden brought Wader's vision to life, she researched and



GreenRoom fellows practice dancing and performing together at the Ordway Center for Performing Arts on Friday, July 19, 2024. (Photos by Talia McWright)



GreenRoom fellows Myra Curry and Keira Kowal Jett stand together at the Ordway theater on Friday, July 19, 2024.



“

I really try to make this a cohesive 360 experience that extends beyond the Ordway walls.”

Maia Maiden

formed relationships with multi-talented artists across Minnesota who would instruct the fellows in different areas of artistry. Her intention was that the fellowship would be intensive.

"People had to say yes to this," Maiden said. "It's very unique. It's the only one of its kind in Minnesota."

One of the most pivotal components of the fellowship is that it provides fellows with networking and relationship

building opportunities. The fellows take classes taught by masterclass teachers, and well-established, Minnesota-based artists. The GreenRoom faculty each bring their own knowledge and wisdom expertise, which Maiden honored by encouraging them to create classes that aligned with their skills and would push the fellows towards growth.

"In our interview Maia Maiden had said to me, 'You're going to be meeting people that it would take you years to access or even know who they are, and you're going to be meeting them and learning from them in a matter of weeks.' and she has been absolutely correct," 2024 fellow Ebony Ramquist said. "Not only had she kept her word in that, but above and beyond even."

During the six week program, the fel-

lows train at the Ordway from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and can have between four to five classes a day. Examples of classes include the Alexander technique, sound bathing, breath work, yoga and business. Each week fellows have a one-on-one session and mentoring with each faculty member and Maiden to check in on their experience and plans for the future. Near the end of the six weeks, fellows also receive professional headshots done by Diggy Made studios.

"I really try to make this a cohesive 360 experience that extends beyond the Ordway walls," Maiden said.

Wellness and self-care are an emphasized component of the GreenRoom curriculum, and the fellows experience this as they discover their talents and challenge their insecurities. Thirty-two-year-old 2024 fellow Bri Salhus came in as a dancer, and was encouraged through GreenRoom to find her voice as a singer.

"I never realized how emotional everything would be and the things that I would move through during this experience," Salhus said. "I think there's only so much you can talk through in talk therapy until it can come out through art. It's just a different experience, a different kind of healing."

The fellows also find strength in each other, as they walk through vulnerable moments together during and outside of classes. Salhus recalled a moment when Imagine Joy sent her a text message after she'd had a difficult day. She said she felt seen in that moment. Program manager Gbadamosi-Alashe described the fellows as a family rather than a collective.

"In a space where coming into this - most of us didn't know each other - we've all exhibited incredible courage to share some of the deepest parts of ourselves with each other, and it's helped us grow closer and invigorated this sense of community," said 2024 fellow Kyle Camay.

After the six weeks, the fellows have a closing session free and open to the public in which the fellows will share their craft with the public. This year's presentation will be on Aug. 20 at the Ordway.

"I went to the presentation last year and saw a lady named Patricia Lacey who's one year older than me get up there and do her thing, and after raising three kids I wanted to discover if I still have my art, and I do," Curry said. "It's been amazing working with the experienced instructors. They're very talented. They're very wise, as well as the masterclass and guest speakers."

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Hennepin History Museum's archive holds a trove of unique, archived research materials for the local historian. (Photo by Michele Pollard)



Visitors learn about the Circle of Water Circus' 1983 mission to rescue the Mississippi River from environmental damage. (Photo by Michele Pollard)

MASKS, PUPPETS AND PLENTY OF FREE PARKING

Hennepin History Museum showcases local history on a smaller, more nimble scale

By **Brian Gabriel**

Propped up alongside Sky, Prairie, Moon and Woods and with arms extended, River's giant, blue face stares down at passersby, perhaps hoping one stops and hears stories about the Mississippi River and its valley.

They are masks that traveled down the river to New Orleans in 1983 with the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre's Circle of Water Circus troupe as it raised awareness about human disregard for America's greatest waterway.

Then they went into storage and then nearly a landfill. Until now.

"My purpose was simply to do whatever I could to encourage people to turn their faces to the River again, that had become a sewage line," recalled Sandy Spielner, who directed the production.

Working with Hennepin History Museum (HHM) curator Alyssa Thiede, these giant mementos of Twin Cities' cultural and artistic past found a new home and are now on display in the new exhibit "Circle of Water: Puppetry as an Agent of Change."

Such collaborations align with HHM's mission "to preserve and explore history, creating spaces where our communities' stories can be told."

'A GEM FOR THE CITY'

According to Meet Minneapolis, the metro area has 55 museums, and HHM sits just north of and not quite in the shadow of its larger cousin, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on Third Avenue South. Since 1958, it has occupied the former 44-room mansion of Carolyn Christian, who came from lumber and flour milling families who made Minneapolis famous as the "Mill City."

"It is a gem for the city, I believe. I think it's a place that people can relate to," Michele Pollard, the museum's archivist, said. "I think people come in here and they kind of get this personal relationship with history."

Unlike larger museums, HHM's intimate size gives a curator like Thiede and executive director John Crippen freedom and agility to take advantage of collaboration opportunities.

"It is serendipitous," Crippen said. "We get these communities coming to us saying we have a story." For the museum,



Hennepin History Museum's staff welcome all visitors: (Left to right) executive director John Crippen, archivist Michele Pollard, and curator Alyssa Thiede. (Photo submitted)

those stories must have broader community appeal.

"All three [current] exhibits are curated in collaboration with community members," Thiede said, empowering them to tell histories in their own way.

"Far Away Home: Tibetans in Minnesota," which runs through the winter of 2024, highlights a Twin Cities' community that rarely gets attention, shedding light on this demographic fact: "I learned that we have the second largest Tibetan refugee community in the United States, which was a shock to me," Thiede said.

"The Bond between Us," a visual history of Minneapolis from the perspective of three generations of Black photographers, ends Sept. 28. "In Memoriam" replaces it, focusing on the Minneapolis Pioneers and Soldiers Memorial Cemetery, the city's oldest, recovering stories of the dead buried there.

The museum offers a library for the researcher, who with the help of the archivist, can access the boxes upon boxes of unique archives stored out of sight. "If you are researching individual people, you can find the city directories. If it's in a neighborhood or district, there's history

on that," Pollard said.

Even with some county funding, Crippen said he would like have more money to make new hires to ease workload demands on the museum's six-person staff. For now, they and volunteers keep things running smoothly.

"Our mission is much higher than what our skeleton crew allows," Thiede said.

"We used to charge \$8," Crippen said. "Now, if you come - for whatever reason you feel it should be free experience - no problem."

This pay-as-you-can policy has an unexpected upside with many patrons giving on-site donations greater than a regular admission fee, Crippen said. "Many people are happy to react to that pay-as-you-can and say I'm going to help this enterprise move forward," he said.

While a historic, old city mansion seems an obvious fit for the museum, one serious drawback is that has been difficult to make it accessible for those with mobility issues.

This means taking the museum to the public. "We are not limited by these four walls," Crippen said, describing a pop-up exhibit at the St. Louis Park Library and a walking tour of the city's "great swamp areas."

The "Circle of Water" exhibit is meant to be intergenerational, educating a younger generation about the environmental work of parents and grandparents. "Wow, that's what they were doing, to work to-



Representing nature, giant masks traveled with the Circle of Water Circus in 1983 to raise awareness about the pollution crisis along the Mississippi River. (Photo by Michele Pollard)



Hennepin History Museum occupies the historic Christian family mansion, sitting north of 24th Street on 3rd Avenue South. (Photo by Michele Pollard)

ward water justice and relationships with the environmental. How can that inspire us to do something?" Crippen said.

"Back in 1983, water was a major issue. Why is it still today? Why is water protection still a crisis?" Thiede said.

"History can unite people if you give people a chance to tell their stories," Crippen said.

For visiting hours and information about the museum visit hennepinhistory.org, keeping in mind there is plenty of free parking.

MINNEAPOLIS FOR A LIFETIME? DEBATABLE

STORIES & JOURNEYS

I recently attended my first Minneapolis Advisory Committee on Aging meeting. I am convinced that in the city of Minneapolis elders/seniors don't exist. There is such a thing as the "Minneapolis for a Lifetime: Age Friendly Action Plan," but from



By Donald L. Hammen

what I can tell it's no more than words on paper. Currently this committee meets the second Thursday of each month, 1-3 p.m. in the Trinity Room at Westminster Presbyterian Church. Anyone can show up at these meetings as a guest. Members of this committee are appointed through their member of the city council or by the mayor. By designation, Minneapolis is an Age Friendly City, but is it really? What do you think dear reader? As an elder do you exist in the city of Minneapolis? Tell yourself, tell others or tell me via tesha@tmcpub.com.

Elders/seniors - from what I can tell - seem to have two (maybe three) allies on the city council - those being Andrea Jenkins, Emily Koske and maybe Aurin Chowdhury. Turns out I know two of the committee members, those being Shelly Jacobson from my Ward 12 who I know through Longfellow Seward Healthy Seniors, and Ella Dean Wikstrom from Ward 11 who I know through the Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council (AFL-CIO). Elders/seniors need to start showing up at these meetings if they want Minneapolis to be for a Lifetime by actually being age friendly. The committee is housed within the Department of Neighborhood and community relations, and is staffed by Christina Kendrick and chaired by Angelique Kingsbury who is appointed by the Mayor.

And if you have read this far you have taken the plunge into the river (flow) of life experiences that is Stories and Journeys.

SPEECH WRITTEN NOT DELIVERED AT DEWAYNE TOWNSEND MEMORIAL SERVICE

When I was offered the opportunity to write Stories and Journeys just over 2.5 years ago, I sought the blessing of two



LIVING 50+ GOOD NEIGHBOR

NANCY EUSTIS was named Volunteer of the Year at the Kenwood Senior Living, 825 Summit Ave. She has lived at The Kenwood since 1997. Eustis has volunteered throughout the community in many ways. For three years, she was president of the Residents Council, convened creative writing classes and the newsletter committee, and every other week she leads discussions on current events.

Years ago, Eustis suffered a spinal cord injury from a car accident. She is wheel-chair-bound, but nothing keeps her in her apartment for long.

"I like that I've found a way to give back," she said. "Volunteering at The Kenwood keeps me learning and being with people."

"Nancy is best at looking out for the betterment of our community and finds many ways to share her talents and experiences," said Jennifer Volkenant, executive director at The Kenwood. "She is delightful to work with in any capacity, and we feel fortunate to know her."

The Kenwood Senior Living is located in the Lowry Hill neighborhood within the Calhoun-Isles community and provides independent living and assisted living apartments.

Know someone aged 50+ that contributes to the Southwest community and inspires those around them? Send your nomination to tesha@tmcpub.com. Please include your contact information, their name, age, and contact information, and a paragraph about what they do that you find amazing about them.

people: those being my brother, Richard Hammen and DeWayne Townsend. They are both deceased. Today, I get the blessing of you, dear reader.

I was honored on Saturday, July 13 when I received a text message from Marcea, DeWayne's wife, which reads: "Can I get you to speak immediately following DeW's service? It would be in the church community room where tea and crumpets will be served." My response was: "What service? When? Sure I can speak." That triggered my creative process that kicks in when I write Stories and Journeys.

This was a hard speech to write because I was processing my own feelings of grief through the process of writing. During a phone conversation with Marcea I gave her an overview of what I was writing. She gave me a thumbs up and said take all the time you want to deliver it.

To shorten up this story. I show up at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis. As I was walking toward the sanctuary I looked toward the Community Room. There was no evidence this space was set up for me or anyone else to speak. Technical impossibility perhaps. At the

MEDICARE ANNUAL UPDATE ON OCT. 9

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is partnering with MN Senior LinkAge to host a free class to help people learn about Medicare. "Medicare Annual Update" on Wednesday, Oct. 9. will take place 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m. at MPRB Headquarters, 2117 West River Road.

Medicare can be complicated, and it seems to change from year to year. Come learn about what's new in Medicare for 2025, so you can choose the best plan for your needs.

ALZHEIMER ASSN OFFERS CLASSES

The Alzheimer's Association Minnesota-North Dakota chapter is offering a series of classes for The Empowered Caregiver designed to provide dementia caregivers with helpful tools and ways to reduce stress.

- Classes explore:
- changes a dementia caregiver may experience
 - self-care and ways to manage feelings of overwhelm
 - how dementia affects communication and tactics to try
 - addressing dementia-related behaviors
 - balancing safety and independence
 - navigating the financial aspects of caregiving
 - Alzheimer's Association and community resources, including a 24/7 Helpline for questions or referrals to local resources at 800.272.3900.
- Resources online at alz.org/mnnd.

bottom of the order of worship I read the following words: "Following the service, friends are invited to join in the community room at the rear of the sanctuary for sweet treats and conversation." Nothing about speakers. I start to do what I call an "energetic shift" toward sweet treats and conversation in the community room.

I make a conscious decision to give Marcea a copy of the speech that I did before leaving. I look around for sweet treats and conversation. I found both. There are Power-Point pictures featuring DeWayne



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THREE RIVERS FIBERSHED CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH LOCAL FIBER

Like locally-grown food, people are seeking locally made clothing

By Margie O'Loughlin

Marigolds, hollyhocks, cosmos, and black eyed Susans. These are just a few of the late-summer flowers bursting into bloom right now. While many are cutting them for bouquets, farmer Maddy Bartsch is steeping their petals, leaves, and seed heads in boiling water to produce a rainbow of natural dyes for yarn and fabric.

Bartsch is co-founder and president of Three Rivers Fibershed (TRF). A resident of southeast Minneapolis, they've been farming at Get Bentz Farm near Northfield for the last three years. They first started experimenting with natural dyes from plants grown in their south Minneapolis community garden plot and apartment window sill in 2016. Growing local color on a larger scale at Get Bentz Farm is their way of contributing to the local fibershed.

WHAT IS A FIBERSHED?

A fibershed develops regional, regenerative fiber systems through responsible carbon farming, rebuilding regional manufacturing, and connecting customers to farms and ranches through education and programming. The center of TRF is in Minneapolis, extending out in a 175-mile radius to include portions of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota.

Within a fibershed, fibers are considered from a soil-to-soil perspective. That means that fiber-bearing animals graze on local land as they grow their coats, instead of some faraway place. Items made from their fiber (sweaters, mittens, socks, etc.) are worn until the end of their durability and then composted – completing the soil-to-soil cycle.

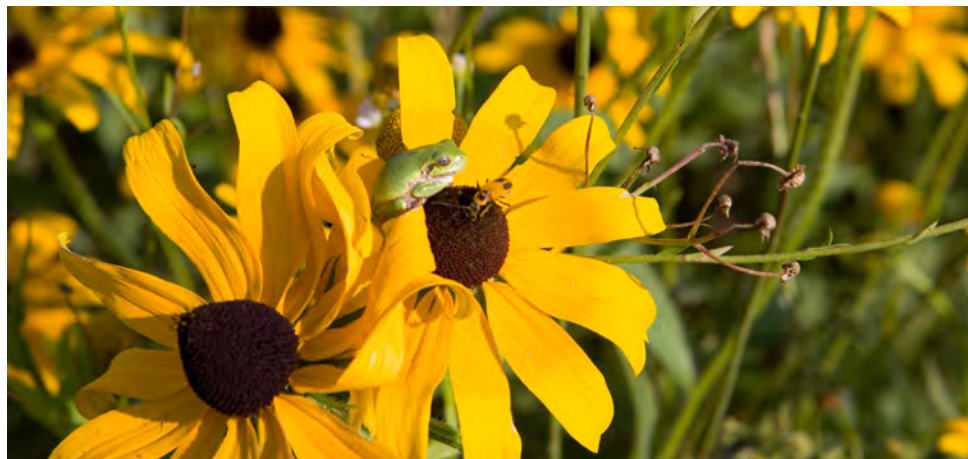
Bartsch explained, "At TRF, we're developing regional fiber systems that build soil and protect the health of our environment." The goal is to create just, local economies that honor all participants: local labor, local fiber, and local natural dyes.

FIBER MOVEMENT GROWING

It wasn't that many years ago that the organic food movement was considered fringe. Bartsch said, "As consumers, we've become much more aware of where our food comes from and how it's grown.



Holding harvested marigold blossoms, farmer and educator Maddy Bartsch said, "We're land stewards really, those of us who are working to develop our local fiber system." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)



Black-eyed Susan is one of the flowers frequently used to make natural dyes. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

These same ideas can and should apply to what we wear. In general, people are learning more about the consequences of their clothing choices. People are realizing they don't want to buy clothes that contain micro-plastics, and they care that synthetic fibers don't break down in landfills.

"People are searching for products that mirror their values. We need to have as local a footprint as we can with what we wear. We need to make or purchase

things that last, so we're buying fewer pieces of clothing over time."

GET TO KNOW YOUR FIBERSHED

The first step in understanding how a fibershed works is to get to know your own. Bartsch shares a booth once each month with Northfield-based farmer/mill owner Theresa Bentz: Saturdays at the Mill City Farmers Market and Sundays at the Linden Hills Farmers Market. The two sell

their yarn, natural dyes, and roving (the bundles of wool used by spinners to make yarn), among other things. Find them by looking in the market vendor listings for Get Bentz Farm.

Each month they have several products to sell that are reasonably priced, and can introduce customers to the soil-to-soil cycle. One of the products Bartsch sells is needle felted wool sponges made from "trash" wool that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

Everybody knows that wool comes from sheep, alpacas, llamas, and rabbits. But did you ever wonder what happens to the fiber of animals raised for meat? The animals have to be shorn before butchering, and their wool is typically thrown away. Bartsch uses it to make their biodegradable sponges – which, given the low price point of the wool, they can sell for just \$6.

If you want to try your hand at working with natural fibers, consider taking one of the classes Bartsch teaches regularly at the American Swedish Institute on natural dyeing, mending, garment repair, and mindful stitching. On Sept. 14, Bartsch demonstrated how to make flower pound-felted coasters.

WHY NATURAL DYES?

The industrial manufacture of clothing destroys water systems with by-products of chemical dyeing and finishing processes, while consuming enormous amounts of water on a thirsty planet.

Bartsch said, "We're working to build alternative models within our fibershed. These regional textile communities will improve soil and water quality, build relationships, and strengthen regional economies.

"Future fibershed communities will rely on renewable energy-powered mills in proximity to where fibers are grown. Through strategic grazing, conservation tillage, and soil carbon enhancing practices, our supply chains will create 'climate beneficial' clothing.

"In rethinking fashion, this has to become the standard for mitigating the effects of climate change. We see an emerging connection between the wearer and the local field where their clothes were grown."

Bartsch teaches and speaks on the topic of local fiber systems and sustainable textiles to learners of all ages throughout the Midwest. They can be reached at hello@threeriversfibershed.org.

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SHE HATED BUGS – SO SHE DECIDED TO BECOME AN ENTOMOLOGIST

Jessica Miller of Dragons Wynd hosts bug clubs and insect safaris

By **Tesha M. Christensen**

Jessica Miller still shrieks sometimes when a spider jumps on her, but the south Minneapolis environmental entomologist has found that makes her more approachable when she's teaching classes on insects.

"People really open up. It disarms them quickly," Miller observed.

She began her career in art history and spent nearly a decade working at places like the American Swedish Institute and Minneapolis Institute of Arts. She learned the craft of production weaving while working for a craftswoman in northeast Minneapolis. Then the economy turned and she pivoted.

"I picked bugs because I really didn't like them," Miller explained. She didn't like being that girl who was scared of insects and decided to do something about it. She enrolled in the University of Minnesota and began taking entomology classes.

Turns out, it fit in well with her concern about water quality and the environment. And it all inspires new art, both her own and her students'.

"I got excited for aquatic insects when I found out they reflect the health of a water," Miller said.

She grew up in Longfellow and has lived along Minnehaha Creek in the Ericson neighborhood since 1997. As a nine-year-old, Miller lost her leg when a driver hit the gas pedal instead of the brake and pinned her between two cars.

For her, environmental entomology is "seeing insects as our brethren, and a natural part of our world. To encourage inviting them back to the spaces they were historically."

Her favorite insect is the damselfly. "They need water to complete their life cycle," Miller pointed out.

Insects do things that humans have little interest in doing, such as managing dead things. "Many of our favorite and healthy foods need pollinators, especially native bees like bumble bees," she observed.

There are many issues facing insects today. Among them: "Habitat loss and humans forgetting to invite them back to the land we disturb for our own needs. Chemical elimination would help immensely. Many times insecticides reduce all insects and unbalance an ecosystem that would otherwise manage the naughty and destructive ones," said Miller.

Since completing her master's thesis on Minnehaha Creek, Miller has been heavily involved with implementing actions for improvements in the Twin Cities area. As part of the Master Water Steward Program, she installs rain gardens to aid infiltration and stormwater. These in turn provide habitat for insects such as pollinators which people depend on for food resources and options.

Through the University of Minnesota Beneficial Insect and Environmental Ecosystem, Miller did native bee identification, insect collection management, and outreach activities. She enjoys connecting people and ideas to work towards a healthier ecosystem for humans and insects.

On her eighth season with Mississippi Park Connection, she talks insects with a plethora of National Park visitors at Owamni Yamni/Saint Anthony Falls. "I love being a part of that area and have a great time with the dogs and the people in the neighborhood," said Miller. "The wildlife in the Mississippi corridor in downtown Minneapolis has been refreshing. It



South Minneapolis resident Jessica Wyn Miller (right), an entomologist, leads a Bug Club adventure into the world of bugs near her Minnehaha Creek-side home. She has found that her work as an artist intersects with insects. "I got excited for aquatic insects when I found out they reflect the health of a water," she recalled. She offers free Bug Club events May to September, 2-4 p.m. (Photos by Terry Faust)



Tiny flowers can hide insects. On Sunday, May 19, 2024, Jessica Wyn Miller (right) led a hunt for bugs outside her home along Minnehaha Creek. (Left to right) Morgan Tackett and sister Naomi took a close look while Elowyn Tackett looked on. (Photos by Terry Faust)

aids in my insect-themed chats, helps with my connection to the earth and reminds visually how connected in our space we are."

Metro Blooms continues to be a great partner with insect outreach and education. On contract with them, Miller is working on topics connecting to Monarch butterflies and the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee. "It is so great to see this company grow," she observed.

Miller has been involved in insect survey work with the Prairie Island Indian Community. "I am living my best life. I just identified a Male velvet ant!" she said in 2023.

She started her own business, Dragons Wynd, in 2017 to share the wonder and fascination of insects and the services

they provide. She does parties, presentations, and insect safaris. She also offers garden consults. Interested in what insect you have a picture of? Want to know more about the insects on land you steward? Ask Dragons Wynd.

Miller leads a Bug Club once a month on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings at her home along the creek. Sunday Bug Club is a casual meetup to look at and talk about insects. Participants wander a typical city lot looking at the native plants and insects while engaging in discussions about them. By paying attention, they see insect signs. Leaf chews (holes or caterpillar eatings) are reasons to stop and study. They look closely at flowers to notice who may be pollinating. There might be predators controlling other insects. They seek

TIPS FROM AN ENTOMOLOGIST FOR INCREASING INSECT LIFE IN A GARDEN

Jessica Miller of Dragons Wynd encourages people to:

- Plant a tree, a shrub, or a flower.
- Reduce unused lawn. It is not good habitat and has shallow roots that do not allow water into the soil effectively.
- Stop any use of chemicals to manage insects or fungus or plants. They tend to unbalance the nature.

CONTACT DRAGONS WYND:

612-807-4833

jessica@dragonswynd.com

dragonswynd.com



out insect homes, which can be horizontal or vertical – in dead plant stems, the soil or wood. Participants are welcome to bring show and tell items. Some of the meetings have themes and activities.

During the Saturday nighttime bug club, a giant black light shines on a large white sheet as Miller and bug club members hang out and wait for the insects to fly in. "Even in a city we can call in insects with a bright light," she pointed out. Night flyers like moths, caddisflies, and beetles are frequent at night lights, as well as some day fliers such as wasps, lady beetles and flies.

Through her work, Miller seeks to inspire respect for insects' behavior, heavy workload, and environmental needs.

RICHFIELD PENN FEST DRAWS CROWDS



Penn Avenue from 62nd to 76th Streets comes alive on Saturday, Sept. 15 with fun during the annual Penn Fest. Held since 2008, the festival draws about 10,000 people for music, dance, sports, games, crafters, artisans, kids activities, Pet Zone, delicious food, small business marketplace, community groups, school groups and more on a street closed to traffic. (Photos by Suzie Marty)

7 DON HAMMEN

at different stages and situations in his life playing on a screen in the front of the room. There were conversations with my former Ward 12 City Council Member Andrew Johnson, my Holy Trinity Meals on Wheels drivers, and Bill Miller, former executive director of the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program.

When I get home I'm asking myself, what do I do with a speech written but not delivered. I invited the spirit of DeWayne into my house. With his spirit present, I delivered it. I then decided it was good enough to put on file and incorporate in a column some day.

I imagine that DeWayne and my brother are resonating with the last words I remember my brother speaking to me before he died: KEEP WRITING!

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



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▶1 HELPING YOUTH

velopment work in Minneapolis Public Schools.

"From my perspective, I am working primarily with students with disabilities and how that may affect their entry into employment," Fawver said. She said she works more with what is going on outside of school, around housing and the stress that families may be experiencing, and how that impacts students' ability to show up and do what is required at school.

"Since the pandemic, the needs of mental health impose barriers," Fawver said. "The stress and level of anxiety young people are facing are pretty significant. As is the lack of access to support for those needs. Throw into that family problems, and employment is kind of the last priority, although it is an important piece."

Fawver said she thinks the real gaps in mental health care and housing are huge. "The other thing I see is lack of transportation and driver's licenses. Those are real barriers to high paying jobs in the area."

Fawver said there are some good programs out there, such as the trade programs through the Finishing Trades Institute and Drivers License Academy through Ramsey County, but youth must be 16 to 18 to enter some of these programs. She said she would like to see programs for younger youth so that they can transition into some of these other classes.

"Autism is being recognized more, at least here at our school," Fawver continued. "Many of our students are on the spectrum, and some of that group in particular struggle with barriers to employment."

"I see people are becoming more educated around this, and I definitely see improvement and more integration and opportunities," she continued. She added that she thinks schools can do a better job of preparing students for the work setting and the social demands of a work environment. "We could provide a lot more support," she said. "And lack of literacy skills is another big barrier. Some of our students with learning disabilities are reading at a second or third grade level, and that is a huge barrier for them."

According to Fawver, many students get hung up by the job application process. "It is an overwhelming task for some of our students just to read emails," she noted. "We make assumptions about how tech savvy our youth are, and they may be good at texting and TikTok, but not at professional communication. We just assume they know things that they don't know." Fawver described one of the biggest joys of her work that continuously motivates her is when she and other staff are able to get students past barriers and start to feel successful.

NINA MCGARRY

For 25 years, Nina McGarry has been a social worker with the Journeys Transition High School program in Saint Paul. She has previously worked in Montana schools doing team-building with elementary children. She was also a Wilderness guide in northwestern Montana for eight years, working with youth at risk.

"I think one thing that has taken me a long time to realize is that every person's situation is so different," McGarry said. "I might work with an unaccompanied youth who has the strongest work ethic. One youth might have a disabled parent who has never worked. Circumstances have been so different for each one. Some families may have a low income, but a strong work ethic and would never take money from the system." She said that no matter what the circumstances are, however, there can be a need for help in certain areas. "As social workers, we identify what those areas are and help with them."

McGarry said that all the youth she works with are in special ed. But as part of her program, she has worked with kids in the Juvenile Detention Center. "These are youth who fell through the cracks and



An eager crew of Elpis youth workers demonstrate woodworking. Left to right: Mariyan A. (R) Phoebe B., Jesus M. and Caleb B. Elpis The nonprofit Elpis Enterprises (2161 University Ave.) offers paid internships to homeless youth in screen printing, woodworking and bag manufacturing. (Photo by Terry Faust)



AT LEFT Workers at Elpis prep boards for birdhouses as they hone their woodworking skills. (Photo by Tessa M. Christensen) AT RIGHT Paul Ramsour of Elpis sinks a woodscrew into a Green Chair as Annette Lang talks to him about chair construction. (Photo by Terry Faust)



struggle." McGarry said she does believe that agencies and organizations are getting better at providing resources for young people in need. "Kids do see a path to moving up, and they are coming with a better vision of the future, even the ones who fall through the cracks," McGarry said. "The community is better at finding strengths, removing some of the barriers and having an upward trajectory. We cannot just stop when they enter training. There is going to be a lot of work, not just one and done."

GRETCHEN WILBRANDT

Gretchen Wilbrandt has been the director of development and community engagement at Urban Boatbuilders since September. She has also been a teacher, a consultant, a PhD student, IT worker and with the Yacht Club. Urban Boatbuilders is a nonprofit in Saint Paul that teaches youth how to build boats through paid internships. "I think everyone comes from a different situation, longing for a sense of community and support. We have fostered and developed that at Urban Boatbuilders," she said. She remarked that the COVID generation wants a little bit more connection and wants to find ways to do that.

"We are looking to break down the silos between the nonprofit and for-profit industries," Wilbrandt said. "We have a shortage of skilled workers, and we want to break down the wall between companies to let them know we are working to ensure we have employable youths. We want to determine our young people are socially and emotionally ready. Helping

challenges," Wilbrandt continued. "Personally, I think there needs to be a paradigm shift in society that honors others, with more equity and more people need to care more about others." She cited COVID, global wars and a mental health crisis as stressors that can make young people feel hopeless. "We need to help people around us and we need micro-communities that blossom. We need to care about other people and give them a chance. We don't want to remove chairs from the table, but bring in more chairs to the table." She said there is a need for inclusive conversation, actual listening, a breaking down of White supremacy and White saviorism.

PAUL RAMSOUR

Paul Ramsour is the executive director of Elpis Enterprises in St. Paul, a nonprofit that offers paid internships to homeless youth in screen printing, woodworking and bag manufacturing. Ramsour created the organization in the late 1990s. The nonprofit teaches soft skills in business, digital literacy and customer service, as well as the trades.

Ramsour, who has spent years in the youth work field, said he thinks barriers for young people are pretty much the same, with some nuances on each of them. "Being able to not only hold down a job but to think about navigating a career path and figure out the steps to get where you want to go in life requires some stability, whether it be in housing, transportation or health and wellness. I don't think those things change a lot," he said.

"Lots of people work from home

are not priorities in the household. Or the primary caregiver has abdicated that responsibility to someone else, and other needs have taken over."

He said that housing stability might be the highest priority, and education and training are not the main focus. "There is nobody there to push the youth to participate in these opportunities, and they miss out."

"I think from a health and wellness standpoint a lack of one good mentor to help youth to navigate and to be a sounding board when they run into trouble is a major barrier. They need someone to set an example in solving problems. The lack of a good mentor is a make or break situation for a lot of these kids." Ramsour said having someone to help them prioritize and make good decisions is key for most kids.

"I always believe there's hope," Ramsour continued. "You have to be really intentional about what you do, and you have to stay active. You have to constantly ask who is not present, whether it is people in your neighborhood or kids on your block. You can't get them all, but if you have an opening you can say we added one or two who would ordinarily not be here. You have to go and talk to the person who was not present, because that might be the life you change."

JOEL SISSON

Joel Sisson is a performance artist in the Twin Cities who started the Green Chair Project around 1991. "Minneapolis was called Murderopolis because of all the gang ac-

▶13 HELPING YOUTH

tivity. A police officer had been shot. That summer I had gotten jumped and beaten up by a handful of young guys. I wondered if I should leave the area."

But then Sisson thought about if he were a young person growing up in the area and wondered if he would have acted much differently if there were no opportunities. "I also had an Adirondack chair stolen at the time, and a neighbor lady said we needed the chair back. So I thought, what if we hired young people to build chairs?"

Sisson said he and Chris Hand tore up their garden, built 100 chairs, painted them and gave them as gifts to their block.

He said the project showed that young people can be productive when given a chance. They continued building chairs for about 12 years. The project started again in the wake of George Floyd's death in 2020. Sisson worked with Elpis's wood-working department and started building chairs again. They used kits that open up and unfold, making two work tables with jigs attached. Others were shown how to build the chairs, spreading the project around the community.

Sisson said the challenge has always been how to reach young people and let them know about the opportunities that are out there for them. It is difficult to keep social media updated with all the summer programs available. "How do you connect with the ones who are falling through the cracks?" he asked.

Sisson applied for a grant to put information on the sides of buses and shelters, but then he followed a different path. He talked with Ramsour and Karl Erickson, the woodworking director at Elpis, about doing chair-building workshops and how to get the word out. "Out of our conversations, we talked about giving youths a handout telling them about how to prepare for job interviews and other job-seeking tools. We thought of something like a graphic novel, in comic-book-style that is culturally appropriate. We would like to find the right kinds of groups to make that happen," Sisson said. He said he has made three little booklets that could be a point to start from.

KAJUAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Twenty-three-year-old Kajuan Burress moved to the Twin Cities a few years ago from Tennessee. He had completed his high school diploma there and struck out with a friend for Minnesota.

"When I came to Minnesota, my mindset was completely different," he said. "I felt like I had made it to the land of opportunity, it just felt like so much good stuff was ahead of me. Everything was new and looked good."

But Burress found that being so young and relying entirely on himself was not so easy.

"I really made some wrong decisions and started doing what was comfortable for me, not what I was supposed to do," he said. "There was some incarceration along the way. 'I'm trying to get out of that. I don't like it. But I'm still on probation,'" Burress said. Then he became homeless and spent seven months staying at the Dorothy Day Center on a bunk, with little space for any belongings.

Burress said he was living in survival mode. "Anything you do is to better your situation and lighten your load a little," he said. Eventually Burress got an internship in woodworking, and he landed a spot in supportive housing so that he now has his own room and more space.

He completed his internship and has now started another, working in maintenance. He is also considering a construction internship, but transportation issues pose a problem. Relying on public transportation eliminates a lot of positions for Burress.

He said he wishes he had someone to help him when he first arrived here — someone who could have helped him think more carefully about the decisions he made.

"You determine your life path by the decisions you make and what you choose to act on," he said. "I feel like I should have gone a certain route, taken a longer path but one that was more certain."

Burress said one mistake he made was to limit himself to certain areas in the Twin Cities. "I would never just stay in a certain area now," he said. He said exploring is how you learn about things.

"I just don't see young people paying

attention to what is out there. I feel like personally I wasted my better years around the wrong people. I should have been putting in time for myself, and maybe I would be a little further."

For now, Burress is glad for the strength he had to get through the tough times. And he is thinking about Tennessee and family. "My uncle and my grandfather both passed, and my brother had a baby. I missed all of it," he said. He would like to get closer to his family and may try somewhere else.

"There are certain parts of Minnesota I don't care to be around any more," he said. "Whether I have good or bad memories, I don't want to think about them."



"They could be done for each ethnic group, with words from elders and a list of resources," Sisson said.

"This is something that could be done across the United States," Sisson continued. "Each region and locality could use a template and then fill in their own

blanks."

Sisson said he learned about how to make public art a part of the community from Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) professor Kingi Akagawa. "He was really good about how an artist can respond to the public in his commu-

nity," Sisson said.

"We need to get people outside, talking to one another," he said.

Editor's note: Freelancer Jan Willms also works at Elpis Enterprises.

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MCAD FACULTY BIENNIAL EXHIBIT



The Gallery at Minneapolis College of Art and Design will spotlight the art and research undertaken by faculty in the 2024 MCAD Faculty Biennial. Some fifty faculty members are participating in an exhibition in the Main and Concourse Galleries through Nov. 2, 2024.

The wide variety of media and formats will showcase the breadth of the faculty's expertise and talents as working artists.

Keisha Williams, Director and Curator of MCAD Gallery, states, "It's been a privilege to collaborate with esteemed MCAD faculty every two years as they select what to show of their own personal works. This exhibition is a reminder of the vast talents that MCAD's creative leaders and educators bring to the Twin Cities art scene."

SHOWN: Howard Quednau
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Wood, styrene, plaster, paper, acrylic

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

20TH ANNUAL AUTUMN BREW REVIEW

Minnesota's longest-running craft beer festival, Autumn Brew Review, will take place this year on Oct. 12, 2024, from 1:30 to 5 p.m. This premier craft brew festival includes beverage sampling (includes Delta-9 THC beverages), entertainment, and community spirit, showcasing craft beers from Minnesota's most innovative breweries. This year's festival will feature a new theme of collaboration, with Minnesota breweries from across the state partnering with each other, breweries from outside Minnesota, and industry groups to debut brand new craft beer releases at the fest. Attendees will be the first, and possibly only group, to try these offerings.

NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

After over three years of fundraising and community engagement, new monkey bars, a climbing dome, and a fire truck-themed playhouse have been installed at Linden Hills Park. During the first phase of the project to upgrade Linden Hills Park's playground, the budget for play equipment was reduced due to an unexpected cost for drainage work required in and near the playground. The Linden Hills Neighborhood Council (LHiNC), through residents and a private donor, raised funds for additional play equipment both at Linden Hills Park and Hall Park in North Minneapolis.

CRITICAL PARKING AREA CHANGES

The city of Minneapolis is changing critical parking areas, started in the 1970s to dissuade commuters from parking in residential neighborhoods. On some blocks in Loring Park, people either have to move their vehicles every so often between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays, or spring for a \$25 annual permit to park on some blocks for as long as 72 hours. These blocks are part of what are called Critical Parking Areas, and the zones may soon change as the city of Minneapolis works to get people biking, walking, and taking transit more. Later this year, the city plans to implement changes to zones in Loring and Elliot Park. A presentation for the Minneapolis City Council says the days and hours of when a vehicle would be required to have a permit to park could change, or the zones could be eliminated entirely. From there, the city could either install meters or let any vehicle park for free. After they make changes to Loring and Elliot Park, they plan to finalize changes citywide by next year.

CITY BRIEFS

NEW REGIONAL PLAN

The Metropolitan Council is drafting a new regional plan to help guide land use, transportation and develop decisions for the next decade. They are seeking feedback on their draft "Imagine 2050" plan until Oct. 7, 2024, and will host a public hearing on Wednesday, Sept. 25 at 5 p.m. at 390 Robert St. N. in St. Paul. People can learn more about the plan at <https://engage.metrocouncil.org/> and submit comments at Mail: Metropolitan Council, 390 Robert St. N., St. Paul, TMN 55101, public.info@metc.state.mn.us and 651-602-1500. They call the draft "the region's plan for an equitable and resilient future," and it will serve as a framework for required local city comprehensive plans for the near future.

CANNABIS BUSINESSES

The city is working on drafting new regulations for cannabis businesses in Minneapolis. City staff introduced draft regulations June 13 and presented their recommendations about when, where and how cannabis businesses can operate at two meetings in August. The rules will create 13 new business licenses and rules that the city hopes will "support the new legal cannabis industry and keep our com-

munity safe and healthy."

AUDIT OF MPD COACHING

In August, the city's audit committee announced that it would be investigating the police department's practice of coaching officers in response to misconduct complaints. The committee directed the city auditor to review the department's use of coaching over the past year to gauge whether it put the city at legal or financial risk. Concerns have been raised in the past about the practice that does not create a public record of police complaints. This evaluation could lead to a more in-depth audit.

EARLY VOTING

Early voting in the 2024 Nov 5 general election will start on Friday, Sept. 20 and continue through Monday, Nov. 4. Early voting sites will operate at Elections & Voter Services center at 980 E Hennepin Ave., at the Urban League at 2100 Plymouth Ave. N., at Bethel Church, at 4120 17th Ave. S and at the Hennepin County Government Center. The ballot this year will include federal, state, local school board and judge races, as well as a constitutional amendment to renew the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and a Minneapolis Public Schools referendum to reauthorize and raise its Technology Capital Project Levy by \$20

million a year to provide more funding for technology systems, equipment and support staff for the next 10 years. Visit <https://myballotmn.sos.mn.gov/> for a sample ballot.

CITY SEEKS ADVISORS

The city is recruiting new members for its various advisory boards and commissions. Members are actively recruited twice each year, in the spring and fall. Fall applications will be accepted through Sept. 30. These cover a wide range of issues where community members can use their expertise and experience to help improve city policies and decisions. Check for current openings and apply for positions on the city website. For more information call 612-673-2216.

METRO B LINE CONSTRUCTION

This month work on the new bus rapid transit B line project will focus between Lake/Excelsior and Market Plaza and Lake and Blaisdell on sidewalk, curb, and stations. One of the last things to finish this year is street resurfacing heading west along Lake St. at Bde Maka Ska before turning around at Market Plaza and moving east along Excelsior Blvd. and Lake St. to Blaisdell.



Briefs compiled by Cam Gordon.

BUSINESS

NEMAA WELCOMES OPERATIONS MANAGER

The Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association is excited to welcome its new Operations Manager, Morgen Ru. He joins NEMAA from the film world, having produced a number of film festivals across the U.S. over the last 12 years. Ru has a passion for supporting artists and helping create and maintain thriving arts ecosystems, is a designer, textile weaver, and avid reader in his free time, and is also currently pursuing a master's degree in design at MCAD. Reach out to him at morgen@nemaa.org.

HUGE IMPROV TO CLOSE

After moving and expanding to 2728 Lyndale Ave. S last year, the board of HUGE Improv Theater has made the decision to close HUGE permanently at the end of October. "The reasons are complex, but they ultimately boil down to money. The board has concluded that, after a series of expected and unexpected challenges, cash flow just cannot sustain the work HUGE was set out to accomplish," they wrote in an email newsletter. "We want to be emphatically clear: the open letter raising concerns about diversity on HUGE's stage is not the reason for this closure. HUGE was already in a precarious financial situation, and there simply isn't a viable way forward."

IRIDESCENT CARE COLLABORATIVE MOVES

Iridescent Care Collaborative, a partnership of mental health and allied private practice owners, owned and led by therapist Sherry Merriam, MA, LPCC, expanded this September and moved into a new office suite at the Center for Performing Arts (CFPA) at 3754 Pleasant Ave #205. "The move to a new office space at CFPA will provide both clients and clinicians with a safe neighborhood, increased access to public transportation, free and ample street parking, ADA-compliant and gender-neutral restrooms, larger office spaces, and, of course, new opportunity to create community with other healers and providers on site," say representatives. According to their website, "CFPA supports a

range of artists and practitioners to teach, practice, and learn in our community."

"Sherry has created a truly special community of practitioners who really support one another not only as professionals, but as people, too," says current member, Haley Bagley, MA, LMFT.

Merriam sees CFPA as "the ideal partner in our separate organizations' shared missions of bringing communities together in a web of interdependence and support."

There will be an open house to celebrate the move and connect with the community on Nov. 15, 5-8 p.m. in the chapel of the Center for Performing Arts.



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- Ninja Anywhere course
- Face painting
- Balloon animals
- Vendor market
- Giveaways



NICOLLET HARDWARE

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