



Claiming
the
story
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AN UNUSUAL SPORT



The 2021 Men's Team Woodhippies plays at McMurray Fields inside Como Regional Park. Manager/player Bryant Duling is in the back row on left. Teams have been playing at McMurray fields for over 60 years. (Photo submitted)

Ward 4 Council Member Jalali steps down

Citing health issues, she will leave after first meeting in February

By JANE MCCLURE



Ward Four Council Member and St. Paul Council President Mitra Jalali is stepping down, citing health reasons. She announced her resignation Jan. 25, saying she will stay on for the first council meeting in February and then take a leave of absence.

"As council president, I have done everything in my power to help our new council succeed and to represent what principled, progressive, and effective elected leadership looks like. Real leadership is about the team, not the individual, and our community sent this team to do historic work," Jalali wrote.

As of Monitor deadline, the process of naming an interim council member hadn't been announced. Typically the council has an open application process and makes an appointment. An appointee serves until a special election. Council members in the past have given preference to appointees who commit to not seeking the seat on a permanent basis.

The last council resignation mid-term was that of Dai Thao, in Ward One in 2022.

Jalali was last elected in 2023, to a term ending in 2028.

She first won a 2018 special election.

In her announcement, Jalali said that serving as an elected official has been "negatively impacting" her health. She first discussed the health issues with her health care professionals in 2023, but went to become council president in 2024, taking on more responsibilities.

MITRA JALALI » 3

St. Paul Park and Rec organizes men, women and co-ed broomball leagues each winter

By MATTHEW K. JOHNSON

For at least 60 years, broomball has been a part of St. Paul. For decades, Parks and Recreation has organized men's, women's, and co-rec broomball leagues played at McMurray Fields in Como Park.

WHAT IS BROOMBALL?

Broomball is a sport played on ice. Like ice hockey, there are six players from each team on the ice. Former league manager Andre Lanoue described broomball:

"You have elements of hockey, such as five-on-five with goalie, and you've got off-sides. So you have some elements of hockey, but there's a certain amount of strategy that involves soccer in terms of how you move the ball up the ice and even how you defend."

Gretchen Duling first learned about broomball at the University of Minnesota where it was offered as an intramural sport. Duling stated, "There are no skates. You have special shoes that are squishy on the bottom."

Co-rec team manager Jess Jerney competed in swimming and never played an outdoor team sport until some friends convinced her to try broomball. Jerney explained, "Broomball sticks previously were a broom cut off to the very end of it, so you have a little triangle at the end with a flat part at the end to hit the ball with. But there's a lot of innovation in the sport. Now you can get a super light aluminum or titanium broom."

BROOMBALL » 2

Neighborhood realtor carves own niche

Banding with fellow Johns, he fashions ice sculptures at St. Paul Winter Carnival

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

You may have seen John Njoes around the neighborhood. After more than 15 years of donning his handyman

hat, Njoes started his career as a realtor specializing in residential sales. He said, "I was doing a lot of remodeling work, and decided to make a pivot to real estate during COVID. I've always loved working with people, and I love old houses."

Njoes is also a person who loves cold weather and all things winter. For a few days each January, he exchanges his Sotheby's Realtor's vest for a thick parka as the St. Paul Winter Carnival Ice Carving Con-

test unfolds. Njoes said, "Ice carving is a pretty obscure art, special to the Midwest. When people grumble about how much they hate the long months of winter, we're just getting ready for our favorite time of year."

TEAM JOHN

The "we" he's referring to is his ice carving team: Team John. The other two team members are also named John (John Nusser-Cooper and John Matis), and they all graduated from South High School in Minneapolis. Njoes said, "We've been

ICE CARVING » 12



Each January, John Njoes, exchanges his Sotheby's Realtor's vest for a thick parka as the Winter Carnival Ice Carving Contest unfolds. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)



Our Streets, district councils push for at-grade option on Interstate 94

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Hundreds of people gather at the capitol to cry 'All the way with the ERA!'

PAGE 4



Como Park wrestlers celebrate their successes this season

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BROOMBALL >> from 1

TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

While broomball in indoor arenas is played year round, outdoor broomball is more popular. However, outdoor ice rinks have become harder to maintain.

Jess Jerney commented, "The St. Paul Park and Rec has done a wonderful job of investing in the refrigerated ice, and that has really kept the sport alive through some of the climate change that we've been experiencing. Last year, we were able to play, I think, all but one game of the season. In Minneapolis, we played one game, and then they had to refund our money because the ice was gone. So I've been really impressed with the North Dale and the Phalen ice."

In recent years, St. Paul scheduled December games at the glycol-cooled outdoor rinks at North Dale, Phalen, and Palace recreation centers. Current league manager Auggie Garcia remembered a conversation with his two supervisors Jessica Williams and Mike Whaley in which they discussed using the refrigerated rinks until the weather got cold enough for natural outdoor ice. He added, "The people at Palace, North Dale, and Phalen have been great with our teams."

Garcia also credited grounds crew leader Derek Hollanitsch: "Derek takes care of our ice rink out at McMurray, and he gets that prepared and to keep it running so well. He suggested we try the refrigerated ice for the beginning of the season." Hollanitsch has been with St. Paul Parks and Recreation 37 years. He also has served on the District Community Council and as the president of the national Sports Field Management Association.

He grew up playing baseball at Rice and Hayden Heights Rec Centers. While in high school in 1987, Hollanitsch got his first job with St. Paul Parks. At St. Paul Saints baseball games, Hollanitsch would



2021 Team Photo of Bruisers Women's Team: Gretchen Duling is on the far left. Manager Anne Donohue is third from right. They still play in St. Paul on Thursdays. (Photo submitted by Gretchen Duling)



January 2025 men's game between Cheap Seats (Purple) and Kinney's Krew (Blue/Gold) at McMurray. (Photo by Matthew K. Johnson)

pick up half-eaten hot dogs and pop cups at Municipal Stadium, eventually renamed Midway Stadium. After graduating from

high school, he got a full-time job with Saint Paul Parks and Rec as part of the grounds crew.



Honestly, when I first saw it, I fell in love. I fell in love with the sport."

Tito Escobedo

Around 2000, Hollanitsch became the crew leader. He has maintained St. Paul's youth and adult sports fields and rinks. Hollanitsch said, "I'm a sports guy.

I enjoy sports, so it doesn't matter if it's baseball, if it's lacrosse, if it's soccer, if it's broomball, if my name is behind it, and I'm supposed to maintain it, I want to make sure that it's maintained for whoever is using that facility." He remarked about broomball: "As long as Mother Nature allows me to make ice and get it ready, the teams will have great ice to be played on."

REFEREES

Broomball, like many recreational sports, doesn't happen safely and fairly without referees. Many referees get their start in other sports. New to refereeing this year is Matt Smith, who comes from a background coaching baseball and hockey. He is being mentored by long-time referee Howard McNertney, who played broomball from 1975 to 2001.

Keith Purinton is the youngest of three brothers who all have refereed at McMurray in St. Paul for years. His oldest brother Kyle and next oldest Kevin both play broomball, as well.

Similar to how players recruit players from other sports, referees use their sports networks to recruit more referees. According to Ryan King, he met head referee Rodney Olson playing softball. King, now a long time referee, recruited his hockey friend Tito Escobedo. Escobedo said, "When I started up at McMurray leagues, King was so nice. I look at him

BROOMBALL >> 3



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McDonald's teardown makes room for new hotel, restaurants

Midway Center update

By JANE MCCLURE

Midway Center McDonald's is no more, torn down Jan. 13, 2025. That makes way for redevelopment along University Avenue and inside the United Village site bounded by Pascal Street and St. Anthony, Snelling and University avenues.

United Village representative Mike Hahm regularly gives updates on the development to area district councils. He told Union Park District Council's land use committee Jan. 27 that a community meeting with a detailed development update is tentatively planned for Feb. 20 at Allianz Field. Area residents and business owners should watch for more information.

A planned hotel, restaurant pavil-

ion and office building are to start construction this year. The pavilion with two restaurants will be built first, followed by the other two buildings.

Hahm said passersby will see infrastructure work starting in March, followed by the restaurant pavilion and then the other two buildings. The pavilion is slab-on-grade and less complex to construct.

As for McDonald's, it was the last of the Midway Center buildings to come down. Its lease expired late last year. It closed in December after years of operation by the Henry family.

McDonald's was initially located in the main Midway Center building, where the restaurant had operated since 1975. It was one of many restaurants and carryout food vendors at the shopping center over the years, including a Woolworth's lunch counter, Taco Bell, Godfather's Pizza, Great Lakes Buffet, and more recently Pe-

king Garden, Perkins, Golden Gate Café, Thien's Cajun Boiling Seafood, Jimmy John's and Little Caesar's.

Jimmy John's and Little Caesar's closed before their small building was torn down last year. Peking Garden, Perkins, Golden Gate Café, Thien's Cajun Boiling Seafood were destroyed in the 2020 civil unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder.

McDonald's as the longest-tenured restaurant at Midway Center reflects changes in the dining industry. In late 1989, a \$5 million plan to revamp Midway Center was announced by then-owner Rein Midway.

McDonald's wanted to move out of the strip mall and into a stand-alone building with a drive-through service window as its business model changed.

Various issues including site contamination from past land uses slowed the

project, as did community opposition. One foe of the project was Midway Bank. Leaders there didn't want a drive-thru service near the bank's drive-thru lanes, saying it would be confusing.

The notion of outlets or "development pads" along University generated debate for a few years. It also caused a split among community organizations. Midway Chamber of Commerce, the Hamline Midway Coalition and the Snelling-Hamline Community Council opposed the notion of drive-thrus and development along University. University UNITED, which was an umbrella group for organizations along University Avenue, supported the proposal.

In 1991, the St. Paul City Council rejected a plan to build three fast food restaurants along the University Avenue, citing traffic issues related to drive-thru windows. A small multi-tenant building and Perkins restaurant were built, with McDonald's going back to the city in 1994 for its drive-thru approval.

Our Streets, district councils push for at-grade options

Re-Thinking 94 update

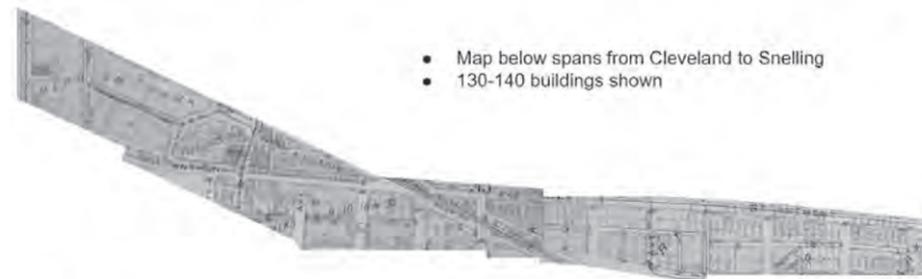
By JANE MCCLURE

Frustration is growing over the Rethinking I-94 project proposal to drop two at-grade options. The Rethinking I-94 Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) Jan. 17 discussed recommendations to eliminate options from further study, in the face of pushback from local elected officials and many community groups.

The Rethinking I-94 project involves the freeway from I-35W and Highway 55/Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis to Marion Street in St. Paul. Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) officials and project consultants hope to have one option set for detailed studies by 2026. Construction wouldn't start until 2030 at the earliest. The project does not have any funding yet.

MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger emphasized that the recommendations are preliminary, with review of all 10 alternatives to be finished this spring. St. Paul and Minneapolis City Councils and Hennepin County Board PAC representatives objected to dropping the two options that would fill in the 7.5-mile freeway trench and replace it with an at-grade roadway. So did many of the 145 community members who signed up to speak. They represented Our Streets, the champion and developer of the at-grade proposals, area district councils and indi-

Union Park: Plat Map of Area Replaced by I-94



Source: 1916 Plat Map Index, from U of M digitized map library
Above image includes sections from plates 25, 28, 22.

viduals.

Our Streets members rallied to speak. Leaders announced earlier in January that its efforts to get a federal U.S. Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities grant fell short, despite having matches from the city of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.

"I have no doubt that MnDOT's decision to rashly eliminate the two at-grade boulevard project options significantly undermined our application," Our Streets Executive Director José Antonio Zayas Cabán said in a website statement. "With the incoming presidential administration, this was our last opportunity to leverage these critical federal dollars. It's incredibly disappointing to see Melissa Barnes and the rest of the Rethinking I-94 team completely disregard the community they

serve and instead pursue the easy choice of status quo."

At-grade advocates said that retaining those options is seen as righting historic wrongs and reconnecting communities long split by the freeway. It is also promoted as having long-term positive effects for climate change.

Many objected in the meeting chat during public comment, when MnDOT sent out a news release summarizing the meeting before it finished.

All of the remaining four options would allow for construction of the proposed Rondo land bridge. The bridge faces challenges on another level as Minnesota House Republicans have introduced a bill trying to block that project.

Elected officials unsuccessfully pushed to be able to vote on each of the 10 op-

tions at the meeting. Six of 10 options are eyed for elimination, including expanding the freeway, and separating I-94 into local and regional routes. The options are in an environmental impact statement (EIS) process.

Russ Stark, chief resilience officer for St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, said that while there are reservations about at-grade options, those should not be ruled out. At the same time, he noted that the three years of filling the trench with "constant trucks" must be considered. Benefits of developing land along the at-grade boulevard would need many years to take shape.

The four concepts that are recommended for further study would allow a reconfigured or reduce freeway to move forward. Ideas include a dedicated lane or continuous shoulders for bus rapid transit. All four would allow a proposed Saint Paul land bridge, spearheaded by Reconnect Rondo, to be built.

Most people who commented spoke for retaining the at-grade options, arguing that it would reduce air pollution, and add housing and businesses where the trench is now. Area district councils spoke for maintaining the at-grade options including Union Park District Council, Summit-University Planning Council, Hamline-Midway Coalition, St. Anthony Park Community Council and West Seventh/Fort Road Federation. Federation comments centered on that neighborhood's history of being split by I-35E years ago.

Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and Minnesota Trucking Association were among the few business groups speaking against the at-grade options, citing the challenges in delivering goods.

BROOMBALL >> from 2

as my mentor." He added, "Reffing is not enough to pay for a full-time living. This is something you do for the love and maybe a little extra cash."

TANGLED UP IN BROOMBALL

With running on ice, weird-looking sticks, and a big orange ball, broomball is a unique sport.

Jerney exclaimed, "One of my favor-

ite parts about broomball is that it's kind of a silly sport. You are slipping and sliding on the ice. Everyone's just trying to keep themselves up and move the ball towards the net. But there's always some silly things that happen on ice, and generally, people don't get hurt when they fall. There's just that light-heartedness of the sport outdoors that I really love. Of course, it's great exercise; there's great friends that you meet, as well."

Andre Lanoue described it: "The fact that you're running around in these fun-

ny-looking shoes, chasing a small orange ball with a broom, kind of hard plastic stick: it's an unusual sport. It's a wonderful sport, but it's not like anything else."

Escobedo concluded, "The thing that I really do love about it is the close-knit community. With softball, it's more variety. You get more people, more knuckleheads. But I love the fact that the broomball community is so clean. They look out for each other and help each other out. I love that atmosphere."

From mid-December through

mid-February, St. Paul holds men's broomball leagues on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The women's league and co-rec league play on Thursday and Friday, respectively.

The St. Paul Broomball playoffs are scheduled during the day Feb. 14-15 at McMurray Fields.

MITRA JALALI >> from 1

In her statement, Jalali said that as much as she loves St. Paul, her well-being is not the price she can pay by staying on the council.

She is the first Asian American woman and the second woman of color elected to the council. She was also the first to openly identify as a member of the LGBTQ community to be elected. She has served on a host of city and regional committees and boards.

Jalali has worked on a wide range of issues including tent control, tenant pro-

tections, various brick and mortar projects, and more. But ward issues have been controversial during her tenure, including the fight over homelessness and drug crimes in the Snelling-University area, the planned expansion of Kimball Court, the demolition and replacement of the Hamline-Midway Branch Library, and housing density issues.

Council leadership changes were announced Jan. 28 and will take effect on Feb. 12.

Councilmember Rebecca Noecker



Rebecca Noecker, Ward 2, is the new city council president.

(Ward 2) will become Council President, and Councilmember Hwa Jeong Kim (Ward 5) will continue to serve as Council Vice President. Council Member Cheniqua Johnson (Ward 7) will chair the HRA, and Council Member Saura Jost (Ward 3) will serve as Vice Chair.

The council will share information about the public appointment process to select an interim council member for Ward 4 in the coming weeks.

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BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY



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

Someone recently asked me to describe the Midway Chamber. I gave some of the usual fact – founded in 1919, around 330 members, mission is to “build a stronger Midway.” But I also added commentary about the personality of our members when I said the members really care about the neighborhood and are down to earth. In other words, the same way I would describe Midway residents.

The pride and passion for the Midway is not anything new, nor necessarily unique to us. However, there does seem to be a correlation between the level of pride a person has in their hometown/neighborhood and its level of affluence. I

THE VALUES OF THE MIDWAY

still remember the sheepishness other students showed in college when admitting to being from a certain west metro suburb known for its wealth (even their hockey team plays in green and gold, the colors of money).

But if pride and modesty define a Midway resident, what are the reasons people choose to live or work here? And what can be done to improve them?

Centrally located. The Midway is centrally located in the Twin Cities. The 50-yard line of the Cities. The center of everything. Drivetime of 20 minutes or less. Midway between the downtowns. Many in the Midway are also very interested in what’s next for I-94. The plan to make an at-grade road has been removed as a possibility, though some advocates believe there’s still a chance. Whatever the outcome, additional work will occur to make improvements and updates along I-94 between the downtowns.

Walkability. On a road trip years ago, I was eating lunch on a fast food patio in Dickinson, N.D. I was talking to the guy at the table next to me who said he’s a farmer and once a month travels a few hours to Dickinson to shop at Wal-Mart. It’s an all-day outing and supplies need to last for weeks. While there are many great things about life in the country, it would be hard to live so far from basic items and in the Midway we are fortunate to have so many options in either a short drive or within walking distance.

But for many, their walks have become more uncomfortable as the presence of addiction, mental illness and the unhoused have popped up. Walkability has been an asset of this neighborhood; what can be done to bring that back for everyone? Here’s also where the concerns of the passionate neighbors come in – when more voices are demanding safer streets, they are more likely to get listened to and

action gets taken. Businesses have told me there has been a difference since media coverage last year talked in detail about the public safety concerns. If we continue to apply pressure, I believe we will see positive results. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and neighborhoods who complain often get what they want.

Diversity. Many people in the Midway point out the wonderful diversity in our community. University Avenue may have more types of cuisine than any other street in Minnesota. And it goes beyond food, as there are many festivals, stores and other businesses where different cultures are celebrated.

Is there a threat to our diversity? Not specifically here, but the rhetoric and policies coming out of Washington have many of us concerned. Thankfully, Minnesota and specifically Saint Paul are welcoming and will remain so. The only change is that we may attract others who seek out our values and find reasons to visit or even move to the Midway.

Another value of our neighborhood is to be welcoming, which is exactly what we’ll do.

guest column



BY BETTY FOILLIARD

MINNESOTANS DEMAND EQUAL RIGHTS



On Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025 hundreds gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol, exclaiming, “All the way with ERA!” (Photos submitted)



Hundreds of people gather on first day of 2025-26 legislative session to cry, “All the way with ERA!”

On Tuesday, Jan. 14 amid a tectonic start to Minnesota Legislature 2025-26 Session, one bright spot emerged: a resounding collective voice for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) echoed throughout the hallowed halls of the Minnesota Capitol exclaiming: “All the way with ERA!”

Hundreds of participants from all across the state gathered for Forward Together: Rally for Equal Rights in the Capitol Rotunda to declare that equal rights are non-negotiable: they are our birthright, our inalienable right, and they must finally be constitutionally protected in both our state and federal constitutions. Anything less is simply that: less.

The Rally for Equal Rights was the launch of a brand new, greatly expanded coalition called “Minnesotans for Equal Rights” <https://www.genderjusticeaction.us/era/> (#MN4ER), that intends to pass a state ERA to allow the voters to decide whether to include Minnesota values in our state constitution. The message is clear: let the people vote!

It was made crystal clear that activists and the myriad organizations are simply not going to lie down and play dead for the next four years while watching our rights eroded away by reactionary legislatures, judges, and courts. A wide array of partner organizations in this diverse new MN4ER coalition include organizers ERA Minnesota & Gender Justice; AAUW MN, the Asian American Organizing Project, Compassion & Choices, FairVote MN, Indivisible North Metro; Island of Discarded Women, Jewish Community Action, League of Women Voters of MN, MN AFL-CIO, Minnesota Council on Disability, Minnesota Move to Amend, Minnesota NOW, National Council of Jewish Women

Minnesota, OutFront Minnesota, TakeAction MN, The ARC Minnesota, The Paper Lantern Project, RISE-Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment, Voices for Racial Justice, Women’s Foundation of MN, Women’s March MN, and YWCA Minneapolis.

Currently 29 states have some form of state ERA, but not Minnesota. At a time when the rights of citizens are under systemic attack, the purpose of this ERA effort is to provide constitutional safeguards against discrimination and to protect Minnesotans’ hard-won fundamental freedoms. The Minnesota ERA will explicitly safeguard against discrimination based on race, color, sex, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation, pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes, and more. This charged political environment has brought about rollbacks of people’s rights happening on an epic scale, making it critically necessary to pass the ERA to protect our freedoms.

Equality speakers at the rally includ-

ed Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan; MN State Auditor Julie Blaha; Senator Bobby Joe Champion, President of the Senate; Minnesota ERA bill chief author Senator Mary Kunesh; Bernie Burnham, President of Minnesota AFL-CIO; Tenzin Choesang, Strategic Partnership Manager at AAOP; the Rev. Dr. DeWayne Davis, Senior Pastor at Plymouth Congregational Church; OutFront Minnesota President Kat Rohn; High School Students Max Nguyen, Kyle Chen, & Dheekshi Jayaprakash representing The League of Women Voters MN; Gloria Perez, President & CEO of Women’s Foundation of MN & Janett Jimenez, WFMN fellow in the Young Women’s Initiative; Megan Peterson, Gender Justice Executive Director; Trevor Turner, Director of Public Policy at Minnesota Council on Disability; AAUW MN President Kelsey Waits; Shelley Carthen Watson, President & CEO of YWCA Minneapolis; and MCs for the rally were Kate Quinlan-Laird, Co-President of ERA

Minnesota & Iman Hassan, Advocacy Director from Gender Justice.

Equality is not a partisan issue. After 102 years of fighting to add the now fully ratified federal ERA into our federal constitution, and 42 years of pushing to add an ERA into our state constitution neither party has yet succeeded - though both have tried. This is indeed the longest, hardest, most arduous movement in America, the movement that touches all other movements. It began as a Republican initiative for decades in the 20th Century; was embraced by the Democrats along the way, then 50 years ago the country got caught up in the Culture Wars.

Things have only worsened in recent years after the abhorrent Dobbs decision, and of late we are witnessing women’s rights, immigrant rights, and LGBTQIA rights being systemically stripped away in other states. Much of this playing out through the unprecedented rancor at the Minnesota Capitol. To secure future protection against discrimination, we need the ERA now.

We invite all sides to unite around principles and virtues that are at the very bedrock of the American experience – that all people are created equal. Equal rights are a moral imperative, they are our inalienable rights and we will persevere until they are explicitly protected in our highest legal document - our constitution.

Organizations and individuals who wish to join in this effort can email us at info.eramn.org

Betty Folliard is the founder of ERA Minnesota, a coalition of activists and allied organizations dedicated to passing and Equal Rights Amendment into our state and federal constitutions. For more information, go to www.eramn.org

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Claiming the story: Why representation needs more than a supporting role

FIRST EDUCATOR

BY DR. ARTIKA TYNER,
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Books inspire our youth to dream big. The kind of dreams that are bold, audacious, and transformative. These dreams ignite a passion for hard work and the courage to embark on leadership journeys that shape a brighter tomorrow. Dreams fill the pages of books, and with every turn of the page, children are invited into a world of infinite possibilities.

This month's column features an inspiring interview with award-winning author Isaiah Allen. He shares his vision of a future where books serve as a powerful catalyst by motivating our youth to discover and embrace their limitless potential.

Q: What motivated you to write A Smile?

A: Growing up, I didn't see myself in the books or media I consumed. In the early 2000s, if a Black character showed up in a sitcom or movie, they were almost always the sidekick – the support in someone else's story. As a young Black kid, that limited view left me feeling like a supporting character in my own life. But thanks to a family that believed in me and a wild imagination, I started picturing a world beyond those roles. My parents introduced me to Black doctors, engineers, educators, making it clear I, too, could go big. They gave me that foundation – the vision to be the main character in my own story.

When I wrote A Smile, I wanted to center someone who looked like me. It's not a fairytale; it's a real-world story of resilience, positivity, and hope. The main character? A young Black boy based on myself. A Smile gives young readers of color a mirror, a chance to see themselves in a positive, central role. It's not about being a sidekick; it's about standing in the spotlight. I wanted to break the mold – to create a character with depth and purpose who could be a role model, not an afterthought.

Q: Why does representation in children's books matter?

A: Representation matters because it reflects reality and shapes perspectives. According to the 2022 Diversity in Children's Literature study by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, only 13.4% of children's books featured Black characters and less than 2% featured Indigenous characters. These numbers are improving slowly, but the gap remains glaring. When stories don't include diverse voices, they send an unspoken message about whose stories are worth telling.

Now, I'm working on a fairytale, a genre where people who look like me are often missing. This time, I'm bringing my perspective into a space that's rarely made room for us. While A Smile was about real-world representation, this fairytale project is about owning space in the realm of imagination. In both stories, I'm showing that Black children – and all children of color – can be the heroes, the dreamers, and the adventurers.

But real representation goes beyond diversity quotas. Adding characters just to "check a box" can feel shallow, sometimes even harmful. Authentic representation means creating stories that resonate, stories that young people can see themselves in. My books aren't about "filling a gap"; they're about showing what's possible when we build stories from our own experiences and potential. When I write, it's not about appearances; it's about impact, about creating something that speaks to those who need it.

And this isn't just for the kids. Adults need this message too. Growing up without seeing yourself authentically in stories shapes how you see your place in the world. For many adults, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, the lack of representation can lead to a sense of invisibility – a feeling that sticks. Seeing ourselves, our stories, reflected back at us is just as necessary for us as it is for the next generation. When we back stories that uplift, that show all of us in our strength, we're supporting a world where everyone is valued.

Q: What is your vision for the future?

A: Representation isn't just something we can achieve once and be done with. It's a commitment we make – to telling and supporting narratives that reflect the world we live in and the world we want. By doing this, we're proving that anyone, at any age, deserves to be the hero in their story. That's the legacy we're building – a future where every child and adult sees their worth, their strength, and their potential.

In a world where so many feel sidelined, storytelling becomes a tool for change. We all deserve to be the heroes in our own lives, and by writing these narratives, we're building a world where every child – and every grown-up – sees themselves, in full color, at the center of their own story. Representation is more than a goal. It's a journey that keeps going, with every new story we tell.

A CALL TO ACTION

Former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, wisely stated: "If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough." Inspiring our children to dream big is a call to action. It is an opportunity for all caring adults to support our children as they learn, grow, and lead by serving as First Educators.

First Educator: refers to the fundamental primary role that parents and caregivers play in a person's early development and education. They instill essential life skills, morals and behaviors. Through her organization, Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute, Dr. Artika Tyner offers resources to foster literacy and education.

TIPS FOR PROMOTING REPRESENTATION IN BOOKS FROM ISAIHAH ALLEN



- 1. Create your own stories together as a family and community:** Representation starts with storytelling. Writing and sharing your experiences, culture, or perspective ensures authenticity. Stories created by those who live them carry a depth that cannot be replicated by others. Whether through books, poetry, or scripts, claiming space with your voice reshapes the narrative landscape.
- 2. Support authors claiming their narratives:** Seek out and champion books where authors authentically tell stories from their own backgrounds. These narratives not only represent, but they also challenge stereotypes by offering a fuller picture of the lived experience.
- 3. Collaborate and share perspectives:** Storytelling doesn't have to be a solo effort. Collaborate across communities to co-create narratives that explore intersections of identities. This fosters a richer representation while building a sense of shared humanity. You can begin by participating in a writing workshop with your children.
- 4. Reimagine traditional genres:** Reclaim spaces where representation is scarce. Whether it's fairytales, fantasy, or sci-fi, bringing underrepresented voices into these genres expands their possibilities and creates a new canon of stories for future generations. You can begin by adding new titles to your home library.



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HAMLINE TO HAMLINE COLLABORATION

BY DARBY COMISKEY & JESSICA KOPP



Hamline Elementary, a community school in the heart of the Hamline Midway neighborhood, and Hamline University, Minnesota's first university have a unique and long-standing partnership. Almost every day you'll find our two communities working together. Here's some of what we've been up to this school year:

During a burst of warm weather in mid-October, the Hamline to Hamline Collaboration gave over 300 Hamline Elementary pre K-5 students the exciting opportunity to tour Hamline University's campus so they can get to know it better. Students got to play in leaf piles and visit sites such as Old Main, Klas Field, Hutton Arena, Anderson Center, Sorin Commons and Bush Library. Our university student tour guides talked about what life is like on campus, and Hamline Elementary students asked questions about sports teams, classes, and the cafeteria. Some students asked if the "king and queen of Hamline"

TWO COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER



Hamline Elementary third graders participate in a Waste Reduction Workshop organized by students in the Environmental Justice and Well-Being class at Hamline University.

lived in "the castle" (Old Main).

Taking advantage of another warm October day, Hamline Elementary fourth and fifth graders participated in an archaeological dig in the Blue Garden with faculty and students from the Hamline University anthropology department. University students visited Hamline Elementary fourth and fifth grade classes before the dig to prepare students for the experience

and after the dig to talk about what they learned. In December, Hamline Elementary third graders participated in a Waste Reduction Workshop organized and facilitated by students in the Environmental Justice and Well-Being class at Hamline University. The elementary students impressed HU students and faculty with their knowledge of waste diversion practices and participated in a hands-on activity

where they repurposed fabric scraps from the HU costume department into art.

Fourth graders in our writing and communications program, Snelling Connection, have been learning the fine art of interviewing and journalistic writing from their Hamline University Student Co-Editors as they prepare to create a school-based newspaper this spring.

Over 20 university students are working as paid tutors to support Hamline Elementary students in math and literacy in their classrooms while our Hand Mentorship Program continues to grow and pair volunteer university mentors with elementary school students for weekly lunchtime visits.

To learn more about how the Hamline to Hamline Collaboration connects Hamline Elementary and Hamline University, please contact Darby Comiskey (hh-collaboration@hamline.edu) or Jessica Kopp (jkopp06@hamline.edu). The collaboration is also proud to announce the launch of our new social media pages and anyone is welcome to follow to keep up with this special community of learners.

Our handles are as follows:

- Instagram: hamlinecollaboration
- Facebook: Hamline Collaboration
- Twitter/X: HamlineCollab
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There's a summer camp for every kid

Summer camp season will be here before parents know it. While children anxiously await the last day of school, adults know that it can be challenging to keep kids occupied and mentally stimulated when they aren't in the classroom. Although it may be alright to enjoy a few days lounging around and playing video games, too much sedentary behavior is not good for anyone, even children. Families turn to summer camp to provide children with activities to occupy their time when school is not in session.

Camps catering to a variety of interests are open to youngsters, so there's likely one out there to excite every child. Each year, more than 25 million children and adults take part in the camp experience, says the American Camp Association. Summer camp gives kids a chance to spread their wings and enjoy new adventures. When seeking camps, families can consider interests, proximity, cost, and other variables. Here are some of the different types of camps families can consider.

Day camps are a popular choice. Day camps tend to be general recreation camps that offer an array of activities. Campers are dropped off (or bussed) in the morning, and arrive home early evening. These camps are readily accessible and run by various organizations. Some camps enable you to pay by the week, rather than com-

mitting to an entire season.

Academic camps focus their attention on various subjects, putting like-minded children together. Academic summer programs ensure children's brains stay active, helping students avoid that dreaded "summer slide." Some of these camps mimic a school day so they are familiar to kids. Academic focus may vary from general academia to specific subjects like STEM to astronomy to the arts.

Fitness-minded campers or those who play particular sports can investigate camps that focus on fitness and sports performance. These may be more rigorous than other types of camps since they involve lots of physical activity. Wilderness preparation camp is another type of camp that may fit into this category. It will highlight survival training and help mold active hikers and campers.

Like the name implies, sleep-away camp hosts campers overnight, typically for several weeks. This may be children's first extended time away from home, and there's bound to be a few nerves that spring up. Round-the-clock activities and chances to bond with their peers can help kids overcome fears of being away from home.

Summer camp options abound. It's only a matter of identifying a path for children and then seeking a camp that offers the desired program.



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Minnesota nights getting warmer

Twin Cities Meteorological Society hosts annual State of the Climate

By JARROD SCHOENECKER

The Twin Cities Meteorological Society's 4th Annual Minnesota State of the Climate event, held at the Anpétu Téca Education Center in Roseville, had a special focus on Minnesota's long-standing weather observation network.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Assistant State Climatologist Pete Boulay led three simultaneous presentations on a night that was supposed to have had three presenters.

DNR Senior Climatologist Kenny Blumenfeld fell ill and was unable to present, and Boulay presented on his slides covering the bulk of the current numbers on Minnesota's climate.

"Minnesota's nights are getting warmer, particularly in the winter months from December through February," said Boulay. On average in Northern Minnesota, the temperature is now 7.3 degrees warmer now that it was climatologically speaking 100 years ago.

Boulay also says that the trend is keeping less snow pack on the ground too. "Less snow equals warmer winters," he said. This process makes the warm-ups ex-

ponential even by small numbers.

An arbitrary group favorite was presented, the annual Top 5 Weather Events for Minnesota, featuring the five significant weather events from the previous year that those who are weather-connected, such as meteorologists and severe weather spotters, are sent and are voted on.

This year's number one in the Top 5 was the exceptionally wet period from June 15-22. There was a significant amount of rain over southern Minnesota during this period, which caused historic flooding.

"This really started getting traction when the national news picked up the dam failure at the Rapidan Dam south of Mankato," said Boulay said. This also coincides with the record flooding in Waterville, Minn.

A full list of the Top 5 Minnesota Weather Events of 2024 can be found at dnr.state.mn.us/climate/journal/ under the December 2024.

The last portion of the evening was to hold a presentation by Meteorologist Michelle Margraf, the Central Minnesota CoCoRaHS coordinator, on the history of the weather observers role in climatology.

Margraf's presentation was thwarted from being presented Monday though. She stated, "At the instruction of the Department of Commerce we are unable to participate in public-facing speaking engagements until further notice. As a result,



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Assistant State Climatologist Pete Boulay talks about the history of observing networks in Minnesota.

I will be unable to participate in the Twin Cities Meteorological Society meeting on Thursday evening." The Department of Commerce oversees the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which her job is housed under.

CoCoRaHS, started in 1998, stands for Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network and is a group of trained volunteer observers that report mostly precipitation back to be recorded. There are some observers of CoCoRaHS have been reporting for decades, according to Boulay.

Boulay, being a state employee rather than a federal employee, generously offered to present what he could of her information, focusing highly on the long-time observers network for weather held here in Minnesota.

MNgage and the National Weather Service's Cooperative Observer Program were groups that were highlighted. MN-

gage is also a volunteer reporting network similar to CoCoRaHS that began in the 1960's. The Cooperative Observer Program was first established by Congress in 1890 when the United States Weather Bureau was established, which was the name used previously for the National Weather Service.

Boulay said, "There are less coop observers in the state, only about 175. In addition to precipitation, many of them have a temperature gauge as well."

The standardized affordable and accurate rain gauge that most of the observers use, which the public can purchase as well, was designed decades ago by Product Alternatives, Inc., located in Fergus Falls, Minn. Their Stratus Rain Gauge is the official rain gauge of NOAA and National Weather Service observers. The gauge measures accurately to 1/100th of an inch and can measure up to 11 inches of precipitation.

"It can be used to measure snow too," said Boulay. "Just don't forget to take out the inner cylinder and funnel or they will crack."

Boulay encourages anyone who is interested in being a volunteer observer to check out CoCoRaHS. He says, "Anyone interested just has to go to cocorahs.org and click on the button for 'Join CoCoRaHS' to get started."

Jarrold Schoenecker is the president of the Twin Cities Meteorological Society. Reach him at TwPresident@TCMetSoc.org. For more on the Twin Cities Meteorological Society, visit TCMetSoc.org. They are a group of weather enthusiasts and meteorologists that has been in existence since 1948.

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**COMO PARK
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**



BY ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher

WRESTLING REVIVAL AT COMO PARK



Boys and girls from the Como Park wrestling team celebrate their success at a recent tournament. (Photo by coach Anthony Minus.)

The second semester of the school year commenced the week of Jan. 27. While full-year courses continue, the new semester ushers in a fresh grading period. Semester-long courses mean that student schedules have some alteration, from the flow of the day to new teachers and classmates.

For select seniors at Como, they also have new college-level courses. Those can include both College in the Schools (CIS) classes that are taught by Como staff for University of Minnesota credit, as well as post-secondary enrollment options (PSEO) where students take a class or two at a local college campus as part of their daily routine.

COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE NIGHT

High school seniors have the additional challenge of navigating their future endeavors during the second semester. While the college application process has been completed by most students seeking higher education, the financial pieces to the puzzle along with finding the right fit are difficult decisions.

Como's Career Pathways Center (CPC), in coordination with the counsel-

ing department, will once again be hosting a "College Knowledge Night" to provide support and information for families and students on the evening of Feb. 19.

Students are always welcome to consult with Ms. Aisha Mohamed who heads the CPC during the school day. But the set-aside night is a great opportunity to navigate financial aid questions, the FAFSA form, and scholarship offers.

The CPC will also be hosting Como's annual Career and Trade Fair later in the spring.

YOUTH IN GOVERNMENT

Sixteen Como students participated in the Youth in Government program at the Minnesota State Capitol for four days in January along with over a thousand students from across the state.

Participants were immersed in the setting of state government with roles and responsibilities ranging from legislators to lobbyists, judges to attorneys, and even media correspondents. Students also enjoyed social activities while staying at the Minneapolis Hilton.

SPRING MUSICAL

The spring musical at Como will be an adaptation of Disney's "The Little Mermaid." Performances are being planned for March in the Como Park Auditorium. Choir director Huy Tran, along with English teachers Michael Youle and Suzanne Myhre conducted auditions and assembled the cast and stage crew during the last week of January.

WRESTLING REVIVAL

High school wrestling is the fastest-growing sport in the country for girls. Como has embraced the development and features a roster of eight female wrestlers which is a high number for the St. Paul City Conference.

Competition for the girls has mainly been in large tournaments outside the city which guarantee opponents for each weight class. There have also been some smaller events within St. Paul schools.

The girls have been quite successful, earning medals and spots on the podium in several tournaments. The Cougar boys are also experiencing a successful season with seven victories in dual meets, the most in a season since 2020.

PEACE BUBBLES



BY MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com

Calling out the powerful, thinking about change

"When your rage is choking you, it is best to say nothing." Octavia Butler

"Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood." Coretta Scott King

Hello Monitor readers,
Last month, I greeted you with sorrowful, grieving, and hopeful thoughts due to the passing of former President Jimmy Carter, the California fires, more school shootings, the continued global wars and genocide live-streamings, and of local, state, and national law-makers forgetting or not honoring their oath. This month it continues to be difficult keeping an optimistic attitude. However, on the bright side, our local Winter Carnival is inspiring. Rose McGee hosted another successful Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday event along with other groups hosting King Day events on a freezing Twin Cities day. And, although the Vikings were not in the Super Bowl, it was one of the best football seasons ever for the Minnesota Vikings. They unexpectedly energized me through the football and election season. So, happy Groundhog and Black History Month with the energy of not repeating past boo-boos, and, instead having those transformational moments of the fun and deep meaning of the Groundhog Day movie or the Christmas Carol movies.

Collectively, we must and can learn our lessons of the past.

I've been struggling with how to speak my truth about having a president who seems prideful about bringing uncompassionate business principles to the highest position in the country and world. Through deeply breathing, having patience, and calling on my angels, I was blessed with an answer to my frustration on how to express my feelings in a healthy and respectful manner. I requested assistance from Brother Larry Long, a peace-

maker, a national and global musician, and a class-act human being. He swiftly rose to my urgent request. The following are the words he shared:

WORDS FROM LARRY LONG AND BISHOP MARIANNE EDGAR BUDDÉ

He's doing exactly what he said he was going to do
Set the insurrectionists free
Including Hatchet Speed who called Hitler,
"One of the best people that's ever been on this earth."
Yet people voted for him anyway
"Back the Blue," who
140 Officers were injured on that day
Beaten, bloodied, crushed by the crowd
Yet people voted for him anyway
The Oath Keepers and Proud Boys are back
The Gleichshaltung of the United States of the Autocracy has begun
If we lose our sense of humor they win,
But there's nothing funny about this.
This is serious stuff
Demanding some next level Jesus-style
Calling out to the powerful
As Episcopal Bishop, Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde did
at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC.
With the unspeakable one in attendance.
These are the words she spoke
And may we all take heed:
"Let me make one final plea, Mr. President. Millions have put their trust in you, and as you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian, and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and Independent families, some who fear for their lives. The people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings, who labor in poultry farms and meatpacking plants,

who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shifts in hospitals, they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes and are good neighbors. They are faithful members of our churches and mosques, synagogues, gurdwara, and temples.
"I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land. May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love, and walk humbly with each other and our God, for the good of all people, the good of all people in this nation and the world." Amen.



Musician and peacemaker
Larry Long



Bishop Marianne Edgar
Budde

FOUR YEARS TO MAKE PROACTIVE CHANGES

Thank you, Mr. Larry Long for sharing your words and the courageous words of Bishop Budde. I believe, that the majority of the people who voted for the GOP Presidential ticket didn't vote for a bully leadership to be a model for our children or to keep us in denial or asleep about our climate shifting in the wrong direction. I'm still a Pollyanna in that I believe we can have positive moments of waking-up/being aware of the possibility of a

Christmas Carol or Groundhog Day transformation/miracle. We do have a eonderful life, regardless of the loud and wealthy rich voices of fear, denial, and of those staying asleep due to perceived comfort and privilege.

Yes, we are in some difficult and challenging times. Please take extra deep breathes in order to realize that we all want the best and to live safely. Like with the Civil War, we will always have folks who will not accept change and who will want to continue feeling superior and in charge of others at the expense, exploitation, oppression, and deaths of others. I salute Bishop Budde; she is keeping the Arc of Justice Bending Forward and keeping hope for our children and ourselves alive and vibrant. Stay optimistic and pray for our president, regardless of how you voted. All will be well and yes, change is always in motion. Remember, we have been through this before and we will probably go through it again. I for sure will miss the uplifting and respect for all people leadership from President Biden and Vice President Harris. I also look forward to our first woman and/or Indigenous president. Locally, I think we are sacredly gifted with having Waltz and Flanagan at the head of our great state.

Be well, don't worry, practice being happy. Our educators say it takes 21 days to change a habit or belief. We have four years to make proactive changes for the betterment for our children and Mother Earth. Let's start now together! I know I need your help just to keep good thoughts for 1-3 days. Together with ethical national leaders and local champions for justice we can correct the dangerous path we are currently exploring due to being gaslighted from misinformation, fear, greed, and intentional lies to uphold a certain type of supremacy.

Let love, kindness, and our better angels and invisible forces guide us. Thank you.

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

FROGTOWN GREEN

BY RENNIE GAITHER



CERT helps when there's a disaster

It's February, and as of the time of this writing the snowfall total for the winter of 2024-25 is 69% lower than the historical average. Sad news for many winter sports aficionados, yet a boon for those of us who veer towards "winter lite."

That said, John Steinbeck wrote: "What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness." I sometimes wonder about the utility of balancing – rather, weighing – seasonal weather patterns against each other? While there's something immediately visceral in making such comparisons, I intuitively pull back. Today, the effects of climate on weather patterns associative with one season may present wildly out of sync in similarity to its traditional opposite. To

be crude: What good is savoring summer's warmth with the warmth of winter to sour the whole affair?

Case in point: The wildfires that have ravaged greater Los Angeles County, resulting in 28 confirmed deaths and over 15,000 structures destroyed as of this writing. Despite debate over whether climate change or other factors fueled the fires, scientists attribute climate change-driven factors such as dry conditions and strong winds to fire prolongation.

Firefighters, law enforcement, and citizen auxiliaries all worked to end the conflagration. Nearly a thousand prison laborers have joined to combat the blazes. Members of Los Angeles's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) have also been involved. The Los Angeles City Fire Department developed and deployed the first CERT program in 1985 after reviewing civilian response to local disasters in Japan and Mexico City.

CERT programs teach people how to better prepare themselves and others for

community hazards such as floods, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and other disasters such as bridge collapses. CERT training programs organize teams of volunteers to assist families, neighbors, and community members during emergencies when professional responders are not immediately available. This helps free up responders to address more critical tasks.

How do I know? I completed training in the spring of 2022 here in Ramsey County!

The Ramsey County Sheriff's Office offers CERT basic training through a nine-week course of weekly meetings open to all residents of the state of Minnesota, 18 years and older. Participants must pass a criminal background check. The training outline includes disaster preparedness, CERT organizational structure, fire safety, light search and rescue, disaster psychology, medical operations, and ways to address terrorist situations. An exam, both written and hands-on, follows for certification.

Some of the more memorable experiences for me were various emergency simulations, from fires to treating life-threatening conditions and basic first aid.

Volunteers should prepare to commit to three-hour weekly meetings over the nine week training period. For more information about the Ramsey County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) visit <bit.ly/3EewGCI>.

At this time, the 2025 schedule for CERT training has yet to post. But Frogtown Green will host its newest monthly Neighbor Night program around emergency preparedness on Thursday, March 6 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Frogtown Community Center, 230 Como Ave. in St Paul. The event is free, and healthy, delicious food will be served. Come out and learn more about how you can help your family and community be better prepared.

Rennie Gaither is a Frogtown Green volunteer. Frogtown Green is a resident-led and volunteer-powered environmental initiative in St Paul's most diverse neighborhood. If you'd like to know more, browse frogtowngreen.com or call 651-757-5970.

Administrative citations approved but worries remain

By JANE MCCLURE

Years of debate over administrative citations as a penalty in St. Paul haven't ended, despite a 7-0 city council vote Jan. 22, 2025 to implement such a measure.

While supporters hail administrative citations as a way to equitably impose penalties for city ordinance violations, and avoid criminal charges, foes contend that the measures could unfairly target BIPOC communities.

The vote amends the city charter, and takes effect in 90 days.

A public hearing in January drew many more supporters for the administrative citations than opponents. Foes included representatives of the Frogtown Neighborhood Association (FNA) and Summit-University Planning Council (SUPC). Those district councils represent some of the city's most diverse neighborhoods.

Caty Royce, co-director of FNA, said the council needs to consider equity issues as it moves forward with the citations. She urged the council to consider providing relief for residents who want to comply but financially cannot. Some type of measure, such as a fund to provide help, is needed.

"What is going to happen to poor folks and BIPOC folks if they get caught up in one of these fines?" Royce said.

SUPC Executive Director Jens Wer-

ner said that despite the change, there are still worries that low-income homeowners would still be unfairly penalized. Part of her concern is centered on the city's complaint-based system for property code enforcement, which results in summary abatement orders being sent out.

One way council members hope to ease those concerns is through a council resolution that sets up a committee to review administrative citations, city ordinance by ordinance, as they take shape. The committee was championed by Ward One Council Member Anika Bowie as she pushed through a resolution to create an Administrative Citations Legislative Advisory Committee.

This would help shape the citation process. The committee is to be established in 90 days, and disband after operating for one year.

Although some council members expressed concerns that they hadn't had time to adequately review the Bowie resolution, it also passed 7-0.

Bowie spoke of the challenges her family faced years ago when her childhood home was cited for property code violations and boarded up for a short time. She cited the "unintended consequences" administrative citations can create.

Bowie did additional research to find a process that gets corrective actions while

protecting people and treating them with respect.

Another issue she raised is that the city should not use fines generated by administrative citations as a way to raise operating revenue. She wants city departments to report annually about the administrative citations process, how departments share information with the public, and how departments are able to collect fines.

The 7-0 vote of approval for the charter changes drew applause from supporters. Outgoing Council President Mitra Jalali was among council members speaking for the charter change and the ability to use the civil citations instead of criminal penalties. One example she cited is the ability to penalize large corporations. One ongoing issue in her fourth ward has been the shuttered University-Snelling CVS, and city officials have struggled with property conditions.

"This is about the big guys," Jalali said. "This is about making them pay."

Before any citations can be adopted, Jalali said the council will have to go through ordinance by ordinance, department by department, to add administrative citations as a penalty option for ordinance violations ranging from dangerous dogs to dilapidated buildings.

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFSCME Council 5, UNITE HERE Local 17, Sustain St. Paul, ISAIHAH, SEIU Healthcare of Minnesota and Iowa, Uni-

dos St. Paul and other groups said the citations are more equitable than the current penalties, which can bring criminal charges in some cases.

"We all lose when our city is unable to protect working people from predatory employers," said Black Hart bar owner Wes Burdine.

Others told stories about living near vacant and condemned properties where landlords did nothing, or living places where landlords didn't make repairs. Others brought up employment situations where city ordinances on earned sick and safe time and minimum wage were violated, but the city could do little.

Charter Commission Chair Rick Varco pointed out at all too often, cable providers block and tear up streets without permits, and don't do proper street repairs. Yet the city can do little to impose penalties.

Speakers pointed out that St. Paul is the largest city in the state without an administrative citations process. They emphasized that it creates a middle group for compliance with ordinances.

But the measure may not be assured yet. Activist Peter Butler is preparing to collect 2,000 signature to halt the charter amendment process and put it on the November ballot. He questioned if the council is overselling the idea, and if the penalties will bring the results city leaders desire.

EVENTS

PORTRAITS OF IMAGINARY WOMEN

Saint Paul mixed media artist Maria Larson Manske will be showing a collection of new limited edition prints Feb. 6-9, 2025 at Succotash, 1589 Selby Ave-

nue in St. Paul. The series depicts imaginary women who lived and worked in various city neighborhoods roughly during the last half of the 20th century. It features mostly working women who contributed to the lifeblood of St. Paul within society's gendered expectations of that time.

'DONETO DEATH'

Applause Community Theatre, based in Saint Paul, announces production of the following: Done to Death by Fred Carmichael will be performed: Feb. 27-March 2 and March 13-15 at The Hive Collaborative in Saint Paul. More information on the show is available at act-mn.org.

EXPERIMENTAL JAZZ ON LAFOND

Starting its second year, Experimental Jazz on Lafond will present Jump Loop w/ Bryan Murray, Toivo Hannigan, and Corey Healey on Thursday, Feb. 13, 7 p.m. at Zion Community Commons, 1697 Lafond Avenue. Tickets for shows are \$15 per night.

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ICE CARVING

>> from 1

competing as a team in the Winter Carnival for more than 20 years. Every Thanksgiving, we get together and decide what we want to carve next."

This year, they'll be carving a giant scale with symbolic objects on it that throw the scale out of balance. All three team members have a young child, and feel the sometimes conflicting demands of parenthood and their respective careers/interests pulling them this way and that.

Each team received 10 blocks of clear, shining ice weighing 300 pounds apiece. As Team John has evolved, they've built their own lathes, cranes, and table saws unique to working with ice. Njoes said, "Ice carving is hard on the body, so we have to get creative in how we work with it."

Having grown up in a creative family, Njoes was grounded in making props and sets for Richfield Flowers & Events, his dad's flower shop. He said, "As someone who was used to building things, making signs, and working with stencils, the art side of ice carving made sense to me – but roughing out designs in ice with a chain saw was one of the new skills I had to learn."

DESIGN CRITERIA

He continued, "People have a hard time understanding why we put so much energy into something that lasts such a short time. Our House of Cards sculpture in 2015 lasted just 12 minutes before it collapsed – but we made it to the finish line. We took second place that year."

What makes for a good ice design? The categories that all contestants are judged on are impact, attention to detail, technical difficulty, finishing, site clean-up, and whether or not the final sculpture



In 2021, John Njoes worked alone to carve a phoenix rising from the ashes for the drive-thru Winter Carnival during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

matches the initial design.

The pool of entrants for the Winter Carnival Ice Carving Contest is getting smaller each year. Fewer and fewer chef schools offer training in ice carving these days, which means beginning carvers have to learn their skills elsewhere.

If you'd like to try your hand at carving ice, you'd better dress for it. Njoes explained, "I have two different carving coats, and wear several layers of warm clothes underneath. You need to be able to transition from working hard with a chainsaw to standing still with a hand tool. We often wear heat packs in our mittens and socks too."

In addition to being flexible with clothing, a carver has to be flexible with design. Njoes said, "You try to get a warm weather and a cold weather option for



The House of Cards carved by Team John in 2015 stood for only 12 minutes before crashing to the ground.

your sculpture. It can be the same design, but you have different ways of executing it depending on the weather."

COUNT DOWN

The contest officially started at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 23. Each team had 48 hours to finish their carving. Njoes said, "There have definitely been years when we've spent the last six hours on Saturday checking the big clock on the Landmark Center tower, wondering if we'd finish in time. That's the clock that judges use for counting down."



In 2025, John Njoes earned the professional title in the single block division, earning \$600, with "Hammock on the Beach."

He continued, "For finishing, we use a weed burning torch and a plumber's torch to melt away any scratches we've made on the ice. We have to move all the torches, electrical cords, tools, bags, and scaffolding before 7 p.m. on Saturday. We also like to rake our way out of the work area so the ground looks nice. Sometimes we have to carve all night, or at least wait until the sun drops down below the City Center. It can be a real grind. Sunshine is as big a factor as temperature. Cloudy skies and temperatures around 10 degrees are best – but I don't find ice carving stressful, even when the weather isn't cooperating."

The Saint Paul Winter Carnival ran through Sunday, Feb. 2. This year marked the 139th anniversary of the St. Paul tradition: Minnesota's oldest and best loved winter celebration.



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