

# SOUTHWEST Connector

NEWS FOR EVERYONE, DELIVERED TO EVERYONE • MARCH 2025 • VOL. 4 • NO. 4 • 25,500 CIRCULATION



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## FEDERAL JOB CUTS HIT HOME

VA Employee fired from dream job

By Margie O'Loughlin

Rose\* is one of thousands of so called "faceless bureaucrats" losing their jobs as the federal workforce is reduced. The South Minneapolis resident explained, "I've worked at the Veteran's Affairs (VA) Medical Center in different capacities for the last six years, mostly in roles funded through research grants. In March of 2024, I began my service in the Research Office of the VA doing grants management. My position was funded by federal dollars; because I was new to my position, although not new to the VA, I was



## CONTENDERS FOR WARD 7

Katie Cashman, Paula Chesley, Elizabeth Shaffer, and Corey Ryan Vest are seeking DFL nomination

By Cam Gordon

On Nov. 4, 2025, voters in Minneapolis will elect city council members for all 13 wards, three at-large park board commissioners, six district park board commissioners, two members of the board of estimate and taxation (BET) and one mayor. Even though the official candidate filing period doesn't start until July 29, many candidates are already at work setting up websites, making phone calls and knocking on doors. The Minneapolis Democratic Farmer Labor (DFL) party will hold precinct caucuses on April 8 to select delegates to attend ward conventions in late April and May, and a city convention July 19-20 where the endorsements for mayor, park board, and BET will be considered. The Minneapolis Republican Party held a city-wide convention on March 8 but so far no candidates seeking Republican party endorsement are running. So far, four candidates are running to be the Ward 7 city council member for the next four-year term. All of them are seeking the DFL party endorsement that will be determined at the Ward 7 convention on May 10.



Over the years, Barb Mellom has built a large network of like-minded knitters across the Twin Cities with a mission to make and distribute hats to members of the community who could use some extra warmth during the colder months. She is this quarter's Living 50+ Good Neighbor. (Photo submitted)

## SHE GIVES THE GIFT OF WARMTH

Barb Mellom of Kingfield has been organizing a knitting movement to make hats for those in need for 17 years

By Allie Johnson

When temperatures fell below zero one Sunday morning this past winter, Barb Mellom had a thought. Her husband, a former social worker, had told her that many patients at Hennepin County Medical Center arrive at the emergency room with no warm clothing and are discharged back out into the cold at all hours of the night. So Mellom called HCMC and left a message for the social worker on duty, asking if the hospital could use any winter hats to give out to patients.

"The phone rang like two minutes later and [the social worker] said to me, 'How many hats do you have, and how soon can you be here?'" she said. Mellom, 84, and a friend loaded up the trunk of her car with dozens of knit hats. The two of them drove downtown to HCMC. "Two nurses came out and



Mark Wojahn directs "The Dance is Not Over: The Patrick Scully Story," which will be shown at this year's film festival.

## ANG LEE KICKS OFF MSPIFF

Filmmakers will be attending every day of 44th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival

By Jan Willms

Highlighting the 44th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) this year is a conversation with Ang Lee, the award-winning director of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Brokeback Mountain" and "The Life of Pi." The festival runs April 2-13 at the Main Cinema, 115 Main Street SE in Minneapolis. A conversation with Lee and the showing of "Brokeback Mountain" will take place April 6 as part of the Milgrom Tribute.

"Lee is a visionary filmmaker, sort of a household name," said Jesse Bishop, programming director for the Minneapolis St. Paul Film Society, which presents MSPIFF. "He has always been very open and generous in talking about his work, and it is coming up on the 20th anniversary of 'Brokeback Mountain.' Also, Bill Pohlad has produced a couple of his films, and we're always looking for local connections. So we thought it was worth diving into." The opening film of the festival is "Free Leonard Peltier," a documentary about the decades-long struggle to free Peltier, who was charged with murder in a shootout with FBI agents. Bishop said he had seen the film at Sundance, just days after clemency was granted to Peltier by President Joe Biden. "They actually had to make a last-minute addition to the film," Bishop said. The film is co-directed by Dick France and Jesse Short Bull, whose film "Lakota Nation vs. the





1 SHE GIVES WARMTH

took the hats," she said. "I felt so good about doing that because I knew they were really going to need hats – and need them right away."

This was far from a one-off instance for Melom. For the past 17 years, the retired speech therapist has been the driving force behind a knitting movement to make hats for those in need.

It all began in 2009, when Melom had the idea to bring 60 hats as gifts for the residents at Simpson Housing Services, where she and her mother-in-law were volunteering on Christmas Eve. She put a call out to members of her church, and word spread quickly.

She ended up with 300 hats. That's when she realized this could be something bigger.

Over the years, Melom has built a large network of like-minded knitters across the Twin Cities with a mission to make and distribute hats to members of the community who could use some extra warmth during the colder months. These days, she estimates they probably get about 3,000 hats per year.

Melom first approached knitting groups from other churches in the area to start making hats. Knitters from First Universalist Church, St. Thomas the Apostle Church, and Lake Harriet Methodist Church are still listed as some of the project's main "collaborators."

"I like to use the phrase 'give the gift of warmth,'" said Melom. "When people ask, is it OK if I knit a scarf instead of a hat, I tell them 'give the gift of warmth.' You just do a better job knitting things that you like."

She also visited local yarn shops to recruit more knitters. These businesses, including Dandelion Fiber Company, Harriet & Alice, Ingebretsen's Scandinavian Gifts and Foods, and StevenBe, currently serve as drop-off sites for donations.

StevenBe's owner, Steven Berg, said he and Melom have developed a close relationship since the first day she walked into his shop all those years ago. He describes her as a "good friend."

"She's got a real drive to make this succeed," said Berg. "It's not often that you get someone on a charity aspect that's willing to put this much into it and keep it going for so many years. And it's gotten stronger and stronger to where we're getting over 3,000 items a year."

Thanks to Ravelry, a community site for knitters and crocheters, the movement has expanded beyond Minnesota. People have mailed in hats from places like Florida, Illinois, and Maine.

Donations are accepted year round, Melom said, although they typically do

# GOOD NEIGHBOR



"I like to use the phrase 'give the gift of warmth,'" said Barb Melom. "When people ask, is it OK if I knit a scarf instead of a hat, I tell them 'give the gift of warmth.' You just do a better job knitting things that you like." (Photo by Allie Johnson)

not start distributing hats until November.

Organizations that have received the hats include shelters like that of Simpson Housing Services and Sharing and Caring Hands, as well as food shelves and schools. During that same cold spell earlier this year, Melom said she also stopped by The Aliveness Project on Nicollet Avenue and gave some hats to some people there.

Despite her age, Melom is still the primary person delivering the hats, although she's often accompanied by other members of the group, including Berg.

Berg said he particularly enjoys going with Melom to bring hats to kids at the Head Start McKnight Early Childhood

Family Development Center in southwest Minneapolis.

"I love to put [the hats] out on the table and watch people pick out what they like and get something they're proud to wear," he said.

As for how they find places or people that could use the hats and other warm items, Melom said: "The core group of us, we just know about these places. I mean, you've been in the community for a long time. Many of us are retired social workers or teachers or librarians so we're people who have had jobs in the community."

Melom recalled one drop-off she did at Tubman, a shelter in south Minneapolis. The staff member shared with her that

she had previously lived at Tubman herself, and how the shelter had helped her make a better life.

Melom left the shelter and returned with more hats and scarves.

"I said, 'I want you to pick out a hat and scarf for yourself. You've been through a lot.' And she did," said Melom.

It's not often that you get someone on a charity aspect that's willing to put this much into it and keep it going for so many years. And it's gotten stronger and stronger to where we're getting over 3,000 items a year."

Steven Berg

Melom returned to the shelter the following year, and the staff member asked whether she remembered her.

"I said yes and she went over to the coat closet and she got out the hat and scarf. Those are the stories that I remem-

ber," she said.

For years, knitters would drop off completed hats at Melom's southwest Minneapolis home, prompting her husband, Gary, to start referring to their front porch as "the hat depot."

Melom and her husband have since moved to Walker Place, a senior living community in the Kingfield neighborhood, where she still knits and collects donated hats, although she no longer has room to store them in her own apartment.

While she says most of her fellow Walker Place residents do not knit anymore, many of them enjoy helping her sort and organize all the donations. Some even accompany her to help deliver the hats.

Anyone is invited to participate in the project by knitting and donating a hat – or really any warm item they want to make – and bring it to one of the drop off locations any time of the year. Why hats?

"We love mittens and socks but we don't get a lot of them because you have to make two so it's always a little bit of a hurdle," said Berg. "Hats are easy."

Berg's store also regularly hosts a "Charitable Day of Making" event with Melom at his shop where anyone is invited to come and knit a hat. His store offers discounts on yarn to those making hats to support Melom's mission.

And every third Saturday of the month, a group including Melom, gets together at Butter Bakery to knit.

"New knitters are always welcome," she said.

<https://hats4thhomeless.blogspot.com/>

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## LIVING 50+ GOOD NEIGHBOR

Know someone aged 50+ that contributes to the Southwest community and inspires those around them? We want to hear about them!

Send your nomination to [tesha@tmcpub.com](mailto: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.

We are excited about amplifying the stories of our good neighbors aged 50+.



# 'GOOD ANCESTORS' RECOGNIZED BY ELDERS CLIMATE ACTION

By **Vincent Kallstrom**

The Twin Cities chapter of Elders Climate Action honored three local activists with its annual Good Ancestor award, recognizing their legacies of community-centered climate action.

Elders Climate Action is a national organization founded in 2014 to mobilize elders to address climate change for the well-being of future generations. The Twin Cities chapter was started in 2020 by Kathryn Ringham who resides in the East Harriet neighborhood in Minneapolis and Pat Samples of Brooklyn Center. The group holds monthly meetings with climate speakers, advocates for climate legislation, gives presentations at schools and libraries, and works to inform people about climate action.

For the last two years, Elders Climate Action has presented individuals who demonstrate a lifelong commitment to climate action and community building with the Good Ancestor award. The group holds their only in-person meeting in September, known as Grandparents' Month, to give out the awards. Last fall, they gave the award to three elders with impactful legacies working toward a more sustainable future in their communities in a ceremony on Sept. 26, 2025.

Ringham, the leader of the Twin Cities chapter, said the award is a way "to identify people who need recognition and acknowledgement for their work, not only in climate, but more of a lifelong pattern of thinking beyond themselves."

Craig Neal, co-founder of the Center for Purposeful Leadership and a member of Elders Climate Action, was nominated for the Good Ancestor award by Paul Thompson, the chair of the Twin Cities chapter's legislative team.

Thompson said he nominated Neal to highlight his commitment to bringing people together.

"He's really been a champion to get urban agriculture on a real local basis," Thompson said. "It's really quite remarkable."

Neal operates a community sponsored garden in his Linden Hills neighborhood, where he and his wife Patricia grow food and flowers for 13 families totalling



**Craig Neal, Paul Thompson and Melvin Giles honored**

53 people. Each family collects weekly harvests of produce May through October. Families purchase shares to help pay for supplies and volunteer to help grow the flowers and produce.

Neal says that this model can help reduce the environmental footprint of food production.

"Everybody has to walk to get their share every week, so they're not driving," Neal said. "We're not driving from a farm out of the city. Everything that leaves our garden comes back to us, except what's eaten. So everything's reused."

#### PAUL THOMPSON

Thompson, who lives in Edina, was nominated for the Good Ancestor award in a consensus decision by members of Elders Climate Action, particularly his legislative team, to recognize his lifelong commitment to environmental work.

Thompson was a Minneapolis public schools teacher for 25 years and a former board member at Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Environmental Action. He's a founder and co-director at Cool Planet.

The goal of Cool Planet is to bring communities together and encourage them to advocate for the environment in their community, according to Thompson.

"We want people to get outside, be healthy, take care of themselves, but meet your neighbors and plan activities that bring people together," Thompson said. "We ski, we bike, we play frisbee, but we also attend city council meetings."

As the chair of Elder Climate Action's seven-member legislative team, Thompson encourages citizens to get involved with the legislative process. The team looks at the thousands of bills introduced in the legislature and looks for areas where Democrats and Republicans can

work together on solutions.

In his position at Citizens' Climate Lobby, Thompson encourages legislators to consider lifting Minnesota's 30-year-old moratorium on nuclear energy.

"So we're trying to at least open the conversation to say we should be considering nuclear as part of a solution," Thompson said. "It does take time to build a nuclear plant, and if we don't start soon, it's going to be too late."

#### MELVIN GILES

Barb Rose, a member of Elders Climate Action from St. Paul, nominated Melvin Giles for the award because of his commitment to intergenerational work on climate solutions.

"I think what he does today is laying the seeds for future generations," Rose said. "The good ancestor award is really just a way to really honor and acknowledge how important it is to not only lean on what we can learn and use from past generations, but also what we need to pass forward so that there are others that can see us as ancestors."

Giles worked with Hannah Lewis, the author of "Mini-Forest Revolution," and Nate Galloway, the garden coordinator at Pilgrim Baptist Church, to plant a forest of native trees to create more canopy and provide cleaner air for the Rondo and Frogtown communities. Fifth graders from nearby Maxfield Elementary helped plant more than 400 trees last May.

Giles said he hopes projects like this can create healthier and safer communities.

"In Rondo, because we are planting these trees, in Frogtown because we are planting these trees, in Hamline-Midway because we are planting these mini forests, these communities will be healthier," Giles said. "We are looking towards the future. Within two to three years these forests can take care of themselves. Along the way it's an opportunity for neighbors to meet neighbors. The best security people can have is to know their neighbors."

*Vincent Kallstrom is a second-year University of Minnesota student majoring in journalism. He is currently an on-air DJ at Radio K on Wednesday nights from nine to eleven.*

## RETHINKING I-94 DEBATE RENEWED

**Cost of refilling trench estimated at \$2.4-\$3.2 billion**

By **Jane McClure**

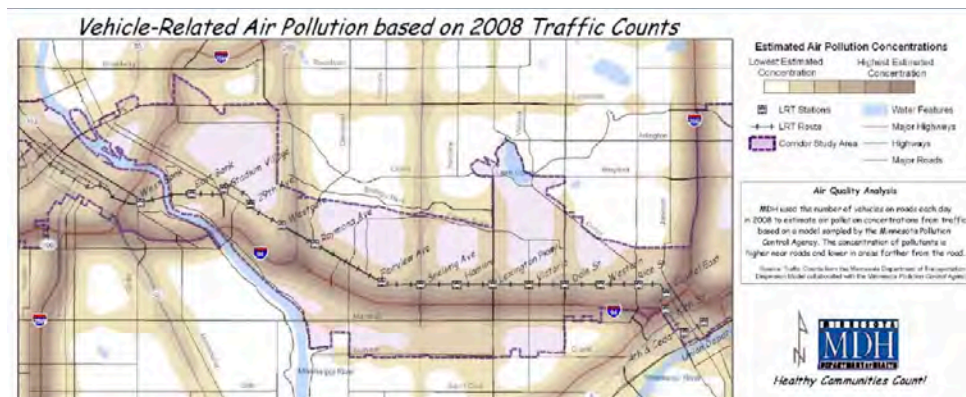
The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) continues to work on draft recommendations for the Rethinking I-94 project. After a long and contentious virtual meeting in January 2025 to discuss recommendations on the future of several options, project leaders are starting a series of community meetings.

The first "coffee in the community" meeting will be noon-2 p.m. Wednesday March 26 at Golden Thyme Café, 934 Selby Ave. Similar meetings throughout the area are planned in the future, with a "coffee in the community" gathering each month. Those will lead to an upcoming public comment period. Project staff will be attending community events and hosting public meetings during the summer

and fall.

Rethinking I-94 is a long-term process to engage community members who live, work, commute and play along the 7.5-mile segment of I-94 between Hwy 55/Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis and Marion Street in St. Paul. Rethinking I-94 is meant to address identified transportation needs while ensuring community members and stakeholders have a meaningful voice in the process.

In January the project's policy advisory committee reviewed initial staff recommendations as to what options to keep and which to drop. What generated much debate is a proposal to fill in the freeway trench and rebuild I-94 as an at-grade boulevard. While proponents see the at-grade option as restoring property for community use, reducing air pollution and spreading traffic impacts elsewhere, foes point out that it would cost an estimated \$2.4 billion to \$3.2 billion, compared to \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion to reconfigure the freeway within its existing footprint.



"In early spring 2025, we will finish evaluating the alternatives and document the results. We will share the recommendations and supporting documents, including an Alternatives Evaluation Memo and matrix summarizing the evaluation results, with the public," MnDOT said in a Feb. 25 statement.

Work on a scoping document/draft scoping decision is an anticipated to start in the spring and continue into fall, with another public comment period in late fall. A resulting document will recom-

mend alternatives for further study in the Tier 1 EIS or environmental impact statement. A final scoping decision document will take shape during winter 2025 until spring 2026. It will include a record of the comments received during the public comment period and responses to the comments. After the final scoping decision document is complete, MnDOT will move into the Tier 1 EIS phase of the project.

Learn more at <https://talk.dot.state.mn.us/rethinking-i94>

# LIVING 50+

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September &  
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Our world is out of balance. It has been for a while.

In 1980, on Thanksgiving Day, John Trudell, one of the most respected and influential Indigenous rights defenders, delivered an empowering speech about this imbalance.

He called on everyone to "Take Back the Earth."

His observations still ring true:

"We're faced with a very serious situation in this generation. There are insane people who wish to rule the world. They wish to continue to rule the world on violence and repression, and we are all the victims of that violence and repression."

"We as the Indigenous people of the Western hemisphere have been resisting this violence and this oppression for 500 years. We know that the Black people have been resisting it for at least that long. And we know that the White people have had to endure it thousands of years. ..."

"We have to re-establish our identity. We have to understand who we are and where we fit in the natural order of the world, because our oppressor deals in illusions. They tell us that it is power, but it is not power. They may have all the guns, the racist laws and judges, and they may control all the money, but that is not power."

"These are imitations of power, and they are only power because in our minds we allow it to be power. But it's all an imitation."

"Racism and violence, racism and guns, economics – the brutality of the American Corporate State way of life is nothing more than violence and repression and it has nothing to do with power. It is brutality. It's a lack of a sane balance."

"The people who have created this system, and who perpetuate this system, they are out of balance. They have made us out of balance."



By Eric Ortiz

# WE HAVE THE POWER

## It's time to use it.



Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation's Youth Community Journalism Institute team with friends, family, and collaborators at St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) on March 10 after producing "Youth Community Journalism – Episode 9: Rebuilding Community in America." (Photo by Eric Ortiz)

"They have come into our minds and they have come into our hearts and they've programmed us. Because we live in this society, they have put us out of balance. And because we are out of balance, we no longer have the power to deal with them. They have conquered us as a natural power."

"We are power. We are a part of the natural world."

"All of the things of the natural world are a natural part of the creation and feed off the energy of our sacred mother, Earth. We are power. But they have separated us from our spiritual connection to the Earth, so people feel powerless."

(Listen to the full speech at [bit.ly/johntrudellearthspeech](http://bit.ly/johntrudellearthspeech).)

Power belongs to the people. But power means nothing if we don't use it.

Throughout history, we've seen what happens when people step up. We've also seen what happens when they don't.

Now is the time to take action, reclaim our collective strength, and create the change we want to see in our communities.

### PARTICIPATION IS POWER.

Power doesn't just sit in city hall or Washington, D.C. It's in our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces. And it's exercised by participation. That means showing up. At the ballot box. At city council meetings. In community organizing spaces. In conversations that push for meaningful change.

True leadership requires actions that serve the common good.

Let's start with the most obvious: voting. Local elections don't get the same attention as presidential races, but they are just as (if not more) important. The people we elect to city council, school boards, and county commissions make decisions about public safety, education, housing,

and transportation.

Take the Minneapolis city council. In recent years, we've seen the impact of how city funds are allocated. The fight over public safety funding continues to be one of the most debated topics in the city. And who gets to make those decisions? The people we put in office.

Community organizing is the engine of local change.

When people come together with a spirit of cooperation and principled pragmatism, we can create real solutions.

The power of organizing isn't just about big policy wins. It's about small, everyday victories that make life better for people. It's about helping neighbors meet basic needs. It's about creating healthy places for youth to grow. It's about holding elected officials accountable.

Too often, we wait for someone else to fix our problems. The truth is, we have the power to fix them ourselves. Incredible local solutions don't need to rely on top-down approaches.

The problems we face aren't going to fix themselves. But the solutions are within reach if we're willing to put in the work. Our communities belong to the people, not the politicians.

If we want change, we have to demand it. If we want justice, we have to fight for it. If we want a better future, we have to build it.

We have the power. It's time to use it.



**Eric Ortiz** lives in the Wedge with his family. He is executive director of the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation, a national youth and community development nonprofit based in Minneapolis, and associate director of research for The Pivot Fund, a venture philanthropy organization that invests in community newsrooms serving underserved communities.

## STORIES & JOURNEYS

Moving past the 2024 Presidential election results for me means that I have reached the following conclusion: There was dis-information and voter suppression. Especially voter suppression. My trusted source for all things voter suppression is the statistician/investigative reporter Greg Palast. You can check him out at [www.gregpalast.com](http://www.gregpalast.com).

Candidate for Vice President Tim Walz when asked by a reporter his view on Project 2025. He said he viewed it as a playbook and why create a playbook if you don't intend to use it. The more I scroll through Project 2025, I have concluded that this is a fascist playbook for the merger of state and corporate power playing out in Washington, D.C. And now Elon Musk has gained entrance to the Social Security Administration possibly giving him access to my (our) Social Security and Medicare information. Project 2025 is in play. I'm asking myself if Elon Musk was truly about rooting out waste,



By Donald L. Hammen

## MOVING PAST PRESIDENTIAL RESULTS

fraud and abuse why would he not bring in accountants to do the job. Instead he is bringing in computer programmers.

It took Hitler 53 days to turn Germany from a functioning democracy into a dictatorship. I am scared and angry. Where are we headed as a nation? How is this not a coup?

### HOPEFUL LOCALLY

For some reason, I'm feeling hopeful locally after the January meeting of Elder Voices (Telling Our Stories/Sharing Our Journeys) at Turtle Bread. I was joined at the Elder Voices table by seven people – all new. There was Erin, Cathy, Beatel, Mary Glen, Chris and Anna. Here's what I took away from the meeting. Everyone obviously came to tell their story and share their journey. Everyone was a Messenger or Connector reader. Four of us have an interest in or connection to the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on Aging. Everyone wanted to leave their e-mail and phone number, which means Elder Voices now has an email list for future communications. And now I need to announce the following:

**ELDER VOICES (TELLING OUR STORIES/SHARING OUR JOURNEYS) IS SCHEDULED TO MEET FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 10-11A.M. AT TURTLE BREAD, 4205-EAST 34TH STREET.**

Look for the table with the All Elders sign.

So dear reader, assuming despair is not an option, what is giving you hope these days? Tell yourself, tell others or tell me via [tesha@tmcpub.com](mailto:tesha@tmcpub.com). And if you have read this far you have taken the plunge into the river(flow) of life experiences which is Stories and Journeys. And thanks to James who recently emailed me his sources of information for getting him through the next four years.

### A CHANCE TO MEET WITH REPRESENTATIVE SAMANTHA SENCER-MURA

That is scheduled to happen at the March 26 meeting of the Longfellow-Seward Healthy Seniors SOLOS Resource Group. SOLOS are people who cannot or choose not to rely on family alone to navigate their lives. She will be addressing how a bill becomes law. Hint: it starts with an idea from people like you

and me. SOLOS meets from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Brackett Park Community Room, 2728-S.39th Ave., Minneapolis.

### MINNEAPOLIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGING UPDATE

The group meets the second Thursday of the month at 1 p.m. Location now and for the foreseeable future is the Public Service Building, 505-4th Ave. S. Next meeting is March 13. March is the month for anyone who thinks they might want to be on this committee to go through the process of being considered. Ultimately you need the endorsement of your city council member. In February, policy aides to City Council member Robin Wonsley attended. There was a presentation by a member of the city clerk's office. These meetings are open to the public which is why I am able to attend.

I'm thinking we need each other now more than ever.

### IN GRATITUDE.



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

## SOUTHWEST Connector

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### Owner & Editor:

Tesha M. Christensen, 612-345-9998  
[tesha@swconnector.com](mailto:tesha@swconnector.com)

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Keep in touch with the Connector. Letters to the editor under 200 words and news releases for publication can be sent via e-mail to [news@swconnector.com](mailto:news@swconnector.com). Unsigned letters will not run.

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612-345-9998  
Tesha M. Christensen, [tesha@tmcpub.com](mailto:tesha@tmcpub.com)  
Denis Wouffe, [denis@tmcpub.com](mailto:denis@tmcpub.com)

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### Contributing Writers & Photographers:

Brian Gabriel, Jan Willms, Jill Boogren, Cam Gordon, Eric Ortiz, J.D. Fratzke, Terry Faust, Suzie Marty, Larry LaVercombe, Donald Hammen, Michele Rae, and WACSO.

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## 44TH MSPIFF

United States" showed at last year's festival. Short Bull and Jhane Myers, one of the producers, will attend the screening at MSPIFF.

The film "Folktales" documents the story of youth taking a gap year after high school and learning about folklore and survival skills in the woods of Norway, relying on themselves, their peers and sled dogs. "It's another approach for how young people can move into adulthood," Bishop said. He said one of the directors, Rachel Grady, will attend the festival. She is originally from the Twin Cities.

Local filmmaker Patrick Coyle will present his latest film "Unholy Communion," at MSPIFF. The film is based on a book by Scandia author Thomas Ehrenbach and tells a story of revenge and redemption. It outlines the investigation into who is murdering Catholic priests. "It's exciting that Patrick is having his festival premiere with us," Bishop said. "He is one of the longtime artists in the community who makes compelling motion

pictures and elevates local voices."

Another local artist, Patrick Scully, has his life and art explored in the documentary "The Dance is Not Over," directed by Mark Wojahn. It's a profile of Patrick and his career as the founder of Patrick's Cabaret, which was located at 3010 Minnehaha Ave. "It's a very reverent portrait of his life and his art," Bishop added.

He said the film "Or Something" is a dramedy about a couple of people who go to a man's house to collect money he owes them. "They don't know each other, but both are owed money. The man does not have the money, but sends them on a wild goose chase across New York City to find the money. They decide to search together and get to know each other." Bishop said the film stars Kareem Rahma, who lived in the Twin Cities before moving to New York. "He has a show on Tik Tok called 'Subway Tapes,' and he interviewed Gov. Tim Walz on one of the episodes. Mary Neely, another comedian and artist, also stars in the film. They will also be putting together a Comedy Night at the festival," Bishop said.

"One movie I think people will be



We have over 65 countries and regions represented by over 200 films at the festival."

Jesse Bishop

but she is coming for the festival."

"The Librarians" is a documentary that reflects on the book banning efforts that are occurring in the United States. "The film comes from a librarian's perspective," said Bishop. "It looks at the book banning and who is behind them, and the efforts to get supporters of the bans on school boards."

Bishop said "The Wailing" is a horror movie that he calls creepy. "There will be a lot of moments that will have you covering your eyes," he said. Some other films like "Surfer" with Nicolas Cage and "Friendship" will be part of the Dark Side

taken with is 'Speak,' about a high school national oratory competition. A couple of the teens are from Minnesota, one from Moorhead and one from Apple Valley. The Apple Valley teen is in college now,

selection.

"We will have lots of family films, too," Bishop said, mentioning "The Legend of Ochi," starring Willem Dafoe.

He said the festival will end on a Sunday, and there is no specific closing movie but rather several films shown the last night. One of those is "Bitterroot," a film about the aftermath of a man's divorce, as well as his relationship with his aging mother, filmed in the wilds of Montana in the Hmong American community in Missoula. "We're excited for this one, showing on the last day," Bishop said. "Kazoua Vang, one of the producers, will be in attendance. Vera Brunner-Sung, the director, has been invited."

"We have over 65 countries and regions represented by over 200 films at the festival," Bishop said. "And for the first time this year, films will be shown at the Edina Mann Theatre April 4-10."

There will be filmmakers in attendance every day. Most films will be shown at the Main Cinema, but other venues include the Capri Theater and the Landmark Center. For more information on tickets and schedules, go to mspfilm.org

# 'THE DANCE IS NOT OVER: THE PATRICK SCULLY STORY'

Southwest Minneapolis filmmaker's documentary on well-known performer shows during MSPIFF 44

By Jan Willms

The most challenging part of making a movie about Patrick Scully was editing it down to 93 minutes, according to director Mark Wojahn.

Scully is an internationally known dancer, choreographer, activist and publicly HIV-positive gay man.

Wojahn has documented his life on film in the documentary The Dance is Not Over," which will be showing at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) at the Main Cinema, 115 Main St. E. in Minneapolis. MSPIFF will run April 2-13, 2025.

"Patrick is a mountain of creativity and ideas," said Wojahn. "The biggest challenge was finding which signature works of his to tell and how to tell it. The other thing was trying to incorporate the Cabaret into the story."

Scully founded Patrick's Cabaret in 1986, and for more than 30 years the site was a home for performing artists who brought edgy and controversial work to the stage, giving audiences an opportunity to see nonconformist dance and theater. Patrick's Cabaret was at 3010 Minnehaha Ave. in Minneapolis where the Hook and Ladder is now in the Longfellow neighborhood.

"Patrick has had so many performers influenced by their work at the cabaret, and so many visitors," Wojahn continued. "He has touched so many, and I could have interviewed even more people than I

did." According to Wojahn, it was difficult to edit the film down to 93 minutes and still honor Patrick for all that he has done.

Wojahn said he has known Scully since 2011, and their long friendship was helpful in making the film.

"We've been working on this for about six years," he said. "When we started the project, we thought there would be one film. And then the pandemic happened, and it gave us a second film." He said that during COVID, he edited the film "Leaves of Grass Illuminated," about Scully's one-man show on Walt Whitman and the performance he gave of that show at the Guthrie Theater.

"That film came out in 2021, and we showed it at the Twin Cities Film Festival. The film was ready in the fall, and it was a matter of timing to get it into that festival." Wojahn said that the collaboration between Scully and himself resulted in two films being made.

"For sure, working with a friend provides access to the person the story and the institution," Wojahn stated. "Because of our long friendship, Patrick felt safe and comfortable with me telling his story. It was clear that he didn't want just anyone to film him. He knew that I would respectfully and honorably make the documentary about him."

Scully has seen some versions of the film, according to Wojahn, and provided feedback regarding accuracy. "He knows this is my documentary, and the story is about him."

"The film does not include everything. It's not easy to tell, because Patrick produced so much work over his career of nearly 50 years. And although the movie entwines his life and art, it is not so much about his personal life. There is a chapter about HIV and AIDS, but we do not delve into his relationships."

Wojahn said the documentary shows



Patrick Scully

the process of Patrick's dance career and how his work evolves from someone who is interested in storytelling and has performed with different companies to founding Patrick's Cabaret and his appearances as Walt Whitman in "Leaves of Grass."

Wojahn pointed out that film is the ultimate collaboration. "From the visual and photography to the producers to the sound men to the lighting artists, film is one of the most collaborative arts," he said.

He has made documentaries for years. "I believe life is stranger than fiction," he stated. "I love celebrating artistic achievements and how a documentary can validate someone's story by putting the lens on them. I like how documentaries can reveal secrets. You'll see the intricacies of Patrick as a choreographer and human being, and I hope that inspires people."

The director said he thinks documentaries can reflect the current political scene of a country. He cited "No Other Land," the Academy Award-winning film that was shot by a Jewish activist and Palestinian

activist, showing the destruction of Palestinian homes on the West Bank.

"That is a very important film for the times we are in," he noted. "Because Patrick is about freedom and living his life as a very well-known homosexual, it is good to be releasing this film in a year with politics as they are. I'm proud to be an ally of that community and make this important film about Patrick."

## TIED TO MINNEAPOLIS

Wojahn said he grew up in the Longfellow area and fell in love with film when he attended the Riverview Theater. "I still live in southwest Minneapolis, just outside the Longfellow neighborhood," he said.

He said it might be easier to be well known as a filmmaker if you lived in Los Angeles or New York City, but the Minnesota film community is very supportive.

"It's easier to make films in a place where we hibernate for awhile. Prince came back because he liked the solitude. There is something to be said for the ingenuity and good community of artists here, and I think our film scene reflects that."

Wojahn said he works in film production and makes documentaries when he is not "working for the man" in commercial film. He also started Casket Cinema, where documentaries are shown to the public at the Casket Building, 681 17th Ave. NE in Minneapolis. "We're trying to build community through documentary film," he noted. "Ninety percent of the door goes to filmmakers and causes."

"The Dance is Not Over" is a documentary that Wojahn said he hopes will reflect the historical record of all the work that Scully has done. "He first danced professionally in 1976, and he is still performing today. Not that many dancers still perform in their 70s. But Patrick just keeps on going. That's why the film is called 'The Dance is not Over.'"

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# HOMEOWNERS EXPERIMENT WITH PAINT COLORS, SAY LOCAL PAINTERS

By **Lulu Jaeckel**

Whale gray, dry sage and french press are some of the popular names of interior paint colors right now at Benjamin Moore, a paint company.

Sid Triantafilou, a local painter and owner of Greco Linden Hills Painting, said earth tones such as brown, tan and red have also gained popularity.

"I'm glad that something other than gray has come to be," Triantafilou said. "People are experimenting and that's been nice."

Triantafilou went to school to become a carpenter but joined a painting and design program when an opening became available.

He was the top of his class and won first place in the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America award for his painting skills.

One of his most recent projects features earth tone colors. His client requested that their living room and dining room be painted to match the colors in their fireplace.

Greg Chileen, owner of Chileen Painting, said bold colors are becoming popular.

"Colors like gold and bright, bright colors that feel more welcoming and bring out warmth, are becoming popular," Chileen said. "Especially in kitchens and bathrooms."

His most memorable project he worked on was restoring the Lake Harriet band shell.

John Roberts, the owner of John Roberts Painting, has worked as a painter and carpenter for over 40 years. His first painting job was in 1979 in Virginia, Minn. where his mentor, Orlando Secola, helped him paint a bakery.

"Orlando taught me the business," Roberts said. "Fifty percent of this job is promotion. He would walk down the street and everyone knew him."

Roberts graduated from a two-year carpentry program at Eveleth Area Vocational Technical Institute in 1985.

He enjoys his work because it's not a 9 to 5 job.

"There's some people that want to be free you know," Roberts said. "They don't want to have to punch a clock. I work for myself and I get the job done but I don't have to punch a clock."

A lot of times, people already know



Sid Triantafilou of Greco Linden Hills Painting paints houses in residential neighborhoods, including East Isles, near Lake of the Isles. (Photo by Lulu Jaeckel)

what color they want for the interior and exterior of their house, Roberts said. It's usually an off-white, tan, yellow or gray.

"A lot of people who are looking to sell their house will go for a more basic color too rather than bold colors," Roberts said.

He also said ceilings are usually painted off-white and accent colors look the best in small rooms.

Tim Schaub, the owner of T Schaub Painting LLC, said choosing colors for a home is very subjective.

"Color trends change every year," Schaub said. "But light gray has always been a popular color for the interior."

Steve Polta, the owner of Steve's Painting, and Schaub both love their jobs because they transform people's houses.

"I love beautifying older homes and restoring them," Polta said.

All of these local painters use wa-



ter-based paints with low volatile organic compounds.

Volatile organic compounds include chemicals that have short and long-term health effects, according to the EPA. VOCs are emitted as gases from products like paints and cleaning supplies.

"We use the best paint and we don't cut any corners," Triantafilou said.



**Lulu Jaeckel** is a University of Minnesota-student majoring in journalism.



Greg Chileen, owner of Chileen Painting, said bold colors are becoming popular. "Colors like gold and bright, bright colors that feel more welcoming and bring out warmth, are becoming popular," Chileen said. "Especially in kitchens and bathrooms." (Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Graphics)

## REASONS TO HIRE A PAINTER

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

### Cut down on the job time

A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

### Pay attention to details

Professional painters are likely to do a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.

### Reduce your workload

Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings, and apply painter's tape.

### Painters already have equipment

Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays, and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

### Lasting results

Professional painters understand which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space. Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.





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# SISTER SCHOOLS

Twelve students from the Southwest High School sister school, Kasugaoka High School, in Japan stayed with 12 students from SWHS from Feb. 28 to March 6 2025. They spent the weekend with their host family doing things like snow tubing, shopping at the Mall of America, visiting museums including the MIA and the Walker, and playing board games at home.



The students visiting from Kasugaoka High School in Ibaraki City, Osaka Prefecture, Japan met with Anthony Middle School students. "They were a big hit!" said Southwest High School teacher Nathan Hamel. (Photo submitted)



After a pleasant meeting exchanging greetings and cultural questions, Mayor Jacob Frey gave the students a tour of City Hall and taught them about the Father of Waters statue. Following the advice of the mayor, all 12 students from Kasugaoka rubbed the left big toe of the great statue for good luck. (Photo submitted)

During the school week, the students from Japan presented about Japanese culture and joined their host students to experience what school is like in America. On Thursday, the students from Kasugaoka met with Mayor Frey, toured the University of Minnesota, and visited Anthony Middle School. For their final evening at Southwest on Thursday, there was a Farewell Potluck Dinner where memories of the last week were shared and the students from Kasugaoka performed a traditional festival dance.

Southwest parent, Erin Hester remarked, "The value we get through this program is insurmountable. All the students learn more than just their language

(either English or Japanese). They also learn culture, understanding and the importance of building lifelong relationships. In worlds that seem so far apart they bond over being teenagers and just wanting to have fun with one another through sharing their music, art, games, fashion, sports and movies. We learn a little more each time we do this."

Minneapolis Southwest High School and Osaka Prefectural Kasugaoka Senior High School in Osaka, Japan officially established a Sister School Agreement on Dec. 2, 2013 after several years of exchanges beginning in 2005. Principal Hatana came to the United States to sign the agreement in order to present the docu-

ment from his school to the Education Department in Japan.

Over 500 Japanese and American students have participated in the cultural exchange, staying with their respective host families and being part of the host's school. The motto of Kasugaoka is independence, autonomy, and freedom. The reason that the students at Kasugaoka don't have to wear a school uniform and have freedom is that the students formed a movement in 1974. Independence means that the students take control of many school events.

On Wednesday there was no school due to a snow day, so the students from Japan (who don't get that much snow at

home in Osaka), took part in Minnesota traditions such as sledding and snow blowing for the first time.

One comment I remember, paraphrased, from a Kasugaoka student: For my first visit to the USA I was 50% excited and 50% nervous. But after my host family was so kind, I was 100% excited," said Southwest High School Japanese Teacher Nathan Hamel.

At the farewell dinner, a Southwest student told their host student: "Thank you so much for coming. You were a light for our family. Seriously, this is the most fun we have had since before COVID."

## FEDERAL CUTS

still considered in my probationary period.

"At 3:52 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 24, an email from an unknown sender landed in my inbox: the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer. It read, 'Unfortunately the Agency finds that your performance has not met the burden to demonstrate that your further employment at the Agency would be in the public interest. For this reason, the Agency informs you that the Agency is removing you from your position in federal service effective immediately.'

"That's how I learned I was terminated. Terminated is the federal term for fired. I went and told my supervisor I'd just been fired, and it was news to him."

### DEDICATION TO SERVE

In Rose's most recent performance evaluation, dated October 2024, she was graded as an outstanding employee – the highest level of review. She said, "The idea behind my job was to progress healthcare research at the VA. My job directly influenced the healthcare research conducted for veterans."

Rose continued, "I think the 'powers that be' don't realize that a lot of us feel called to work here; we have a sense of mission to serve those who gave everything they had to our country. You can throw ominous threats at us all day long, and it won't change our drive and motivation. It was still pedal to the metal to get that mission done."

"To my knowledge, some 2,400 people within the VA nationally received the same email I did. I learned from a meeting with my union representative that at least 38 local staffers received that same email,



Pictured at left outside the Minneapolis VA Hospital, Rose said, "I know I can get another job, and that a lot of people have it worse than I do. But I am finding it hard to wrap my head around what's happening right now." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

too.

"My job was mission critical requiring specialized experience. The loss of my position impairs our ability to secure program funding in the future."

### PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW

When a federal agency proposes to terminate an employee serving a probationary period, the employee is entitled to the following, according to the Code of Federal Regulations:

(a) An advance written notice stating the reasons, specifically and in detail, for the proposed action.

(b) The employee is entitled to a reasonable time for filing a written answer to the notice of proposed adverse action and for furnishing affidavits in support of their answer. If the employee answers, the agency shall consider the answer in reaching its decision.

(c) The employee is entitled to be no-

tified of the agency's decision at the earliest practicable date. The agency shall deliver the decision to the employee at or before the time the action will be made effective. The notice shall be in writing, inform the employee of the reasons for the action, inform the employee of their right of appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), and inform them of the time limit within which the appeal must be submitted.

None of the parts of this statute were upheld in Rose's termination. She has filed two appeals to date: to the Merit Systems Protection Board for Federal Employees and to the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, who sent her termination letter.

She has not heard back from either.

### LIMBO

During her years at the VA, Rose worked on completing a Ph.D in rehabilitation science at the University of Minnesota. She said, "I've financed the last one and a half years of the degree myself, and am 90% on my way to being done. The problem is I have no access to the data I compiled, because my research subjects were VA patients. All of my research is locked up in my computer. At the very least, I should be able to access that data sometime, but I don't know when."

Rose concluded, "It's now three weeks later and, to my knowledge, no one at the VA has been directly informed of my termination: not the Human Resources Department, and not my supervisor. I've received no information about my health insurance status, my severance package, my pension, or my 401K contributions."

"Our union and the local research office are fighting hard to get me reinstated. They've appealed to our regional office, and at the national level. Any opportunity that has come through for them to advo-

## PACT ACT INCREASES NEED FOR VA SERVICES

The PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history. Passed in 2022, it expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras who suffered exposure to toxins. The act adds 20+ more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures.

According to the VA Performance Dashboard, 5.6 million veterans have been screened for toxic exposures, and more than 740,000 veterans have enrolled in VA health care since the passage of the PACT Act.

Secretary of the VA Doug Collins is planning a reduction of 15% of the VA workforce, meaning that some 80,000 employees in that system will lose their jobs. The goal is to reduce workforce levels to those of 2019, at the close of the first Trump administration.

cate for me, they've done it.

"My motivation for putting my story out there is that these terminations are affecting real people doing real work in the federal service. The message that's being pushed is that federal employees are wasteful – that we sit at our desks with our feet up all day, wasting the public's money."

"That could not be further from the truth."

*Editor's note: Rose\* asked to speak under the condition of anonymity. Rose is not her real name.*



## ▶1 CONTENDERS WARD 7

### WHO THEY ARE

Two of the candidates, incumbent Katie Cashman and District 6 Park Commissioner Elizabeth Shaffer, will be familiar to many Ward 7 voters because they already hold elected office. Two others, Paula Chesley and Corey Ryan Vest, are new to campaigning for electoral office.

Chesley, who plans to stay in the race until November regardless of the DFL endorsement, calls herself a “lifelong Democrat,” and said that she has volunteered for campaigns going back to 2008. “I believe this race is made up of solely Democrats,” she said, “so if no other candidates continue after one candidate gets the DFL endorsement, it doesn’t give the voters much of a choice.”

In 2020, she bought a home close to Hennepin Ave. S. and credits her work on the East Isles Neighborhood Association Board among the experiences that have most helped prepare her to be a council member. She has earned a PhD, worked as a professor and researcher in the past, and now is a yoga and meditation teacher in a mental health clinic.

Chesley has been a block captain, organized for National Night Out, and helped form the East Isles Safety Walking Club. She was instrumental getting part of the Park Board’s nudity ordinance that discriminated against women repealed in 2020.

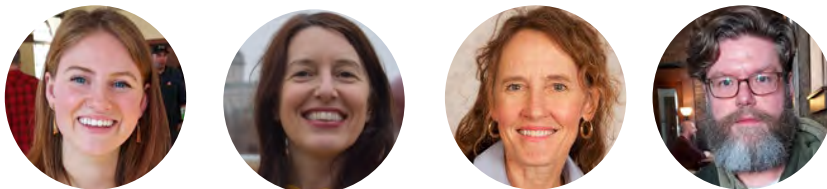
Vest rents an apartment on The Mall near the corner of Lagoon and Hennepin Aves where he has lived for 20 years. He is a volunteer DFL party official at the state senate district and 5th congressional district levels, and serves on DFL state central committee. He is seeking the party endorsement and said that he “leans toward abiding” with the party’s endorsement and plans to announce his intention before the ward convention.

A freelance database consultant for the past 20 years, Vest grew up in St. Louis and Chicago and graduated from Carlton College in Northfield, Minn. before coming to Minneapolis. He credits his father with helping prepare him for work as a council member.

“Every single day I become more grateful for how my father raised me,” he said. “He was born in Detroit, left school in the ninth grade and worked his way through the ranks of national direct marketing.” Vest fondly recalls time he spent in printing plants and warehouses, as well as desktop publishing, sales, and other offices in Chicago and St. Louis that helped shape who he is today.

Current area park commissioner Shaffer has lived in Lowry Hill for 13 years, and in Phillips and the Wedge prior to that. She lives with her husband Steve and has four adult children.

She said that “if the DFL endorses an-



(Left to right) Katie Cashman, Paula Chesley, Elizabeth Shaffer, and Corey Ryan Vest are running for the Ward 7 city council seat.

other candidate, I will continue to run and be on the ballot this November.”

Her three years representing ward 7 residents on the park board, she believes, has helped prepare her to become a council member. “I have become a trusted leader willing to listen and advocate for residents and promote pragmatic action over talk,” she said. “I have helped reset the park board into a functioning, collaborative body focused on what’s best for our parks and park users. I will bring this same foundation of strong relationships and authentic voice to the council.”

Incumbent Ward 7 Council Member Cashman grew up in Minneapolis and lives in the Steven’s Square-Loring Heights neighborhood. She holds degrees in geography and urban planning. Prior to being elected in 2023, she worked as a project manager at the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy.

Cashman chairs the city’s Climate and Infrastructure committee and cites her experience there making “meaningful improvements to our city’s infrastructure, to address our housing crisis, build crime prevention strategies and to make Minneapolis a climate friendly city,” as well as her work with “colleagues on the council and the mayor where possible to deliver resources for the people of Ward 7 and Minneapolis,” as experiences that have helped qualify her for a second term.

She is endorsed by Attorney General Keith Ellison and other Democratic elected officials including Sen Scott Dibble, Rep. Jamie Long, and Rep. Esther Agbaje. When asked about running if the DFL endorses another candidate Cashman said, “I’m running with the DFL party and am confident I’ll be endorsed.”

### WHAT THEY PRIORITIZE

All the candidates except Vest have websites that outline many shared priorities. Housing, commercial revitalization and environment appear in a variety of forms, but public safety appears to be consistently listed at the top.

On her website, Shaffer prioritizes maintaining “safe, functional public spaces and systems,” She said, “We must support our police, with the recruitment and training of new hires and investigators as our top priority.”

Shaffer also prioritizes having the city be a friendly place for businesses, entrepreneurs and workers; fiscal responsibility; environmental well-being, green spaces

and parks; and “cross-ward relationships and dialog.”

“I will make it a top priority to ensure our Minneapolis Police Department is fully supported through effective recruitment efforts and fair compensation,” said Chesley, “while also insisting on accountability measures that rebuild trust with the community.”

Chesley also prioritizes the need to “revitalize our commercial corridors, particularly in Uptown and Downtown, create more affordable housing, and ensure our city government is truly accountable to its residents.”

Vest was clear when interviewed that he thinks more and better policing is needed. He considers himself a “little more traditional” than Cashman when it comes to policing while also supporting reform that he sees as a long-term process.

According to Cashman’s website, “My number one priority is to ensure the safety of all residents and visitors in Minneapolis.” She added that she will work “to bolster the complementary and alternative public safety workforce to free up police capacity for cases of violent crime,” and “supports expanding hiring pathways to help MPD meet the minimum staffing number in the city charter.”

Cashman includes ensuring the safety of city neighborhoods, addressing housing affordability, providing excellent constituent services, revitalizing commercial corridors; supporting workers, investing in climate solutions, improving transit accessibility and committing to zero waste in her list of priorities.

### HOW THEY DECIDE

A city council member is expected make hundreds of city budget and policy decisions every month, some with significant and long-term consequences.

When asked about his decision-making process, Vest said, “I believe in a circular process: skepticism, investigation, storytelling, and reform.” He said that it is important to “question authority and remember power tends to corrupt,” and that he tries to “always be curious and ask unusual questions” as well as share what he learns with others in a way that “brings them along on a mutual journey.” He also tries to “beware of unintended consequences” and to “never be afraid to adjust course.”

Chesley said that her academic background will help her make decisions.

### NEIGHBORHOODS IN WARD 7

- Bryn Mawr
- Cedar-Isles-Dean
- Downtown West
- East Isles
- Kenwood
- Linden Hills
- Loring Park
- Lowry Hill
- Steven’s Square-Loring Heights
- West Maka Ska



“I have a PhD and am into data and research,” she said. “This means looking up how other cities have done things – was it effective? Where were the shortcomings? How could we do better? And, also looking at original data.” She said that she will also “pro-actively seek out feedback as opposed to listening to just the folks who are already engaged.”

“My decision-making starts with understanding and representing the community perspective,” said Shaffer. “Where there is diversity of opinion, I will work to understand all perspectives and clearly articulate back to community members why I voted as I did. Within difficult decisions, my priorities would include the long-range health of Minneapolis and its livability for residents, improved public safety and increased development within our city.”

“I am a values-based leader,” said Cashman. “I value courage, compassion and effectiveness. It’s important for me to center those most impacted and their autonomy and voice in decision making. I also balance present and future needs to make sure the decision is serving long term goals and is not merely a short-term band aid solution.”

“As steel sharpens steel,” said Vest, “I hope my fellow candidates and I will emerge on the other side of this election, win or lose, as stronger neighbors and better friends who can work together long into the future.”

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## IMMIGRANT DEFENSE NETWORK LAUNCHES AMID RISING ENFORCEMENT

On Feb. 14, 2025, a historic partnership of immigrant, labor, legal, faith, and community organizations launched the Immigrant Defense Network (IDN), a coordinated effort in Minnesota dedicated to protecting and empowering immigrant families.

The launch of IDN comes at a critical time when immigrant communities in Minnesota are facing heightened enforcement actions. This week, Rochester, Minn., was the site of the "Valentine's Raids" which are part of a broader pattern of aggressive immigration enforcement under the current administration. In response, COPAL (3702 E Lake St.), a member of the IDN, organized an emergency protest, demonstrating the urgent need for coordinated community defense networks.

"Today, we made it clear: Minnesota stands strong in solidarity, committed to protecting and supporting its immigrant communities," said COPAL Organizing Director Ryan Perez. "We will not let fear divide us, instead, we are strengthening our network to safeguard, inform, and uplift one another and the communities we serve and represent."

The press conference was followed by IDN's "Love Your Immigrant Neighbor"



The local branch of the Immigrant Defense Network and supporters gather on the Lake Street/Marshall Avenue Bridge on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025 with signs stating, "We love our immigrant neighbors." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Day of Action, a statewide mobilization where IDN members and allies delivered 14,000 Valentine's Day cards providing words of encouragement and crucial Know-Your-Rights information. Supporters also took to bridges in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Mankato, Austin, Monticello, and Rochester, standing together for justice and in solidarity to display Minnesota's unwavering support for its immigrant neighbors.

As immigrant communities face an

increasingly hostile political climate and intensified enforcement actions, IDN is taking decisive action so 20,000 Minnesotans can learn about their rights, will train 2,000 Community Rights Ambassadors, and advocate for legislative measures that safeguard the safety, dignity, and future of all.

Minnesota is home to over 500,000 immigrants who contribute to the state's economy, paying \$3.5 billion in federal taxes and \$1.7 billion in state and local taxes annually.

## WATER MAIN BREAKS AT 50TH AND PENN

Crews from the City's Public Works department have been working to restore vehicle and pedestrian access to the intersection of 50th Street and Penn Ave. following the Feb. 13, 2025 water main break. While continuing those efforts on March 13, potential signs of instability were noted at the mixed-use building at 2221 W. 50th St. As a precaution, the intersection was closed for further assessment.

The building has been uninhabited since the water main break, affecting Paperback Exchange (2227 W 50th St.) Terzo (2221 W 50th St.) and Sparrow Cafe (5001 Penn Ave S), and Theisen Renovation, plus Lake Harriet Florist, Scuba Center, and Lake Harriet Pizza next door. The water main break also flooded some homes nearby, including the home of Paperback Exchange owners Marion and Keith Hersey.

Over the past few weeks, public works crews have worked to repair infrastructure



The burst water main flooded The Paperback Exchange, wrecking an estimated 70% of the stock and over 100,000 books, as most of the inventory was stored in the basement, which was fully submerged. Fundraisers are being held to help the businesses affected by the water main break.

at 50th and Penn damaged by the water main break. That included the initial repair to the water main and work to repair the street, sidewalk, and traffic lights. Sub-zero temperatures and a snow emergency have presented challenges for crews. In mid-March, the city began building a

temporary retaining wall to support the sidewalk and street while the building restorations were underway.

Crews will continue to work to stabilize the building's foundation so that restoration work can continue.

### CITY BRIEFS

#### TRAFFIC SAFETY CAMERAS

The city plans to start a pilot traffic safety camera program this summer with five cameras that will help enforce speed limits laws. The city is conducting a survey in March and April as one way to gather feedback on potential locations. In accordance with state law, the cameras will be distributed throughout the city, within 2,000 feet of schools, at locations with traffic safety concerns and in locations that consider community feedback, crashes, vehicle speeds, equity, and other potential safety treatments. The program will run for up to four years and may expand to a maximum of 42 locations and be used to enforce traffic light laws in the future.

#### NEW WARD 10 CANDIDATE

Lydia Millard has joined the race for ward 10 city council member. This position is currently held by Aisha Chughtai who is running for reelection. Both candidates are seeking Democratic Farmer Labor Party endorsement. Millard lives in the Wedge and is a renter.

#### PARK DISTRICT 4

With the current commissioner, Elizabeth Shaffer running for city council,

the voters in park district 4 will elect a new park board commissioner this year. So far, two candidates have announced campaigns for the seat: Andrew Gebo, a payment analyst at SPS Commerce and Jordan Leick, a data analyst at the city of Minneapolis.

#### NICOLLET AVE BRIDGE

The city is hosting a meeting on Thursday, March 27 at 4 p.m. at the Washburn Library (5244 Lyndale Ave) to discuss plans to replace or repair the Nicollet Ave. bridge over Minnehaha Creek. The new bridge will be 60 feet, 4 inches wide and will include six-foot protected bike lanes, eight-foot pedestrian sidewalks, and two 11-foot traffic lanes.

#### HENNEPIN AVE. S RECONSTRUCTION

Construction on Hennepin Ave will resume at the end of March focused on the stretch from 26th St to Douglas Ave. It will start with utility work that is expected to be complete in early April after Xcel Energy upgrades facilities along the corridor and between 26th Ave. and 24th Ave. on the east side of the corridor. People can expect noise, vibration, and dust in work areas as well as lane closures, traffic delays and detours. Business access will remain open during construction.

#### CAPITAL LONG-RANGE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

The council has approved the appointments of three southwest residents (Juana Sandoval from Ward 10, Patrick McDougle of Ward 13 and Ryan Stitt from Ward 7) to the committee that reviews department budget requests and recommends projects and other expenditures every year as part of the city's annual budget process.

#### GREEN LINE CONSTRUCTION

Construction related to the Light Rail Green Line extension is set to start up again on Abbott Ave S, Chowen Ave S, W 32 St and Excelsior Blvd. It will include new boulevards, sidewalks, and pedestrian ramps. Parking restrictions will be in place but local access for residents and businesses is expected to be maintained throughout the construction that will continue throughout the summer and fall.

#### BIKE TRAILS

Cedar Lake Trail from Bryn Mawr Station to Van White Memorial Boulevard and between Royalston Ave and the Azine Alley just west of West River Parkway is now open. The Luce Line Regional Trail bridge that crosses the freight rail corridor connecting Bryn Mawr Meadows Park

## TRANSIT NEWS

### BETTER TRANSIT COMING IN 2025

Metro Transit is implementing several major improvements this year, some of which will directly bless the Southwest Connector readership area. There are three waves of improvement coming that I know of:

On Saturday, March 22, there will be minor changes on several routes in Southwest Minneapolis:

- The layover point for Route 2 will be after the bus turns onto Dupont Avenue, rather than on Hennepin between Franklin and 22nd.

- Eastbound Route 9 trips between 2:30 and 9:30 p.m. on weekdays will run three minutes earlier. Westbound trips that currently arrive at Hedberg and Greenbrier at 5:18 and 6:17 p.m. will now instead end at the Louisiana Transit Center.

- Metro Transit will adjust Route 18 and 25 travel times to reflect actual trip durations.

- Route 21 will have slightly different stops in downtown Saint Paul.

- Route 46 school day trips are undergoing changes: Westbound trips from the 46th St. Route 46 will lose the 7:32 and 7:48 a.m. trips from the 46th St. LRT station, and the 7:34 a.m. trip will now depart at 7:36 a.m. The 46 will also run with alternating 30 and 60 minute spacing in the evenings 7 days a week. They will also adjust all daily trip times to ensure consistency.

- Planned construction on I-94 will cause adjustments to trip times on Routes 113 and 114.

The big news for the March service change is the Gold Line, a new Bus Rapid Transit line running from downtown Saint Paul to Woodbury. While this isn't near Southwest Minneapolis, it makes travel to that part of the metro area more accessible for everyone, and second, there are already plans to combine the Gold Line with Route 94 as of 2027, enabling a direct ride from Minneapolis to the east side of Saint Paul.

There will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. on March 22 at Woodlane Park and Ride with the first ceremonial bus leaving at 10:45 a.m., and community celebrations at Woodlane and Sun Ray Park and Rides from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Gold Line will offer free rides to riders for the first week.

On Saturday, June 14, Southwest Minneapolis gets its turn! The B Line, which will run on Lake Street and be faster than Route 21, with fewer stops and with advantages similar to other Bus Rapid Transit lines.

This coming December, we'll get a second dose of transit goodness with the opening of the E Line on Hennepin Avenue, which will be faster than Route 6 and will replace the France Avenue sector completely. The Xerxes sector will still run from Uptown Transit Center to Minnesota Drive in Bloomington.

I am sure many readers are tired of the construction delays on Hennepin Avenue and Lake Street in the past few years, and are grateful it is over so we can enjoy the benefits.

with the Bassett Creek Valley Station area and the segment of the Cedar Lake Trail east of Van White Memorial Boulevard are closed but are scheduled to reopen later this year. The closed Kenilworth Trail from the Midtown Greenway to Bryn Mawr Station in Minneapolis is also expected open in 2025.

► Briefs compiled by Cam Gordon.



By John Wilson





## 11 AWARDS FOR TMC PUBLICATIONS

At the 158th annual Minnesota Newspaper Association Convention, TMC Publications earned 11 awards. Accepting them in person were (left to right) Tesha M. Christensen, Jan Willms and Terbutto Ochothow. Our woman-owned, family-run newspaper group includes the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger, Midway Como Frogtown Monitor and the Southwest Connector.

- Business Profile, 2nd place: Tesha M. Christensen for "South Lyndale Liquor triples size"
- Columnist, 2nd place: Eric Ortiz
- Human Interest Story - Personality, 3rd place: Jan Willms for "The Sign Painter"
- Social Issues Story, 3rd place: Jan Willms for "Helping youth succeed"

- Photography News Photo, 1st place: Tesha M. Christensen for Slice Pizza ribbon cutting
- Photography News Photo, 2nd place: Terbutto Ochothow for "African Fest"
- Photography Portrait and Personality, 2nd place: Terbutto Ochothow for "Brewery owner"
- Typography and Design, 1st Place: Southwest Connector
- Advertising Excellence, 2nd place: Southwest Connector
- Use of Photography as a Whole, 3rd place: Southwest Connector
- Use of Information Graphics and Graphic Illustrations, 3rd place: Intersection of ideas on I-94

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# COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS ADVOCATE FOR RECYCLING, COMPOSTING

Hands-on opportunities help Tangletown resident not feel as frustrated about environmental concerns

By Allie Johnson

Have you ever been frustrated seeing recyclable or compostable items in the trash bin? Or maybe you yourself have hesitated over whether an item can be recycled or not.

Those feelings are what led Tangletown resident and self-described former dumpster diver Leah Sweet Slicker to join the ranks of Hennepin County's Community Recycling Ambassadors in 2018.

Since 2011, the Community Recycling Ambassadors program has been training Hennepin County residents on how to be an advocate for recycling, composting, and overall reducing waste in their community.

Kirsten Wahlberg, the program coordinator and waste reduction specialist with Hennepin County, said the purpose of this program is to bridge the awareness gap when it comes to recycling in the county.

"There's this misconception that all you have to do is hand this person a hand-out or a magnet to put on the refrigerator and all of a sudden they're going to understand how to recycle and compost," said Wahlberg. "But studies show that having a person to put behind that recycling guide or having a face in front of this person that's wanting to know more really will make the difference."

To become a Community Recycling Ambassador, residents must apply and be accepted into the program. Accepted applicants attend six weeks of training – now offered virtually – where they learn from industry experts and county staff about waste reduction, recycling, and organics as well as how to volunteer and effectively communicate what they learned.

"We're really trying to equip people with the knowledge and the skills to get them going," Wahlberg said.

Sweet said she particularly enjoyed learning the ins and outs of Hennepin County's recycling and waste systems –in-



Tangletown resident Leah Sweet Slicker worked with both the Blaisdell YMCA and Burroughs Elementary School – where her children attended – to obtain new recycling containers with better signage. She also volunteered with the University of Minnesota's Pack and Give Back program, which encourages students to donate rather than throw away unwanted items when they're moving out at the end of the semester, helping to sort those items.

formation she could then pass on to family members, friends, and the rest of the community.

"[Recycling standards] are different are all over," she said. "People get complacent, like 'It's just too confusing, I'm going to throw these things away,' or 'I heard that most stuff doesn't get recycled anyways so I'm just going to throw things away.'"

#### QUICK EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

After undergoing training, participants are then required to complete 30 hours of volunteer work before they are officially certified as Community Recycling Ambassadors.

That volunteering can take many different forms, Wahlberg said. Community Recycling Ambassadors have volunteered

as waste monitors at events like the Basilica Block Party music festival and the annual May Day Parade in Powderhorn Park, helping guide attendees on what items to put in which bin.

"I love it because it's a really quick interaction," said Wahlberg. "It's a really quick education opportunity."

Ambassadors are encouraged to volunteer in whatever way they are most comfortable. For some, that means taking on their own project, like encouraging their church to switch to reusable cutlery and plates, or starting a swap meet in their neighborhood.

"There are lots of opportunities for extroverts, but if that's not people's style, there are other opportunities as well," Wahlberg said. For instance, there's a Community Recycling Ambassador who is running a Discord channel for volunteers.

"She's using her skills to manage volunteers online and that's totally up her alley, which is great," Wahlberg said. "People can kind of design [their own projects] and figure out what works for them."

For Sweet, she worked with both the Blaisdell YMCA and Burroughs Elementary School – where her children attended – to obtain new recycling containers with better signage. She also volunteered

with the University of Minnesota's Pack and Give Back program, which encourages students to donate rather than throw away unwanted items when they're moving out at the end of the semester, helping to sort those items.

"The program is a really great hands-on way to not feel so frustrated about the state of our environmental concerns and just become more of an active resource for folks," Sweet said.

Once participants complete their mandatory 30 hours of volunteering, it is up to them how they want to continue to share their knowledge and raise awareness in the community, Wahlberg said.



The program is a really great hands-on way to not feel so frustrated about the state of our environmental concerns and just become more of an active resource for folks."

Leah Sweet Slicker

#### FIX-IT CLINICS

Sweet has been a Community Recycling Ambassador now for over seven years. These days, she is a regular volunteer at Hennepin County Fix-it-Clinics, where residents can bring broken

electronics, appliances, clothing, and more to be repaired.

She does not help repair items herself, rather, she helps by directing attendees on where to go and helping to weigh all the items that come through the clinic to determine how much waste was diverted from landfills.

"I'm not a welder, I'm not really a tinkerer, but I'm noisy and I'm comfortable welcoming people and explaining the process to them," said Sweet.

#### TRAINING OFFERED EVERY SPRING AND FALL

Since its launch, the program has created about 850 Community Recycling Ambassadors. Wahlberg said county staff will tap into that large pool of sustainability-minded volunteers when they need additional help.

"[Community Recycling Ambassadors] are the faces. They're the ones going out and actually implementing a lot of these ideas that we have at the county level that we just don't have the capacity to do," said Wahlberg.

The Community Recycling Ambassadors program is open to anyone over the age of 18 who lives, works, or goes to school in Hennepin County. Classes are offered every spring and fall. Interested residents can sign up with their email to be notified when applications open again this fall.

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