



"We see ourselves as ambassadors of dance."

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Company celebrates 100 years in the Midway

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Local resident receives honorary degree

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Midway Como

Monitor



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Local school ranked best IB high school in Minnesota

By JILL BOOGREN

Great River School in the Como-Midway neighborhood earned top marks from *U.S. News & World Report* this May when it received a Gold Medal Award and was ranked Minnesota's #1 high school. It's a high honor for a small, public charter school in the heart of a big city.

"It's a very fun time here at the school," said Lucy Suits, communication and outreach manager for the school and parent of a student enrolled there. "It's an opportunity to show what's working."

The ranking was based on math and reading test scores and college readiness, which factored in the percentage of students taking college-readiness tests and how well they did. Evaluated against other International Baccalaureate (IB) schools (see "2015 Best High Schools in Minnesota," pg. 5), Great River School outperformed the rest.

While staff appreciate the recognition, they are quick to point out that these scores don't define who they are as a school.

"The award doesn't measure all the things we do to support students," said Head of School Sam O'Brien. "It's a conventional validation of how our students are doing."

And by all accounts this is an unconventional school. Tucked among office buildings along Energy Park Drive, Great River School is a public Montessori school, one of three in the state serving high school students, according to the USA Montessori Census. It opened 11 years ago



Back side of Great River School. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

serving grades 7-12 and has since added grades 1-6.

Here there are guides, not teachers, and a head of school, not a principal. Students are taught in mixed grade levels. Recess is 45 minutes long, and the school is designed to allow students to move freely. There are no desks, only tables and chairs, accessible outdoor spaces, and a kitchen where students can cook

for each other.

"You don't see a school designed to take tests," said O'Brien. They operate under a deep belief in the students and their opportunity to learn and grow. It's their notion that all students have dignity, and it is the job of staff to support it.

"Every student has the potential to do whatever work they want to do," said O'Brien. If a

student is interested in something but finds the course work challenging, he explained, the message is "you just need to work at this," not "it's not in your capacity."

Students at work

Outside during recess on a cloudy Friday morning, elemen-

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Head of Great River School, Sam O'Brien. (Photo by Jill Boogren)



Teresa Hichens-Olson (left), a Bush Fellow and parent of both a current student and an alumnus of the school, and Lucy Suits, the school's communication manager and parent of a student at the school. (Photo by Jill Boogren)



Left to right: Great River School students Elena Biggs (7th grade), Gabi Vazquez-Thorp (7th grade), and Anna Himango (8th grade) sort spices for their upcoming 100-mile bike trip in Wisconsin. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

2015 Hamline Midway Spring Festival planned June 16

By KYLE MIANULLI

Gather your friends and family and join your community for the Hamline Midway Spring Festival Tues., June 16, 4-8:30pm in the fields behind Hancock Recreation Center and Hamline Elementary, 1599 Englewood Ave.

Come explore and enjoy all that makes Hamline Midway such a vibrant and thriving

urban community. Fun and festivities for all ages and interests will abound. The event is free and open to the public. Explore, discover and connect with more than 60 exhibitors at the Community Expo, including area businesses, nonprofits, schools, artists, neighborhood groups and more.

There will be three opportunities for you to do some good

deeds at the festival:

—bring a non-perishable food item to donate to the food shelf with the Franciscan Brothers of Peace;

—scrounge up your old electronics to donate with Tech Dump; and

—drop off your old shoes for Shoe-Away Hunger.

Whether you bring one or all three, you'll get a voucher for

a free hot dog donated by Clayton Howatt of Verus Builders, LLC.

Music

The main stage will be alive with music all evening. Ashley DuBose will headline the performances from 7:30-8:30pm. A St. Paul native, DuBose gained national recognition as a contestant on NBC's *The Voice* in

2013. She has since gone on to build a local and national following and continues to bring her image-positive R&B, funk and jazz stylings to fans.

Other performances will include:

—the Irish Music Group Tipper Road, known for bringing new life to traditional songs from the

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Center for Hmong Arts and Talent

Summer events to CHAT about

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

"The Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT) has the distinction of being the first and only Hmong arts organization ever established," according to executive director Fres Thao. Located in the Sunrise Market Building at 995 University Ave. W., the 2nd floor CHAT studio is a place where Hmong youth can come to create art and find community.

The Hmong are a distinct ethnic group from the mountainous regions of Laos. They began arriving in Minnesota in 1975 as refugees from the devastation of the Vietnam War. With some 66,000 Hmong having settled here, the Twin Cities is now home to the largest urban Hmong population in the country.

Thao, an eloquent spoken-word artist, explained the history of CHAT.

The organization began as Pom Siab Hmoob Theatre, which translates as Peering into the Heart. Between 1991-97, the company wrote, produced and performed five successful plays. In 1998, organizers decided to expand beyond theatre to better serve the Hmong arts communi-

ty. Pom Siab Hmoob had been the first Hmong theatre group in the world. Traditionally the Hmong specialize in poetry, dance, woodwind instruments and textile arts; theatre has only recently become part of their cultural expression.

The mission of CHAT is for youth to live, learn and create art with a purpose. That means making a platform for traditional arts but also diving into new ways of making art and new ways of thinking. Thao said, "Everything we do here is Hmong-inspired, infused with leadership development and an emphasis on community building for our youth."

On June 9, CHAT launched their summer season of Open Studio from 4-7pm. This weekly get-together is facilitated by the Youth Leadership Group (YLG), but, "all teens and older are welcome and you don't need to be Hmong," said Thao. There will be karaoke, movies, and opportunities for performance. CHAT supports many ways of venturing into the world of art and creative expression. They provide guidance and support in the areas of visual arts, theatre, literary arts, dance, music, fashion design, mixed media and more. "There are three questions that figure into every conversation here," said Thao. "Who are we, where have we been and where are we going?"

The YLG is open to youth ages 14 to 20 years old. It got its start in 2008 and this year has 15 members, according to senior member Zena Lee, a student at St. Paul College who also loves singing. YLG is for youth interested in developing leadership and community organizing skills through service-learning projects and theatre arts. At the end of the program, YLG members write and perform a play in collaboration with the Asian American theatre company Mu Performing Arts.

"I moved to St. Paul from Wisconsin when I was 14," Lee said. "The Hmong community is so big here, and YLG gave me a place to belong. The counselors are always saying things like, 'we're all family', and it really does help to know there's a place where you can go and where you're understood."

There are some 300,000 Hmong living in the USA. According to Thao, the annual Freedom Celebration and Sports Festival at Como Park's McMurray Field is the most anticipated Hmong event of the year. CHAT is one of the community partners who will make this event happen July 4 and 5. This year's celebration is expected to draw more than 40,000 people over its two-day run. Neighbors should be prepared for a busy weekend. Thao suggested, "Rather than being irritated by the crowds and the unfamiliar sights and sounds, please consider them your invitation to join us for a new cultural experience."

The cost of admission is \$5 for the whole day. There will be competitions of soccer and volleyball, Hmong artists from across the country selling their work, and food booths overflowing with papaya salad and sizzling Hmong sausages, among other things.

One of the three stages will be dedicated to performing arts and managed by the YLG, with Hmong music and entertainment for youth. YLG alumni Wong Thao, a hip-hop dancer, serves as sound tech for the CHAT performance stage. "It's volunteering for these kinds of community events that have made my experience with CHAT most meaningful," Thao said. "I've been exposed to so many different people and organizations, and it feels satisfying to work as a group and give back to the community—Hmong and otherwise."



CHAT Executive Director Fres Thao. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Because parking and traffic have been challenging in the past during the festival, look up the location of parking lots with shuttle service, take the bus, ride your bike or walk to the event.

On the night of July 4 from 9pm-1am, Bedlam Theatre in downtown St. Paul is hosting the CHAT Adults' Freedom Fest Concert. The performers haven't been finalized yet but, according to Thao, "They'll represent the multi-cultural talent of the Twin Cities and be well worth

staying up for."

Visit the CHAT website at www.aboutchat.org to learn more about their leadership development and art opportunities for Hmong youth in the community.

To better understand the contributions the Hmong have made in the last 40 years, be sure to visit the Minnesota History Center's exhibit "We are Hmong Minnesota/Peb Yog Hmoob Minnesota," which runs through November 29.

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• On May 20, Academy of Finance (AOF) 9th and 10th-grade students attended a year-end recognition ceremony at Travelers corporate headquarters downtown. Students that earned "A" and "B" Honor Roll status received certificates, and AOF staff and Travelers representatives distributed additional awards for going "above and beyond."

• Business and Academy of Finance (AOF) teacher Gail Rosenow received a prestigious Best Prep award for her consistent excellence in Business Education. She received the Larson Financial Literacy Award on May 19. Best Prep's founding partners 3M, General Mills, Ecolab, and Cargill sponsor the collaboration between the business community and education.

• WCCO News recently aired a

News from Como Park High School

Compiled by ERIC ERICKSON, Social Studies Teacher

Honors and awards mark the end of the school year

story featuring seniors Monique Baker and Tuan Nguyen. The three-minute piece is called "2 Como Park students battle adversity, head to college" and is available on the WCCO website, minnesota.cbslocal.com. It can also be googled to find various sites that have linked the story.

• Senior Honors Night was held in the Como Auditorium on May

27. Honors ranged from academic department awards to National Advanced Placement Scholar recognitions, to Male and Female Athletes of the Year. Additionally, dozens of scholarships earned by Como Park seniors were announced. Students, parents, and teachers enjoyed a reception with cake and punch, following the program.

• Senior John Paul Proper com-

posed and conducted "Overture in Eb for Band" for the Como Park Band. The piece premiered on May 21 at the Gala Concert in the Como Auditorium. The Band's musicians noted Proper's work was both fun and challenging to play, and featured solos for several prominent seniors in their final concert at school.

• The combined bands of Como

Park participated in the 95th annual Patrol Parade event in May. They marched from Rice St. to CHS Field, the new home of the St. Paul Saints, to perform the Como school song during the game, attended by Mayor Coleman and other dignitaries.

• ELL (English Language Learners) Level 1 and Level 2 students visited the Como Zoo in May, with a study focus on animals and habitats. The students also visited the U of M Raptor Center last month. Before the field trip, students did research and reports on bird species using the iPads. Both field trips were powerful for the ELL students, most of whom had not ex-

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Sticker shock of street repair takes residents by surprise

By JANE MCCLURE

Street and bridge work throughout St. Paul isn't merely a hassle for anyone trying to get around. The increased costs of construction are causing sticker shock for city, county and state officials. Property owners who must pay assessments are also feeling the pain. That includes residents of the Como-Chatsworth neighborhood, who at one point feared that their assessments would almost double.

In the fall of 2014, the city told property owners that they would be paying \$80 to \$95 per foot. Word of a high increase to \$140.50 per foot prompted many to attend a May 6 public hearing to object. That has now been reduced to \$111 per foot, but it still causes hardship. Property owners on arterial streets will pay about \$120.

St. Paul property owners pay about 20 to 25 percent of street reconstruction costs. Last year residents paid about \$77 per front foot in residential street paving projects.

Jim Prayfrock's family has owned its Oxford St. home for many years. "As a single dad, with one kid going out of college, one kid going in. . . These assessments are a hardship."

Prayfrock said his block is in poor condition, and the street needs rebuilding. His family has paid assessments for street and curb maintenance, even though the curbs fell apart in the late 1960s. "The work is needed, but at what cost?"

Others urged the city to hold out for lower construction bids and subsequent assessments. Chatsworth St. resident Corey Plath joked that he came to the hearing wanting to talk about a \$140.50 per foot assessment. On finding out about the lower assessment estimate, he quipped, "Well that just took all my venom out of me, way to go." Plath still urged the council to wait on his street.

Others said the work needs to go forward because property owners are already living with torn-up boulevards and sidewalks damaged due to water and sanitary sewer line replacement. Church St. resident Randy Croce said he and several neighbors already incurred a few thousand dollars in costs each to get utility work done. "Otherwise we'll individually have to pay out more," he said.

The actual fate of projects will not be determined until bids come in over the next few months. Bids will determine if assessments go up or down, or, even if some projects go forward at all. But for Como-Chatsworth residents, some boulevards have been already torn up for water line replacement and other work.

"Costs are coming in much higher than they ever have before," said St. Paul City Council President Russ Stark. Not only have materials costs risen, a robust economy means that contractors have their pick of jobs. The City Council is considering holding a policy session to discuss what can be done

to mitigate costs to property owners.

The cost of road construction has increased faster than the rate of inflation. Materials including oil, concrete and gravel have risen, along with equipment process. One estimate given to state lawmakers was that the costs of construction and materials have gone up by more than 70 percent in the last decade.

Kathy Lantry, director of the St. Paul Department of Public Works, said that higher costs mean fewer projects can be completed in a construction season. The city rebuilt many streets during a sewer separation and street reconstruction program that ended in 1996, and then began rebuilding the remaining 200 miles of older residential streets. That program was supposed to be done in about 2006-2007. It is now scheduled to end sometime after 2021. The city used to rebuild streets in as many as four neighborhoods per year. In 2015, only one neighborhood, Como-Chatsworth, can be done.

Final assessments won't be announced until the projects are near completion. The city will hold a final assessment public hearing in the fall.

"Over the next few months bids will be opened, and we'll have more accurate costs," said Bruce Engelbrekt, St. Paul Real Estate Office. "We're hoping for favorable costs but if the costs are much higher, we'll have to come back and see if we can move forward."

The fact that so many projects

are moving ahead means contractors have their pick of jobs. A good economy is one factor. For Ramsey County, Hennepin County, and other Minnesota counties, adding a wheelage tax a few years ago has provided more resources for roads.

In some cases, projects get few if any bids. That includes Minneso-

ta Department of transportation's current Snelling Ave. and Highway 5 Bridge projects. "And in St. Paul, for the second year in a row, the Maryland Ave. Bridge project got no bids," Lantry said.

Letters to the Editor

"State-of-the-art" should mean no chlorine

To the Editor:

The plans for the new YMCA that will serve our neighborhood are exciting. However, I am concerned that the water filtration system planned for the aquatic center will not serve the health of swimmers and those who maintain the pool.

Chlorine has been used for decades to disinfect and control bacteria in swimming pools. According to the plans, the new "state-of-the-art" aquatic center at the Y will use a chlorine-based filtration system, despite warnings about such a system's safety.

Look at how quickly a bathing suit disintegrates from time in a chlorine pool. Then consider how your skin and eyes are affected. Many people, especially children, are allergic to pools with chlorine filtration, and develop rashes and breathing prob-

lems leading to asthma. Thankfully, there are safe filtration systems used in some pools, such as Oxford Pool, Como Park Pool, and Highland Park Pool. They all use sphagnum moss for filtration, decreasing the need for chlorine. The water is sparkling clear; bathing suits don't rot, and eye goggles are not necessary.

I understand chlorine filtration is less expensive in the beginning, but expensive to maintain. Chlorine is dangerous to work with, and the health and safety of those who maintain the pool need consideration.

I recommend that the Y rethink their plan. Although most Ys in the area use chlorine, I encourage "our" Y to break with the pack and be a truly "healthy" health center.

Meredith Sommers



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Monitor In A Minute

Compiled by JANE MCCLURE

Auto repair to open on Como

An auto repair facility can open on Como Ave. if it meets certain conditions, the St. Paul Planning Commission decided May 22. Hoyebay Automotive will open soon at 550 Como Ave. with the newly issued conditional use permit.

The business in the Como-Dale-Front neighborhood shares space with a used motor vehicle sales business, Fleetwood Motors. Auto repair business owner James Hoyer is purchasing the property. There is already a separate conditional use permit for the auto sales business. The auto repair will have its own permit. Hoyer told the Planning Commission Zoning Committee in May

that if the auto sales business violates its permit conditions, he will not renew the lease and take steps to open his own auto sales business.

One issue the committee discussed in May was how the two uses need to be regulated. Both uses for auto sales and repair can generate additional traffic and parking, including overflow parking. The committee discussed the dozen conditions placed on the auto repair business. Most of the conditions are standard for auto repair licenses in the city, according to city staff.

The Planning Commission decision on a conditional use permit is final unless appealed to the City Council. With no district council or community opposition, an appeal isn't anticipated.

Hamline Church honored

Hamline Church United Methodist, 1514 Englewood Ave., was one of the winners of the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission/American Institute of Architects St. Paul Chapter awards for preservation. The awards were presented May 19 in a ceremony at St. Paul City Hall/Ramsey County Courthouse.

The church's trustees, council, and archives committee were honored with an award for stewardship, for efforts to preserve the church building. The 1928 building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The awards are presented to recognize projects, individuals and organizations that enhance and celebrate St. Paul's cultural resources. The award preservation was part of the city's celebration

of National Preservation Month.

New rules on cell towers

Federally mandated regulatory changes for antennae for cell phones and other means of wireless communication were adopted in May by the St. Paul City Council. No one attended a May 6 public hearing to speak to the changes, which the Planning Commission recommended for approval.

Because of the consternation some antennae have caused, City Council members said they were surprised that no one came to the public hearing to raise questions about the changes. But because the federal rules take precedence over local ordinances, there isn't much the city can do.

New Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules

on wireless infrastructure require the changes, which are very technical in nature. It will be easier to co-locate antennae on a building or "base structure" where antennae already exist. Freestanding towers can become taller. The timeline in which the city can act on an application has been shortened to 60 days from 150 days for new facilities and 90 days for co-located facilities. The new regulations also state that esthetics cannot be a consideration in siting decisions. Other changes are meant to encourage placement on taller structures and to promote more co-location on the same site.

The federal changes don't apply to city-owned land, so the city could continue to allow or block facilities in parks or public right-of-way.

Hamline Midway Spring Festival

Continued from page 1

Emerald Isle;
—the award-winning Americana powerhouses Urban Hillbilly Quartet;
—African drumming and dance from Babatunde Lea;
—the neighborhood all-star jazz and Brazilian duo Mira and Tom Kehoe with Maliya Gorman Carter juggling and performing;
—spoken word and performing artists with the CANVAS Teen Arts Center, and more.

Acoustic blues-folk singer and guitarist Daniel Rumsey and the Arborators will also be roaming the festival grounds with even more music to enliven your evening.

Food

Bring your appetites and sample the traditional Spanish cuisine of A La Plancha food truck. Seasonal and fresh ingredients are the backbone of the fair from this truck. Just look for the orange truck featuring a picture of a Mexican Wrestler, or "Luchador." With vegetarian, as well as meat-eater options, A La Plancha will satisfy all appetites.

Fry Mama's Fry Bread—the only food truck owned and run by Midway residents—brings a delicious twist to traditional native fry bread. With both sweet and savory options, you'll have a choice of delicious toppings to adorn your fluffy flying saucer of fry bread. Owned by Barbara Ritt, former proprietor of Cookie's by Barbara on Snelling Ave., Fry Mama's Fry Bread bridges the

old world with the new in a delicious fusion of Midway and Native pride.

Urban Farm & Homestead Fair

Whether you tend a plot at a community garden, keep a window box of herbs, or are just looking for new ways to bring the best of the country to your own urban oasis, you'll find tons of resources and information at the Urban Farm and Homestead Fair.

Plant some seeds and watch them grow with the North Country Food Alliance. The University of Minnesota Bee Squad will be on hand with information about pollinators and what you can do to help make the Midway a "pollinator paradise." Learn everything you need to know to start your backyard chicken coop with resources and supplies from Eggplant Urban Farm supply, who will bring a couple of their feathery friends for you to meet. You can also bring a soil sample to have tested by the University of Minnesota Soils Lab.

Catch up with all that's happening at the urban farmstead over at Frogtown Farm. Ramsey County Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer all your home gardening questions. The Midway Green Spirit Community Garden will also be present with tips and tricks and to share what's up this year at the garden. Are you trying to reduce your waste? Try your hand at the Zero Waste Sorting game from Eureka Recycling!

Kids Activities

The parents of our two community schools, Hamline Elementary,

and Galtier Community School, have teamed up to host enough kid-friendly activities, crafts and games to keep every member of the family busy and creative. From arts and crafts, to face painting, lawn games and more, everyone is likely to leave with at least some glitter in their hair and big smiles on their faces. Get your bounce on in the bouncy house, provided by St. Paul Parks and Recreation, or test your mettle on the Climbing Tower and grab a glimpse of the community festivities from on high.

Issues & Opportunities Forum

Hamline Midway is full of passionate, informed and hard-working people who want to see our community and city thrive. What better way to discuss the issues that matter to you, and the opportunities to address them right here in our community, than in an outdoor living room. This space is specially designed to be conducive to passionate and constructive dialog focused on solutions and education.

Pull up a seat and hear what's happening to alleviate the risk associated with train cars carrying Bakken Oil through our communities. Learn about the work being done to advocate for high-speed fiber optic internet as a public good in the city with Connect St. Paul. Connect with the Hamline Midway Environmental Group, and learn about

the exciting environmental initiatives they have underway in the neighborhood. Learn more about the Hamline Midway Neighbors for Peace, and the Midway Progressive Women's Network, as well.

Movie Theater Showings

If you're looking to take a break and cool down during the festivities, hop inside the Hancock Rec. Center gym and pull up a seat for select neighborhood documentaries by Hamline University Students in David Davies' Visual Anthropology Class.

And then, at 8:30pm, unwind with a special movie theater showing of the hit movie, "Paddington," which will play on the Parks and Recreation Movie Theater Screen in the gym.

Bake Sale

After you fill up on dinner from one of the delicious food trucks, head to the Hamline Midway Community Bake Sale. Expert home-bakers, as well as area businesses, will have a wide variety of delectable sweets for sale. Gluten-free, or gluten-full—there will be baked goods for all! Proceeds will be donated to a fund for next year's festival and to support various neighborhood initiatives and programs.

Our Sponsors and Partners Make this Event Possible

This year's Hamline Midway

Spring Festival is made possible entirely by the generosity of our sponsors and the dedication of our partner organizations. Special thanks go to our major sponsors Hamline University and the Turf Club. The partnership of St. Paul Parks and Recreation and the CANVAS Teen Arts Center in organizing and producing this event has been integral to the scale and success of the planning process, as well.

This event would also not be possible without our Neighborhood Supporter sponsors: Neighbor Works, Greg's PC Repair, the Melo Family: Mim, Fred & Baby Zoe, Chuddwerks, Verus Builders, LLC, The Friends School of Minnesota, Hamline Elementary, Galtier Community School, Tech Dump, Lloyd's Pharmacy and the UPS Store.



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Great River School

Continued from page 1

tary-age students play together on a small hill. Another student digs in the mulch, while another is engrossed in a Harry Potter book.

Inside a large, adjacent building called the West Campus, a rock band rehearses while middle-grade students prepare for an upcoming 100-mile bike trip in Wisconsin. Seventh graders Elena Biggs and Gabi Vazquez-Thorp, and Eighth Grader Anna Himango, organize spices for cooking.

Students are arranged into different crews for cooking and cleanup on the trip, Biggs explained. Himango said they take a lot of trips during the school year. "It makes our school special," she added. Depending on grade level, students may spend time in Horton Park or the Como Woodlands. Or they may visit a farm, go camping or canoeing, or take part in an archeological dig.

"There are more options than a lot of schools," said Biggs. "It feels like more of a community."

All of this is very intentional. At Great River School, social development is considered just as important as academics. At recess and on these exploratory trips, students are learning how to live with, and help, one another.



Andres Badillo Moorman, 12th grade, pitches in at Great River School. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

Outside the school's front entrance, high school students shoot hoops and play Frisbee (the school has an Ultimate Frisbee team) while Senior Andres Badillo Moorman digs dandelions out of a plant bed.

"I learn best at this school," he said. "They do a lot of hands-on things. Service, for one." On Wednesday afternoons, he explained, students are given time to develop their CAS (Creative, Activity, and Service) work. It's part of the core of the IB Diploma and may involve anything from tending a garden to learning to play the violin. Badillo Moorman enjoys reading with the elementary students.

"We can help a lot of the kids," he said. After graduation Badillo Moorman hopes to either

get a five-year apprenticeship at an electrician program or try for an associate's degree.

Cooperation is highly valued over competition at the school. Students have a lot of responsibilities but are given a lot of freedom to make choices about how to do their work. Unlike at many IB schools, everyone at Great River participates in the IB program; they're all in it together.

The aim, according to O'Brien, is to develop executive thinkers in cooperative, creative, supportive academic systems—making them the problem solvers of tomorrow. They're in the business of building character, community, human dignity—not usually the first things that come to mind when thinking of standardized tests.

It's more important, suggested O'Brien, to "trust in students' capacity to succeed, not measure their ability to succeed."

There are hints beyond conventional indicators that students are succeeding at the school: the student exhibiting confidence in a subject matter that was previously out of reach; the graduates reporting a smooth transition to college; the alumnus serving on the school's Board. Still, when 83% of students take at least one IB test—a number that far exceeds the rate for other ranked schools in the state—you know something is working.

"It's really a validation of

2015 Best High Schools in Minnesota*

U.S. News & World Report

- #1 Great River School, St. Paul
- #2 South St. Paul Secondary, South St. Paul
- #3 Henry Senior High School, Minneapolis
- #4 Minnetonka High School, Minnetonka
- #5 Fridley Senior High, Fridley
- #6 Champlin Park Senior High, Champlin



Schools receiving rankings by U.S. News & World Report first had to meet test score then college readiness criteria. To be eligible for a ranking, students—including disadvantaged students—had to perform better than what is statistically expected for their state.

Great River School was the only school in Minnesota to receive a Gold Medal Award, which was given to the top 500 performing schools in the country.

*Minnesota was one of three states who didn't permit U.S. News to use their schools' Advanced Placement data, so only Minnesota's IB schools were rated.

See the full report at: www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/minnesota

how powerful the students are," said Teresa Hichens-Olson, a Bush Fellow and parent of both a current student and an alumnus of the school. "If you remove fences and boundaries, the bars aren't there. They see beyond the bars."

A painting on the surface of the front parking lot, student-conceived and -stenciled, perhaps says it best: "You can do anything you want to do. This is your world."

Great River School (1326 Energy Park Dr.) is a tuition-free, public charter school that serves grades 1-12. It is a Montessori IB school, with no requirement to have been in a Montessori program to enroll there. Students are selected by lottery. The school also hosts summer camps, open to everyone ages 4-14. You can contact them by phone, 651-305-2780, or by email at www.great-riverschool.org



Prep Sports Notebook:

By MATTHEW DAVIS

Individuals take home the trophies, even if teams don't

When state team trophies don't roll in by the trophy case, individual athletes can still bring home state tourney hardware for their respective schools with individual-oriented sports.

Badminton

Kia Vang and Sheng Vang of Como Park gave the Cougars at least one state title for the spring season during May.

The Vangs won the state badminton doubles title last month in defeating Johnson's Julie Her and Kar Bao Xiong 10-21, 21-9, 21-17 in Eden Prairie. Before the state tournament, the Cougars tandem beat another Johnson pair for the St. Paul City Conference doubles title. The Vangs won 21-9, 21-7 over Kao Soua Yang and Xai Chang.

Bowling

For state adapted bowling,

Kayla Kellerman came five points shy of a state championship in second place for the girls physically impaired division. Kellerman bowled a 467 for her two games while state champion Emily Rettinger from Simley had 472. The Cougars ninth-grader scored 230 in her first game and had a 237 in game two.

Como's Valentino Diaz finished third in the boys cognitively impaired division on May 15. Diaz bowled a 449 in his two games with a 218 in the first game and a 232 in the second. The Como junior finished just a point behind second place at Brunswick Zone in Brooklyn Park.

Two Thousand, a freshman at Como, likewise took third in boys physically impaired division with a 446 in two games. Thousand bowled his best in game one with a 221 and then a 225 in the second game.

Tennis

Nathan Parson represented Como in the Class AA boys tennis singles tournament on June 4-5 at the University of Minnesota's Baseline Tennis Center. Parson won the Section 4AA tournament as the No. 1 seed in defeating Ryan Meger of Mahtomedi 6-2, 6-2.

Track

Similarly, Trevon Clay competed for the Cougars in a state tournament this month in three events for the boys track team. Clay won the Section 4AA title in the 110-meter hurdles at 14.29 seconds to land a spot in the Class AA state meet on June 4-5 at Hamline University. He also finished at the top for the 300 hurdles in 38.53.

In addition to hurdles, Clay came in second in the long jump at 44-1.50 to earn a spot in state. Clay also earned a con-



Como Park's Valentino Diaz (second from the left) finished third in adapted state bowling tournament boys cognitively impaired division on May 15. (Photo by Matthew Davis)

ference title in the event earlier in May as he did in both hurdling events.

Central had one boys Class AA state entrant with Jakobi Jackson. He ran a 49.92 in the 400 to finish second.

Baseball

Team sports in the area have seen some success this spring too. Como baseball went 12-5 for the regular season and took second in the conference. The Cougars also battled their way through the consolation bracket to reach the final four of the 4AA tournament.

Central finished just a half game back of the Cougars in the conference standing but fell in the first round of the 4AA to DeLaSalle.

Softball

For softball, Como took the conference title with an 11-1 league record in a tie with Highland Park. The Cougars faced a brutal 4AA field with Visitation and Minnehaha, two teams that had three regular season losses between them. Como fell twice to Minnehaha by a run in the double elimination tourney.

Central came in third for the conference at 8-4. The Minutemaids had a quick exit in sectionals with a first-round loss to St. Croix Lutheran.

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From student to teacher, local school has played life-long role

Once a student there, Gwen Larson will be retiring after teaching 26 years at Hamline Elementary

By JAN WILLMS

Hamline Elementary has played a primary role in the life of Gwen Larson, who grew up in a house four blocks from the school, located at 1599 Englewood.

As a child, she walked to the school, winding her way through the Hamline University campus. The school was then called Hancock, and Larson said she still thinks of it by that name.

Her mom was very involved with the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and worked for the school as a secretary for 15-20 years, according to Larson. Larson graduated from college, taught school in a couple Twin Cities locations and then moved away for awhile.

When she returned, she began teaching at Hamline Elementary in 1989 and has been there ever since. She will retire in June from the school she has loved so much, and that has meant so much to her.

"I have taught first grade for all but the last two years," Larson said. "The last two years I have been library support for K-2, teaching six to eight classes a day of reading and writing and providing remediation and tutoring."

Larson also taught as an adjunct instructor at Hamline University from 1991 to 2005, quitting then because both she and her husband were caring for aging parents.

One class she took over from

another instructor was Retelling, in which she instructed students on how to retell information. Hamline offered a one-week literacy institute, a project that continues to this day, according to Larson. For that, she was one of the workshop instructors, teaching several classes in writing and reading. "There were other classes with literary strategies and lots and lots of ideas," she noted. She explained that as children, we learn to listen and that is how we learn to speak.

Larson said she has a lot of memories surrounding Hamline Elementary.

"The original school, built in the late 1800s, was an old brownstone," she recalled. As the years passed, there were many additions, and now the original building is gone. A sign that hung in the old building is in a garden courtyard of the current school.

"The oldest part of the school now is an addition that was built in the 1960s," Larson said. "It is currently the cafeteria area and office center. The cafeteria has doubled as an auditorium."

She said originally, the school was K-8 and changed to K-6 in the mid-60s. Two years ago it became K-5, but then a preschool was added. Other additions in the mid-to-late 70s and as recently as 12 to 15 years ago include space for grades 3-5 and a learning center.

"The school has changed,"



Gwen Larson, long-time teacher at Hamline Elementary, reflects on the changes the school has made. (Submitted photo)

Larson said. It began as a community school. Kids would walk to school and over the noon hour go home for lunch. "Now the kids are served breakfast, lunch and a snack at the school," she noted.

The nearby rec center offers an extended day program, and many of the students go there before and after school.

Larson said that in 1989, there was some diversity at Hamline Elementary, but not a lot. There has been a gradual growth of students from different ethnicities attending. "There are a lot of cultural differences, and the kids mix well and have a good education," she said.

Larson was a part of the school's collaboration with Hamline, which began in 1991. "We had many meetings, and the

principal and I went to faculty meetings at Hamline University," she explained. "Hamline Elementary was the premier school in the country to have this collaboration."

Each grade level at the elementary school is paired with a department of Hamline University. For example, the fifth grade is paired with the law department. As part of this pairing, they take part in a mock trial on the Hamline campus. Other grades are paired with the art department and the gymnastics department.

"There is another program, Hand in Hand, that is similar to Big Brothers and Sisters," Larson related. Hamline University students serve as friends and mentors to kids who need them.

From a community school, Hamline Elementary became a magnet school. Today it is back to being a neighborhood school.

Larson said that in the past, there was a strong PTO organization, with a lot of special events. "When we became a magnet, that kind of fizzled," she said. "Now that it's back to a neighborhood school, we are re-developing that organization."

Teaching children reading and writing has been a serious task for Larson, but according to one of her colleagues, Elizabeth Srigley, she also has a lighter side.

"Gwen has always been a great storyteller," Srigley said. "She can describe things that make you smile and you want to hear more."

"I always thought Gwen was a serious person who was always in control, but I found a different side to her when she did a retirement skit for another first-grade teacher," Srigley continued. "She could have been an actress or stand-up comedian. She was so funny--everyone was surprised and laughing."

A combination of serious purpose and an ability to make others laugh are strengths that Larson brings to her teaching. She said that reading was always a part of her life.

"I remember that my dad always had a book he was reading," she said. "I remember being read to."

She said she had always wanted to be a teacher, her mom was a teacher, and she played school at home.

"Having gone through my elementary years at Hamline Hancock, then my mom worked there and to be hired there as a teacher, it felt like home," Larson said. "It was my school; that's where my heart is, and teaching there was a special opportunity to give back."

Larson and her husband both plan to retire from their jobs in June and spend time with their grandchildren, three boys in the Twin Cities and two girls in London. They also have lots of volunteering lined up. "We won't be idle," Larson noted.

News from Como Park High

Continued from page 3

perienced either place before.

- Dr. Mark Seeley, a professor of climatology at the U of M, and the father of Como alumni, visited Science classes on May 28 to discuss climate change, and connect students' recent environmental studies to current events.

- Friday, June 12 is the annual Rice St. Athletic Club (RSAC) Taco Feed at Gabe's by the Park. The RSAC is a 60-year-old neighborhood institution that supports school and community athletics, including Como Park High School. The event is from 4-8pm. A \$5 ticket entitles guests to three Tacos and supports community athletics. Tickets are available at the door or the school athletic office (651-744-5347).

- Como junior Trevon Clay qualified for the State Track and Field meet in three different events: the 110-meter hurdles, the 300-meter hurdles, and the Triple Jump. Clay successfully returned to State, hav-



Como junior Trevon Clay at the top of the Track podium at the Section 4AA Meet. Clay qualified for the State Track and Field meet in three different events: the 110-meter hurdles, the 300-meter hurdles, and the Triple Jump.

ing qualified in both hurdling events last year. The 2015 State Meet was held at Hamline University on June 5-6 after the Monitor went to press.

- Senior Nate Parsons qualified for the State Tennis Tournament. Parsons repeated his Section 4AA Singles Championship from 2014 to qualify. He also played in the 2013 State Tournament as part of

a Como Park doubles team. The 2015 State Tournament was held at the Baseline Tennis Center on the U of M campus on June 4-5 after this edition went to print.

- Seniors Kia Vang and Sheng Vang won the State Championship in Doubles Badminton on May 14. After winning the St. Paul City title the prior week, the girls kept the momentum going through State,

defeating a team from city rival Johnson in the State Final. A Pioneer Press story featured the entire Como team on a front-page photo, with several quotes from Kia and Sheng about their accomplishment.

- Como Parents, Teachers, and Students will be at the Hamline Midway Spring Festival on June 16. Stop by the Como Park High School stand to play a game, do an activity, pick up some Como Pride

and learn more about the school and community.

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GROW YOUR BACKYARD HOMESTEAD



A smorgasbord of summer classes in their new expanded space

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Tucked behind the Subway Restaurant at 2121 University Ave. W. is a brick industrial building that formerly housed a cabinet factory. For the past five years, the re-purposed space has been home to one of the Twin

Cities' most beloved dance companies: TU Dance.

TU Dance is named for its founders: Toni Pierce-Sands, who grew up in the Como Park and Summit-University neighborhoods, and her husband, Uri Sands from Miami, FL.

Pierce-Sands was a young stand-out at Minnesota Dance Theatre, where she and her sister Kristi were two of a handful of dancers of color in the 1970's. "That experience, plus living in Minnesota at a time when it was much more homogeneous than

it is now," she said, "really made me long for racial diversity."

Pierce-Sands packed her bags and moved to NYC in the early 80's, where she saw a rainbow of faces in the dance world. She joined the Alvin Ailey Company, the unquestioned premier, multi-racial, modern dance company in the country. After two years, Pierce-Sands moved to Europe and became a lead dancer with troupes in Cologne, Germany and Paris, France.

Returning to Ailey's company in the early 90's, she met Uri Sands: a gifted dancer and choreographer. They eventually married and on a visit home to St. Paul years later, Sands said, "We should really think about building our lives here."

"I realized New York was my heart home," she reflected, "but St. Paul was my family home."

Once here, the pair became, as Pierce-Sands noted, "two patrons of the arts." She taught at the University of Minnesota, and they gave themselves a couple of years to envision what it was they could bring to the dance community that wasn't here already.

Above: McCall Atkinson, Sophia McLaughlin, Keenan Schember and Maia Fernandez outside the entrance to TU Dance Center. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

"We went to see so many dance performances during that time," Pierce-Sands said. "What was clear after the first one was that there were very few dancers of color on stage, and very few people of color in the audience." Pierce-Sands continued, "The Twin Cities had grown so much racially in the years we'd been gone, but it wasn't being emulated on the dance stage – at least not enough for us."

That was about to change.

In little more than ten years, TU Dance has become a cornerstone of the Twin Cities dance community. With a full fall and spring performance schedule each year, the company brings a vibrant, highly trained and multi-racial company onto the venerable stages of the Ordway, O'Shaughnessy and Southern Theatres, among others.

"We always knew we would

Continued on page 9

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By TESSA M. CHRISTENSEN

When Terry and Margie Commerford considered where they wanted to locate their businesses, they knew one thing.

They wanted to be where people live.

Their companies, River of Goods and Terrybears Urns and Memorials, had been housed in a commercial area in a suburb at one time, but they didn't like it.

"We made a choice to be in a neighborhood instead of an industrial park," observed Terry.

In Jan. 2015, they marked three years at their 946 W. Pierce Butler Rte. facility.

Over the past 25 years, they had rented warehouse and office spaces throughout the Twin Cities, including the Midway area, and were ready to own, recalled Commerford, who lives in South Minneapolis. Their realtor connected them with the St. Paul Port Authority, which was working to revitalize the property.

According to Terry, it had been a swamp, then a dump. Then it was filled in. A bowling alley was built. The seven acres became crime-ridden, and the Port Authority stepped in. They cleaned it up and sold it to the Commerfords for \$1.

Stipulations of the agreement are that they employ at least 60 and hire from the neighborhood.

"I really believe in urban renewal," commented Terry.

In addition to housing their two businesses, the property is home to the Our Village Community Garden on the southeast and Stone's Throw Urban Farm on the west.

"It's nice to have the community here," Terry remarked. "I truly enjoy the neighborhood."

Using land for more than lawns

"This plot is an example of taking advantage of land that would otherwise just be lawn," stated Sarah Garton of Stone's Throw. "It supports a local business. It would otherwise just be a chore for someone else."

Stone's Throw expanded this year, and now uses about one acre. In all, they farm two and a half acres at 14 different lots through South Minneapolis and Frogtown. A wide variety of fresh greens, heirloom tomatoes, and herbs are grown and sold through CSA shares and farmers markets. It's a for-profit farm that also engages in community work, according to Garton, which makes it different

River of Goods, Terrybears helping to renew neighborhood



Two businesses share site with urban farm and community garden

from many other farms.

Terry pointed out that another benefit to having the building at 946 W. Pierce Butler Rte. is the increased efficiencies they get from combining two businesses in one building.

River of Goods supplies local gift and floral shops with unique decorating products and light fixtures. They serve catalog buyers, retail shops, corporate buyers, TV shopping networks and more.

Terrybear Urns and Memorials designs and provides hand-crafted, affordable cremation urns. Customers include distributors, funeral homes, families and pet owners.

They were like cowboys

In some ways, Terry and Margie are a long way from where they began.

"We started selling stuffed animals out of trucks on street corners," recalled Terry.

When they began importing brass items from Korea and India, they continued hawking

items on the streets. "We had this weird combination of brass giftware and stuffed animals," said Terry.

They decided to move into the Eden Prairie Mall, and then opened a brass store in Burnsville. What followed was 15 years where they opened and closed about 400 retail stores. During one holiday season, they set up and took down 22 stores. Malls liked them because they helped fill space and looked permanent, noted Terry.

They had two stores that were the exception: the Tiffany Collection Store at the Mall of America and the River of Goods store at Hwy. 280 and Como.

In time, they had to make a choice to continue in retail or become wholesalers.

They opted to focus on being wholesalers.

For Terry, managing a workforce that was constantly turning over wasn't what he wanted to do. He prefers to build a team and nurture a stable workforce.

They also decided to hire someone else to serve as CEO and president 13 years ago.

"That was the best thing I've ever done because it brought a lot of discipline and professionalism to the business," Terry said. "We were like cowboys running around opening businesses and working on street corners."

Today, Lavina Lau is the CEO of both River of Goods and Terrybears (which split into separate businesses about 15 years ago). Margie is the on-air talent for Shop NBC. Terry is the sourcing specialist and frequently travels to India and China, where they have 15 full-time employees.

"I've got 2 million miles on Delta alone," Terry observed.

Twenty-five years ago, Terry and Margie Commerford began selling teddy bears and brass items out of their truck in the Twin Cities. Today they're established in the Midway area with two thriving businesses, and they're helping renew the neighborhood. (Photo submitted)

lower cost. "Now the customer will end up with items at a lesser price, and they will be delighted," said Terry.

"I love delighting a customer with an item that is the best in its class."

Downton Abbey Lane

In January 2015, River of Goods launched a new line at the Atlantic Gift Show, one based on lighting found in the PBS television series Downton Abbey.

The line includes 25 original designs, including decorative floor and table lamps, wall sconces, accent lamps, pendants, and chandeliers. There are one-of-a-kind and hand-crafted stained glass, crystal pendants and chandeliers, elaborate shades with tassels and fringe, and ornate bases.

"Everyone kept saying we have lamps that look like Downton Abbey," explained Terry. So they reached out to the show and embarked on a one-year process to create lighting fixtures that closely resemble those on the show.

"They've been really good to work with," observed Terry. "It opened a lot of doors for us."

He pointed out that their number one concern when it comes to lights is always that they are safe. Next come good designs and pricing that fits.

"We don't carry lamps you'll find in the big box stores," said Terry.

As wholesalers, they primarily sell direct to businesses, but individuals can purchase some of their items on their website: www.riverofgoods.com/.

"I love it because I love it"

He has fun doing his work, and greatly enjoys the various facets of his job. "I love it because I love it," Terry explained.

He especially enjoys traveling to work with vendors in India, some of whom he has worked with for 25 years.

He also appreciates the design component of his work.

Recently, they moved the manufacturing of their lily lamps from a facility in China to one in India that can produce a higher quality product at a



Sarah Garton of Stone's Throw Urban Farm harvests red oak leaf lettuce from the 1-acre plot at 946 W. Pierce Butler Rte. "This plot is an example of taking advantage of land that would otherwise just be lawn," stated Garton. (Photo by Tessa M. Christensen)



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In addition to housing the two businesses (River of Goods and Terrybear Urns and Memorials) owned by Terry and Margie Commerford at 946 W. Pierce Butler Rte., there is a community garden and urban farm on site. (Photo by Tessa M. Christensen)

TU Dance

Continued from page 7

have a company and a dance center, we just weren't sure which would come first, Pierce-Sands said.

Once their 12 member company was established, Toni and Uri went about the business of starting their school. They rented several spaces but until Board member Leif Ericson found this location, there wasn't a sense that they were home yet.

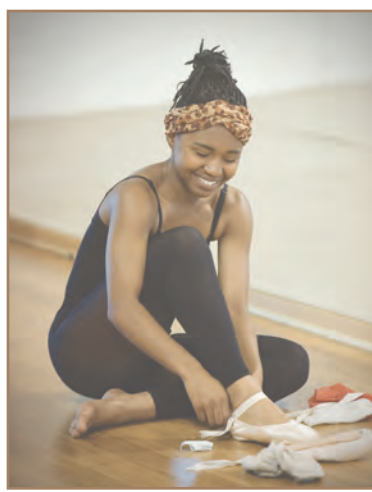
Phase I of their 2010 building renovation gave TU Dance a grand first-floor studio and other accommodations. With generous funding from the McKnight Foundation, construction is nearly finished on Phase II. A gracious second-floor studio with rooftop views, two new bathrooms, a sitting area, and gleaming office spaces will be ready in time for their expanded summer schedule.

Alongside regular classes, TU Dance will be offering a smörgåsbord experience called

Summer Dance Intensives beginning July 6 through Aug. 22. Special child and teen programming for new dancers introduces students to the joys of movement. The classes will help develop confidence around body awareness, coordination, balance, flexibility, and musicality. And they're fun! For experienced dancers through age 23, there will be modern, ballet, African and repertory classes offered at the pre-professional level. Check out the website at www.tudance.org/summer for more information.

Observation Week is through June 13 at TU Dance, when children and adults can visit classes to get a sense for what they're all about. Financial aid is available, and no one will be turned away for inability to pay. Dance apparel (there is a dress code) is provided through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board.

The name Pierce-Sands and Sands chose for their dance center is something one doesn't come across every day: a triple



Destiny Anderson, 16, has been a student at TU Dance Center for the past two years. She came with no classical training, but with a love for movement and a serious hip hop practice. Destiny has been accepted into Dance Theatre of Harlem's Summer Intensive, a rigorous ballet program in New York City. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

entendre. TU is their combined signature, the "T" and the "U" from their first names. It's a play on words and an invitation to dance. Lastly, the word tu, in French, is the familiar or personal form of the pronoun you.

The invitation to dance is extended to all members of the community, as is the invitation to enjoy watching dance as a performance art.

"We see ourselves as ambassadors of dance," Pierce-Sands concluded, "and we love the idea of welcoming new people in."

Left: Students in the pre-professional program take a variety of classical ballet, modern, West African, repertory and workshop classes. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Right: Uri Sands and Toni Pierce-Sands, co-founders of TU Dance Center. (Photo by Ingrid Werthman)



Camille Horstmann, a 17-year-old dance student at the St. Paul Conservatory, also studies at TU Dance Center six days/week. Recovering from an ankle injury, she came to class to observe even when she couldn't participate. Camille has been accepted into this year's Alvin Ailey Summer Intensive. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)



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Murray Middle School works to put outdoor classroom to good use

Murray Middle School continues to develop its ability to use the local College Park space for an outdoor classroom. The staff will get special professional development on how to use the space as an effective classroom this coming fall, but for now, students are stepping up to make the park a better representation of the different biomes represented in Minnesota. Environmental Education students removed an invasive species—buckthorn—from parts of the park, and planted dogwoods and oak trees in their place. Jon Shumacher stopped by to say hello to the students as they took a short break.

The staff is also very excited about Murray 8th grade student Phillip Chervenak's Eagle Scout Project. He, with the help of several Murray students and the boys in his troop, made 15 Leopold benches for the students to use during lessons in the outdoor classroom.



Phillip Chervenak (upper right in photo), is an 8th grade student from Murray whose Eagle Scout project included making 15 Leopold benches for the outdoor classroom at College Park. (Photo submitted)

Recently, Murray Magnet Science II students conducted an insect survey to compare with data from several earlier years.

Midway Chamber names Chad Kulas executive director

The Midway Chamber of Commerce has announced that Chad Kulas has been hired to be its new Executive Director. Kulas was selected from a competitive pool of candidates after an extensive search process. He will fill the vacancy created by Kari Canfield's departure in April.

"We are extremely pleased to be able to bring Chad on as our new Executive Director," said Dan Leggett, Chairperson for the Midway Chamber's Board of Directors. "Chad brings with him a strong connection to this community as well as the knowledge, creativity and experience that will help the Chamber and its members continue to grow during this time of change for the Midway area and local businesses."

Kulas brings more than 10 years of experience to the Mid-

way Chamber of Commerce, having worked closely with local organizations and businesses, advising and managing government relations teams, as well as providing event coordination and public relations services.

His experience working for the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of Saint Paul and most recently holding the position of Public Affairs Manager for a local management consultation firm specializing in Chambers has let him see the Chamber world from various different perspectives.

"I am excited to have the chance to help lead this great organization at such an important time," said Kulas. "The Midway Chamber represents what is really the heart of our metro area and there are great opportunities

to build on its recent success and make this an even stronger and more active organization."

Music in the Park announces full summer schedule at Como

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation offers a wide variety of musical experiences for all tastes and pleasures. Jazz, folk, blues, concert bands, world, electronic, and pop are just a few genres included feature at Music in the Parks 2015. All performances are free except for the Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening theater style musicals at Como Lakeside Pavilion in July and August. The following performances are scheduled at Como Lakeside Pavilion:

- Thur., June 11, 7pm - The Lowland Lakers (Folk/Americana)
- Sun., June 14, 3pm - The Zillionaires (Roots Americana)
- Sun., June 14, 7pm - Calhoun-Isles Community Band (Concert Band)
- Mon., June 15, 7pm - Northern Winds Concert Band (Concert Band)
- Tues., June 16, 7pm - Northstar Barbershop Chorus (Barbershop)
- Wed., June 17, 7pm - Zuhrah Flames (Big Band)
- Thur., June 18, 7pm - Tea and Sympathy (Folk/Alt Rock)
- Fri., June 19, 7pm - The Gentlemen's Anti-Temperance League (Swing String Quartet)
- Sun., June 21, 3pm - Travis Ramin Show
- Sun., June 21, 7pm - Good News Big Band (Big Band)
- Mon., June 22, 7pm - Brio Brass (Brass Band)
- Tue., June 23, 7pm - St. Anthony Park Community Band (Concert Band)
- Wed., June 24, 7pm - Sumunar Gamelan and Dance Ensemble (Indonesian Music & Dance)
- Thur., June 25, 7pm - Jazz Fest featuring Bill Simonson (Jazz)
- Fri., June 26, 7pm - Jazz Fest featuring Ticket to Brasil (Jazz)
- Sat., June 27, 7pm - Jazz Fest featuring Robert Everest (Jazz)
- Sun., June 28, 3pm - Como Pops (Concert Band)
- Sun., June 28, 7pm - St. Anthony Civic Orchestra (Orchestra)
- Mon., June 29, 7pm - Red Rock Swing Band (Swing)
- Tue., June 30, 7pm - Roseville Big Band (Big Band)
- Wed., July 1, 7pm - Capitol City Wind Ensemble (Concert Band)
- Fri., July 3, 7pm - Minneapolis Pops Orchestra (Orchestra)
- Mon., July 6, 7pm - Fridley City Band w/Old Time Band (Brass/Concert Band)
- Tues., July 7, 7pm - The Classig Big Band and Nostalgics Vocal Quartet (Concert Band/Vocal Quartet)
- Wed., July 8, 7pm - South Washington Co. Concert Band (Concert Band)
- Thur., July 9, 7pm - Rosetown Theater Group (Community Theater)
- Fri., July 10, 7pm - Rosetown Theater Group (Community Theater)



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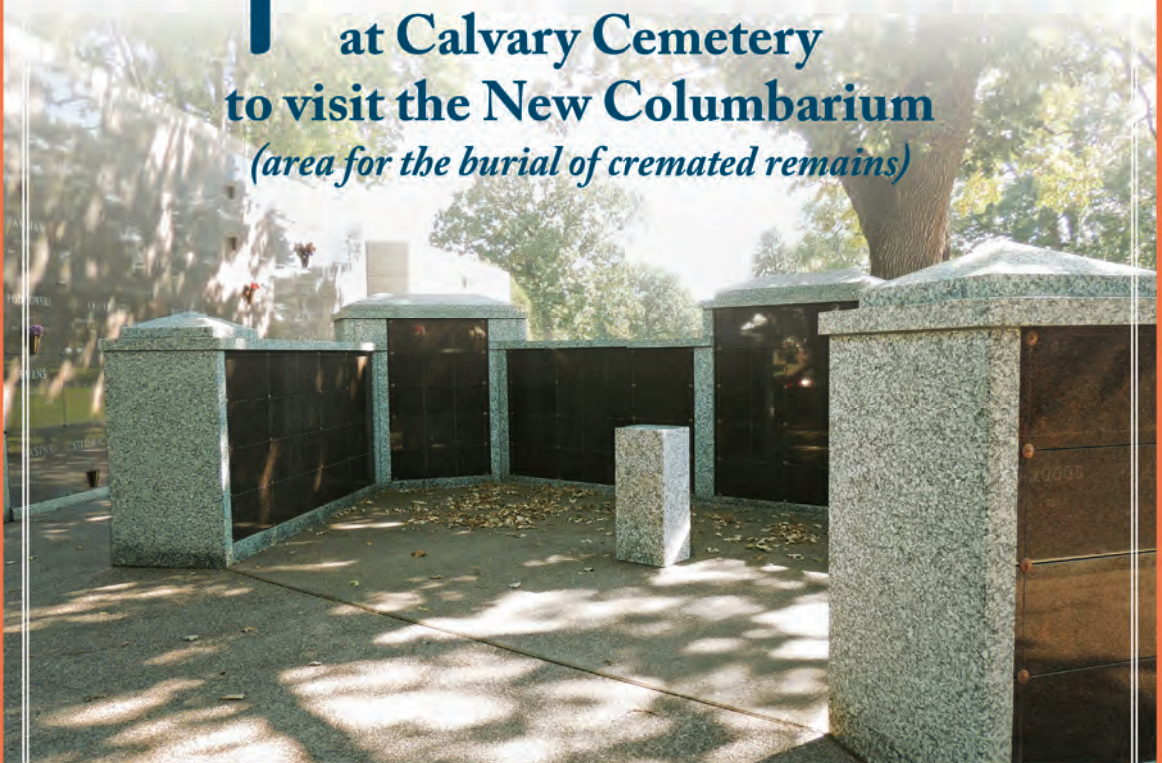
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Minnesota Chemical Company celebrates 100 years in Midway

The company is now owned by the third generation of Bakers—and the fourth generation is also involved

By TESSA M. CHRISTENSEN

It's been 100 years since Irish immigrant R.P. Baker began the Minnesota Chemical Company (MCC) in the Midway area, and today his grandchildren are running the family business.

"We have changed with the times," remarked President Mike Baker. "We have taken good care of customers and provided a good living for our employees."

Mike and cousins Steve and Dan own Minnesota Chemical Company. They took over in 1985 from R.P.'s sons (Robert, Dan and John Baker) when the "Baker Boys" retired together. They led the company for 40 years through recessions, competition, inflation, and a host of other challenges.

The Baker Boys had taken over after their father's death in October 1943 during World War II. The three boys had left their management positions at MCC when war broke out; Dan and John joined the Army Air Corps, and Bob joined the Army. All three served as officers based on their experience as cadets at Saint Thomas Military Academy.

According to a history compiled by MCC, the trio hit the ground running when they came back from World War II. When they rejoined the company, a primary focus was manufacturing soap for the laundry and dairy industries, and the only location was in St. Paul.

Within a decade, the "Baker Boys" moved the company away from manufacturing of soap. They refocused the company on distributing a full range of supplies, and eventually equipment, for commercial and institutional laundries and dry cleaners throughout the Midwest.

In 1952, a Milwaukee sales office/warehouse was also established. In 1962, an equipment



The Minnesota Chemical Company has been located in the same area for 100 years. Originally located at 2207 Wycliff Ave. in St. Paul, it moved one block over to Hampden Ave. in 1937 to be closer to a rail line and to gain warehouse space.

sales and service office was added in Waverly, Iowa.

'I felt my place was here'

Robert's son Steve started working at MCC as a kid, cutting the grass and cleaning the bathrooms on Saturdays. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin with a liberal arts degree in 1975, he started working full-time at Minnesota Chemical.

He never considered another career path. "I always felt my place was here," stated Steve. "I never had the pull to do anything else."

Five years later his cousin Mike also started working at MCC.

It was Mike's dad, John Baker, who discussed retirement with his two brothers, and the "Baker Boys" retired on the same day in 1985. MCC passed into the hands of Steve and Mike, and Dan joined as owner a few years later.

"It was a very orderly and peaceful transition," recalled Steve. "They never looked back."

Robert passed away in 1998, Dan in 2006, and John in 2010.

Steve has seen many changes in the industry during his tenure with Minnesota Chemical. "The stuff we sell today is very different than what we sold when I first came into the business," he remarked.

The chemicals are more earth-friendly than they were, and the equipment is much more efficient, he added.

They currently serve Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and parts of South and North Dakota. Customers come from a variety of industries, from healthcare, athletic clubs, hotels, and motels, dry cleaning, and coin-operated laundries. Many of their customers are also family-owned businesses that they have served for decades.

Dan has been in Wisconsin for much of his career and has switched from selling supplies to equipment, and from laundries to coin-operated laundromats. Those shifts have kept him engaged in his work.



R.P. Baker's three sons, (left to right) Bob, Dan, and John, left their management roles at Minnesota Chemical Company to serve in the military during World War II. The Baker Boys retired together in 1985 and passed the company down to the third generation of Bakers.

As distributors, much of their success comes from getting good lines of products to sell, he pointed out. "You're only as good as the lines that you carry," said Dan. Their suppliers include Milnor, ECOLAB, and Pariser, among others.

Mike also credits a shifting industry as the reason he has continued to enjoy his job. "Customers have different needs, and they come to us with problems looking for solutions," he observed. "Since I concentrate on equipment, mainly large washing machines and dryers, sometimes it is a matter of helping customers making better use of machines they own. Other times we can help customer staff be more efficient with newer, more productive equipment."

An ethical company

Steve thinks that the main reason that MCC has been in business for 100 years is that they're an ethical company.

"Ethics matter today," observed Steve. "You have to be fair and consistent with all your customers. You have to do what you say you're going to do. You have to warranty stuff."

Steve has been a Rotarian for 30 years and is a founding member of the St. Paul Sunrise Rotary Club. Recently, while reciting the Rotary Four Way Test, he was struck by how accurately the document describes the Minnesota Chemical Company's way of doing business.

Steve isn't sure if R.P. ever saw a copy of the Four Way Test, but "its core ideas influences everything we do at MCC – being truthful, being fair, building good will, building friendships, and being

mutually beneficial to us and our customers," he said. Steve's father and his uncle John were also Rotarians.

Steve Baker never knew R.P. as he died young. "I'm sure he'd be proud and probably a little amazed it was still going," commented Steve.

Immigrant success story

His grandfather was an immigrant success story. He journeyed from Ireland to America as a teenager, and first worked in upstate New York selling woolen goods.

When R.P. moved to Minnesota, he discovered that most soaps were being transported to the state from the east coast. "He realized there was an opportunity there," said Steve.

R.P. and several other Irish immigrants began manufacturing soaps and cleaning compounds.

MCC founders were originally attracted to the Midway area in St. Paul for two reasons—proximity to the Minnesota Transfer Railroad's hub and the presence of meat processing plants in the area. The plants provided a critical component in soap manufacturing: beef tallow.

R.P.'s handwritten ledger from September 1915 lists cash in the drawer at \$10. Cash paid out ranged from sponges at 15 cents to stamps for 10 cents—and "car fare" for a dime (i.e. a taxi cab fare).

Salt was one of the biggest company expenses that month: \$2.67 for hundreds of pounds.

Among the cleaning products that were being produced in the early years was the product Nokomis Bubbles. The hand-written recipe lists salt, tallow, grease, and borax.

The company's soap and cleaning compounds were so popular that Minnesota Chemical Company expanded into an eight-state area in the Midwest within a decade.

The company was first located in a small building at 2207 Wycliff St. Then it moved to a 50,000-foot-space on Hampden Ave. in 1937 because of frontage on a spur rail line and lots of ground-floor warehouse space. It had once been a mammoth 300,000-plus-square-foot three-story building that took up a whole city block. But, eventually, most of the building was torn down, and a portion remaining on its eastern edge was purchased by MCC.

Today, the building is too large for MCC and is up for sale. They no longer need space for manufacturing, explained Steve.

They currently have 27 employees spread out among their locations.

What they've always appreciated about the Midway area is how central the location is.

Laundry is as basic as it gets

Dan is very proud of the fact that MCC is a fourth-generation, family-owned business. "Not many people can say that," he observed. "We've been able to prosper in the good times and bad times."

Although the industry continues to evolve and change, Steve is confident there will always be a place for MCC. "Laundry is about as basic as it gets," said Steve. "It's got to get done somehow."



Irish immigrant R.P. Baker founded Minnesota Chemical Company in 1915 in the Midway area of St. Paul. His three sons took over after his death and the end of World War II, and ran it successfully for 45 years before passing the reins to the third generation of Bakers. Today, R.P.'s great-grandson James works at Minnesota Chemical.



Brothers Steve (left) and Dan (right), along with cousin Mike (center) own Minnesota Chemical Company today. They strive to follow in their grandfather's footsteps and treat their customers ethically.

In Our Community

Monitor

Send us your news! When you submit your press release it will be considered for both the newspaper as well as the Monitor Facebook page (facebook.com/monitorsaintpaul). You can also go to our website, MonitorSaintPaul.com and enter the information in the online Event Calendar.

Support group for partners & spouses

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Minnesota is sponsoring a support group specifically for partners or spouses of someone who lives with a mental illness. The Partners & Spouses support group meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 6:30pm, at Falcon Heights United Church of Christ, 1795 Holton St. (Holton & Garden). For more information, call Melissa at 651-354-0825.

La Leche Group scheduled July 14

The next meetings of the Como-Midway La Leche Group will be on Tue., July 14. All expectant and nursing mothers are invited to attend with their babies and toddlers to discuss breastfeeding and mothering issues. Call Heidi at 651-659-9527 for more information.

Driver review class offered June 25

There will be an AARP Driver Review Class on Thur., June 25, from noon-4pm. This class consists of an overview of safe driving. There is no writing or driving test required. Minnesota law mandates a 10% reduction in car insurance premiums for persons 55 years and older who complete a defensive driving class like this. The class will be held at Merriam Park Community Center (2000 St. Anthony Ave.) and is sponsored by Keystone Community Services. Cost is \$18, and you can call 651-645-7424 for more information or to reserve your spot.

The class will be offered again on Mon. July 27, 10am-4pm.

Keystone seniors schedule events

The Keystone Senior Program at Merriam Park Community Center (2000 St. Anthony Ave. one block off of Cleveland Ave.) has many exercise opportunities beginning this summer. Zumba Gold is held every Friday through November from 12:30-1:30pm. Just drop in and try it out. Live Exercise will be ongoing Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through the summer. Call for the time of day. And, Stick Walking will be on Thursdays at 10am. Bring your sticks and walk with other "stick walkers" throughout the neighborhood.

The Senior Summer Picnic will be on Wed., June 24 from

Sunflower Revolution 2015



Low tech/high joy collaborative, a socially-engaged artistic project, has organized the fifth season of The Sunflower Revolution. The Sunflower Revolution is a community artistic project between low tech/high joy collaborative and residents of the senior housing campus at Episcopal Homes. Together they design, screen print, sew, fill and seal 500 sunflower seed packets to distribute for free to the broader community. The intent is to join neighbors, blocks and perhaps cities through the act of planting sunflower seeds. For the Sunflower Revolution 2015, the collaborative has been working with the staff and residents of four affordable housing units within Episcopal Homes: Seabury, Midway Pointe, Carty Heights and Kings Crossing. The residents were involved in every step of the project, including the seed packet artwork, screen printing, filling, sewing and distribution. This year's sunflower selection is Mammoth Grey, a massive, bright yellow sunflower that grows up to 12 feet tall. On Wed., May 27 the Sunflower Revolution culminated with the installation of two Seed Hubs, bright yellow boxes filled with free artist-designed seed packets for the broader community. The Seed Hubs were located along The Green Line. One Hub was at the entrance to Episcopal Homes' main campus, located on Fairview and University at 1830 University Ave. W. The second Hub was at Episcopal Homes' Kings Crossing entrance at Dale and University at 500 Dale St.

11:30am-1pm. Games, jokes, laughter and Cecil's box lunch will be featured. Call to register and choose your choice of veggie, turkey or corn beef. The cost is \$9.

The AARP Smart Driver Refresher class will be held on Thur., June 25 from noon-4pm.

To register for programs or with questions call 651-645-7424.

Good Vibes Trio to play June 17

The Saint Paul Public Library is hosting a live jazz performance in June leading up to the Twin Cities Jazz Festival. Good Vibes Trio will be at the Hamline Midway Library (1558 W. Minnehaha Ave.) on Wednesday, June 17, 6:30pm. The Good Vibes Trio plays creative post-bop music led by Twin Cities bassist Chris Bates, with drummer Phil Hey and Dave Hagedorn on vibes. The event is free, and all are welcome.

Hamline Midway Elders plans events

All Hamline Midway residents are invited to the annual free Ice Cream Social Thur., June 25 from 6:30-8pm. The Ice Cream Social will be held on the lawn

outside Hamline Church United Methodist (or inside the building if bad weather) at 1514 Englewood Ave. There will be musical entertainment, children's activities, door prizes – and of course plenty of ice cream and toppings – along with an ice cream making demonstration and sampling featuring an old-fashioned cranking ice cream maker.

Hamline Midway Elders monthly luncheon, "Arts & Aging," is scheduled for Tues., July 14. A panel of artists and representatives from arts organizations will discuss their work and share how the arts are important for older adults. Panelists include Naomi Cohn (poet), Lori Greene from Mosaic on a Stick, Jun-Li Wang from Springboard for the Arts, Jonathan Oppenheimer from the Midway Mural Project, and Leslye Orr from Dreamland Arts. The luncheon begins at 11:30am at Hamline Church United Methodist (1514 Englewood Ave.) and new attendees are always welcome at these second Tuesday monthly luncheons. After the luncheon, there will be a free bus field trip to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (space is limited and reservations required).

The Hamline Midway Elders (HME) sponsors a Caregiver Support Group on the second Thursday of each month. The group is open to anyone caring

for older adults or persons of any age with special needs and is facilitated by HME's Monica Gallagher and trained volunteers. The group meets at Hamline Church United Methodist, 1514 Englewood Ave. There is no cost, and new attendees are always welcome.

Hamline Midway Elders operates with only two part-time staff and relies on its volunteers. The majority of our services to neighborhood elders is provided by some wonderful volunteers, and they could use more. They have a variety of volunteer needs, ranging from driving folks to/from medical appointments to providing chore services, to friendly visiting, to helping out at program events. Please consider helping the HME program help neighborhood elders.

For more information on any of the above items, please contact Hamline Midway Elders at 651-209-6542 or info@hmelers.org.

Bethel Rummage Sale set June 18-20

Bethel Lutheran Church will hold its annual Rummage Sale benefiting the Children's Christian Education Fund on June 18 (Pre-sale 6-8pm; \$3 admission), June 19 (9am-6pm) and June 20 (9am-3pm). Bethel is located in St. Paul's Como Park neighborhood at 670 W. Wheelock Pkwy.

The church will be open for donations on June 13 from 9am-1pm.

The sale will offer a wide range of items including books, furniture, tools, houseware items, dishes, glassware, stemware, crystal, collectibles of all kinds, arts and crafts, jewelry, office supplies, working electronics, sporting goods, gently used toys and clothing for the whole family.

For more information about Bethel Lutheran Church, its programs and ministries visit www.bethelstpaul.com or call 651-488-6681.

Dancing at Como By The Lake scheduled

The North End South Como Block Nurse Program and UCare are bringing you a 6-week dance program at Como By the Lake Apartments, 901 E. Como Blvd. Each week will focus on a different area of dance from ballroom to the Hully Gully and the twist! Everyone is welcome, and this program is free. The program will meet on June 16, 23 and July 14, 21 and 28. Feel free to come for one session and try out or come for all!

Farmers Market open in North End

The District 6 Planning Council is sponsoring a Farmers Market twice a week at 168 Front Ave.. The market will be open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8am to noon beginning Tues., June 23 through the end of October. There is room for one more vendor, so if you are interested or if you have questions contact District 6 at 651-488-4485 or district6ed@dist6pc.org.

Register now for upcoming classes

Summer Camps and classes are beginning in June at your local recreation center. Register now at www.stpaul.gov/parks to guarantee your spot.

Programs at Northwest Como (651-298-5813) include: Archery; You are the Actor; Tumble Time; Artist Workshop; Extreme Robotics, Battle Bots; Digital Film Making; Soccer Camp; Forensic Lab; Tae Kwon Do; Snag Golf; and Kumihimo Bracelets.

Activities at North Dale (651-558-2329) include: Growing with Music; Basketball Skills; Jewelry Making Glass for Adults; Edible Bouquets for Adults; Theatre & Art, Dragons, Knights & Princesses; Theatre Iperform; Cooking Kids Cupcakes; Preschool Judo; Tae Kwon Do; Tie Dye Time; and Messy Play.

Scheduled activities at Langford (651-298-5765) include: Soo Bahk Do; Pilates; Disney Art Princess Dress Up; Theatre & Art Twist & Shout; Basketball Camp; Robotics Builders; Story Time Adventures; Video Game Design Nintendo Characters; Soccer Camp; Art Class; and Kaleidoscope.

Up Coming Special Events: —Langford 4th of July Celebration: 9am-4pm (Parade, Volleyball, Horseshoes, Pony Rides, Tennis, Kids Games, Concessions)

—Northwest Como Movie/Camp Out on Fri., July 10, 6-11pm (Ball games, Jump Castle, Climbing Tower, Craft, Bingo, Movie at 9pm "The Goonies"). Campout with bonfire after the movie. Pre-register for the campout. Families must provide their own tent and camping gear.

Chair Yoga planned for Mondays

The North End South Como Block Nurse Program is sponsoring Chair Yoga every Monday, 11-11:45am, at the Como by the Lake Apartments, 901 E. Como

Blvd. This class is great for improving strength, flexibility and overall mobility. Designed to meet the specific needs of senior in a structure to benefit everyone at any level of health and fitness. The yoga poses are adapted and are done either standing or seated. Chairs are provided to keep everyone safe and supported. The class is free so give it a try!

Midway Murals events scheduled

Mark your calendars now to save Sat., Aug. 29 from noon-6pm, scheduled date for the Midway Art Festival and Midway Murals Unveiling Celebration! The Midway Murals project will celebrate the unveiling of its four murals with music, live art, interactive art projects, and a walking tour of the murals along Snelling Ave. Community members are invited to come out to this daylong event that will showcase the vibrancy, creativity, and diverse cultures of the Hamline Midway neighborhood.

Leading up to the event, Midway Murals will highlight the many artistic talents that reside in the Hamline Midway neighborhood. All Hamline Midway neighbors, employees, and students are invited to submit their original artwork pieces that will be displayed in businesses and other public spaces along Snelling Ave. beginning July 25. The art will remain on display through Labor Day.

Everyone in the neighborhood is invited to submit their art-all skill levels and ages--for the Art Crawl. To submit and to get more information, email Midway Murals coordinator Jonathan Oppenheimer, at jonathan@midwaymurals.com.

Interfaith meal during Ramadan

People of all faiths are invited to experience one of 14 Ramadan open house dinners organized as part of the "Taking Heart" program of the Minnesota Council of Churches and mosques in Minnesota. One

of the open house dinners will take place Tues., June 23 at 8:30-10:30pm, at the Masjid Taqwa, 1608 Como Ave. Although the meals are free, registration is required.

As Muslims take part in Ramadan throughout June and July, 14 mosques and Islamic Community Centers are extending an invitation to non-Muslim neighbors for a traditional Ramadan Iftar (fast-breaking meal) in partnership with the Muslim American Society of Minnesota.

These events are free and open to the public, but registration is required. Information and registration materials can be found by going to www.mnchurches.org and then clicking on "Register to Attend a Taking Heart Ramadan Iftar."

Dance Theater awarded grant

The CAAM Chinese Dance Theater, 800 Transfer Rd., has been awarded a \$10,000 grant by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. The money is to fund specialized training, including solo and small group choreography and educational programming, which will allow CAAM Chinese Dance Theater to expand its offerings. The training program will occur between June 2015 and February 2016.

Local design group rebrands

Beganik Strategy + Design - a Como-based marketing and branding agency at 1241 St. Albans St. N. - has changed its name to Mercury Creative Group.

"The name change reflects who we are as a company at this rapidly growing phase in our history," said Justin Beganek, Creative Director and Founder. "For the past 17 years we have been growing and expanding; giving us the opportunity to hire an amazing team that is focused on strategy-based thinking and outcome-focused communications. Our new name better reflects our team as a collaborative whole, along with being easier

for our clients and the greater public to remember and pronounce."

The new identity was developed by Beganek and his team using the same process typically used for their clients to implement a re-branding initiative. The Mercury Creative Group re-branding work included creating a fresh brand look, feel and tone to help support the name change.

Garden tour slated for July 11

The St Anthony Park Garden Tour will be held Sat., July 11, 11am - 4 pm. Advance tickets for the tour are \$12, and can be obtained at www.stanthonyparkgardenclub.com or at Bibelot (Como Ave.), Micawbers, or Speedy Market. Day of the tour tickets will be \$15 at St. Anthony Park Library, 2245 Como Ave. Steep hillsides, shady ravines, glacial soil; tour 10 gardens that tackle challenging geography and our climate with style and inventiveness. Bring a notebook for inspiration and your questions. Master gardeners will be available at every stop! Features include native plants, rain gardens, bee and pollinator-friendly gardens, a fairy garden, sustainable and edible landscaping, and an experimental garden. Proceeds benefit the St. Anthony Park Garden Club activities and scholarships.

90-yr old building gets new name

The former Bigelow Building (450 Syndicate St. N.) was officially renamed the Community Action Building in a dedication ceremony on May 20.

Built in 1925 by the Brown & Bigelow Corporation, this building would later become home to a pair of Brown & Bigelow subsidiaries Quality Park and Northwestern Paper Goods. In 1996, the building was purchased by Community Action (known then as Ramsey Action Programs), which relocated its headquarters and a new Head Start center there.

In January 2015, Commu-

nity Action paid off the mortgage debt used to finance the original purchase of its headquarters and now owns the building outright. According to Executive Director, Dr. Clarence Hightower, "The ownership of the site further strengthens our financial position and affords Community Action increased flexibility in developing our future strategic plans."

As a part of the complete renaming and rebranding process, Community Action is adding approximately 600 square feet of new exterior signage to the building and other areas of the property.

What's your best idea to tap into the potential of the Green Line to make surrounding neighborhoods more vibrant places to live and work?

Knight Challenge seeks applications

The Knight Green Line Challenge is open for applications, asking people to submit ideas that answer that question. The challenge is offering a share of \$500,000 for innovative ideas. In last year's challenge several local groups and individuals received grants and recognition for their ideas.

The Green Line brought with it the potential to better connect and energize the neighborhoods and businesses it serves. As part of St. Paul's urban core, it also offers the opportunity to benefit the city as a whole and contribute to its growth. There are just two rules:

Proposed projects must take place in and benefit at least one of six St. Paul neighborhoods along the Green Line: Downtown St. Paul, Frogtown/Thomas-Dale, Hamline Midway, St. Anthony Park, Summit-University or Union Park.

Ideas must tap into the potential of the Green Line to create impact in one or more of these three key areas:

- Exciting current residents and attracting newcomers to the Central Corridor
- Expanding economic opportunity and breaking down divides
- Strengthening a culture of civic engagement

The challenge is open to civic innovators of all kinds. To enter and for more information, go to knightgreenlinechallenge.org and answer a few questions by July 10.

Town Hall Meeting planned June 15

State Representative Rena Moran and State Senator Sandra Pappas invite residents to attend a Town Hall Meeting on Mon., June 15, at the Rondo Library Community Room, 461 N. Dale St. The meeting will take place 5:30-7:30pm and will cover: review of the 2015 Legislative Session; and an overview of changes to the Council on Black Minnesotans. This year legislation affecting the impact and transparency of Minnesota's Ethnic Councils passed the legislature. Residents are encouraged to attend with questions and comments about the councils and any other legislative topic. Rep. Carolyn Laine will join the meeting to discuss some of the proposed changes.

Central Park Blues Fest starts June 14

On Sunday, June 14, 4:30-8pm, the Central Park Blues Fest kicks off the "Performances in the Park - Live @ The Rog," a series of free summer performances in Roseville's Central Park.

Rich "Rhythm" Williams, spoken word artist, will perform at 4:30 and 6:15pm and The Groove Merchants featuring Jimi "Primetime" Smith with special guest, Dee Miller will play at 5pm and 6:45pm. Bring your lawn chairs or blankets or snag a park bench and enjoy this great summer kick-off event! The Rog, a.k.a. the Frank Rog Amphitheatre, is in Central Park, 2540 Lexington Ave. N., Roseville.

For more information about the Live @ The Rog series, visit www.CityofRoseville.com/LiveRog, or call Roseville Parks and Recreation at 651-792-7006.

New ride opens at Como Town Park

Tiger Trax, the newest ride at Como Town Amusement Park, is currently under construction.

The family-friendly roller coaster was created by SBF Group in Italy. It was shipped overseas, travelled thousands of miles via train and semi-truck, and recently arrived at Como Town.

A jungle themed loading station will lead guests to roller coaster featuring 1,100 feet of track. The coaster cars will seat four and are colorfully painted to depict Como Zoo's Siberian Tigers.

Tiger Trax will join Como Town's 18 other rides and attractions for kids of all ages in mid-June.

Como Town is located at 1301 Midway Pkwy. It is a family-friendly four-acre amusement park adjacent to Como Zoo which opened in 2005.

For up-to-date event listings, go to the *Monitor* online calendar at www.MonitorSaintPaul.com/events



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St. Paul youth take a stand against racism

Great River School students come together to raise awareness about apathy and take action against injustice

By EMMA PIORIER and
ANNA CLEMENTS

Every spring, Great River School takes a day to talk about the effects of race and racism in our society. The IRACE Summit, which stands for Identity, Racial Awareness, and Cultural Education, is a student-founded and student-planned event. The summit brings together the school's community and works to create open dialogue about racism and social injustice.

In the wake of the National Black Lives Matter movement, this year's summit was held in a context that created a broader outlook on how race affects our world. The response from the Summit has been overwhelmingly positive from both community members who participated in the event and the students in attendance.

Through the day's theme of "Apathy, Action, and Awareness," this year's IRACE Summit was focused on exploring what it means to overcome apathy by raising awareness, and taking ac-



The purpose of the workshops was to generate conversation and awareness about inequality. (Photo submitted)

tion.

The student leaders who planned IRACE worked with community members from around the Twin Cities to

bring together a wide array of thought-provoking workshops that the students attended. Local experts and activists led the workshops covering topics ranging from the Prison Industrial Complex to the basics of having a positive conversation about race to the effects of institutional discrimination.

Great River School brought in college professors, midwives, and activists from throughout the Twin Cities to contribute. The goal of the workshops was to: —generate conversation to raise awareness about topics and issues related to race, racism, gender, or economic inequality; —think about the apathy we have towards those issues as a community; and —give the students the tools to foster action in response to their newfound awareness.

To continue the growth of IRACE and the development of long-lasting conversations about race in our communities, this year the summit incorporated two local keynote performances

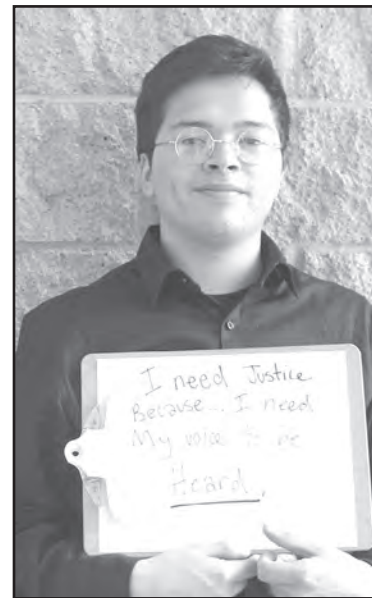
to start and end the day.

Mina Moore, a local R&B artist and activist, discussed the marginalization of people of color in the music industry, and performed multiple songs with her wonderful band.

Mu Daiko, a local drumming group, performed and talked about traditional Taiko drumming. Mu Daiko is part of a multifaceted performing arts company that focuses on giving voice to the stories and culture of Asian Americans. Each performance allowed our students to interact with performers and learn in a more exciting and meaningful way.

One goal of the summit was to ignite the flame of conversation amongst St. Paul youth to kindle a burning fire in the fight for racial justice through creating safe and comfortable space for discussion.

The IRACE Summit is based entirely on the work of volunteers in the student and surrounding communities. If you're interested in helping plan or fa-



This year's IRACE Summit was focused on exploring what it means to overcome apathy. (Photo submitted)

cilitating a workshop at the 2016 summit, contact Andrea Christensen at achristensen@greatrivschool.org.

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Midway Rare and Used Books celebrates 50 years

"We love books" say owners Tom and Kathy Stransky

By TESHA M. CHRISTENSEN

Long before they owned Midway Used and Rare Books, the bookstore was shaping Tom and Kathy Stransky's lives.

As teenagers, the two book lovers used to go to bookstores on dates.

One day they walked into Midway Books, and in the basement they found a \$5 copy of *Alice in Wonderland* that was illustrated by Arthur Rackham.

It was the first book Tom bought Kathy.

A few years later, they wed, and in 1980 they bought the bookstore. In June 2015, Midway Books celebrates its 50th anniversary.

"We spent our lives building this collection," said Kathy.

Housed in a Streamline Moderne building located at the corner of University and Snelling Avenues in St. Paul, Midway Used and Rare Books started off as a small paperback trading store. Today it is overflowing with 50,000 books.

The bookstore will celebrate by holding its annual anniversary sale from June 13-24. Everything in the store, except for new comics, will be 30% off.

Caretakers of books

The couple views themselves as caretakers of the thousands of books in their bookstore and the 4,000 more at their home.

"You hold them for the right person," Kathy remarked.

She needs many more lifetimes to read all the books she wants to. "How can there be so many worlds? How can there be so many things I don't know about?" she wondered.

When asked how many books he reads a year, Tom replied, "Not enough."

Midway Rare and Used Books specializes in science fiction and fantasy, children's illustrated books, photography, art, military, philosophy and science, and old and new comic books.

"We like to spread information," remarked Tom. "All the information isn't on the Internet and there's a lot of misinformation on



There are over 50,000 books inside Midway Rare and Used Books. "We have a better inventory than the library does," stated owner Kathy Stransky. (Photo by Tesha M. Christensen)

the Internet."

He pointed out that it's hard to cross reference stuff online. "There's so much information out there you don't know what is true or false."

The Stranskys buy books every day and encourage anyone selling to use the parking lot in the back of the building (accessible off Sherburne). They have so many books in the store that some remain boxed in back rooms.

"When books give me shivers, either reading them or handling them, I have to buy them," Kathy explained.

In building their collection, the Stranskys have become experts in many fields. "I don't care for fishing and hunting," Kathy confessed. But when they bought 68 boxes of fly fishing books, she learned how to appreciate the hobby.

Some of their specialties have occurred by happenstance. When the Hackers decided to sell their bookmobile packed with art books, they bought the whole bus. "It was the best education I got," said Kathy. "We became known as having the best art selection in the Midwest."

Old and rare

One of the oldest books in their

store dates to 1561. It's a book about Martin Luther King written in Old German. One of the things Kathy loves most about it is the notes and drawings written in the margins by former readers. Today, readers use post-it notes to mark a place, but back then they used a quill to highlight text.

"You see these things come through, and someone's got to preserve it," remarked Kathy. And so they had the cover and binding fixed.

Another old and rare item in the bookstore is a page from the Nuremberg Chronicle dating to 1493. They also have a page from the first King James Bible from 1600.

They started selling books online almost as soon as it was possible (in 1995) and have shipped books all around the world.

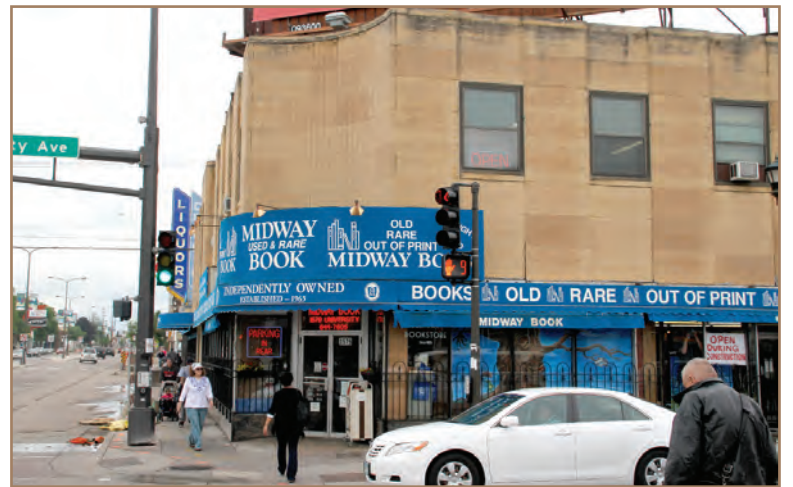
They also crisscross the country selling at various comic book shows and book fairs. One of their biggest is near home, held each June at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

A bookstore owner who still goes to the library two times a week, Kathy explained, "I love to read." This summer, she's finally opening up Proust, a wordy French writer she never thought she would find the time for. "There

are books that wait for you," Kathy observed.

'I wish people appreciated books as much as we do'

"We always say to each other, 'I wish people appreciated books as



Midway Rare and Used Books has seen many changes in the last 50 years at its location at the corner of Snelling and University. A 30% off sale June 13-24 will commemorate the store's anniversary. (Photo by Tesha M. Christensen)

much as we do," said Kathy.

Their 4,000 square foot house is full of books--so full that Tom's military collection and Kathy's photography collection are kept at the bookstore.

Paid in books

Tom and Kathy are dedicated to books. When they were young, a man who owned the bookstore in Stillwater hired them to go through the books in his South Minneapolis garage to alphabetize them. "We did it in winter and no heat," recalled Kathy. But they were paid in books, and that made it worthwhile.

After graduating from college with a degree in psychology, Tom realized he didn't want to pursue that career, and instead got a job at the Nicola bookstore at Nicollet and Lake in Minneapolis. He had always loved comic books, reading Spiderman and Batman as a kid. At the time, only drug stores were carrying comic books, but Tom saw an opportunity there. He began ordering new comic books for the store and starting building up the archives.

In time he became the manager at Nicola, and then Al Kremer, who owned Nicola and Midway, hired him to run the Midway location. As he had at Nicola, Tom added a strong comic book sec-

tion.

Meanwhile, Kathy was working part-time at both the University Hospital and Marly Rusoff's bookstore. She was just about to buy Rusoff's when Kremer told them that if they wanted to buy Midway, he would sell it.

"It wasn't our dream place, but it was open and running," said Kathy. Tom had already been there for 10 years.

They were young, and both felt ready to take on the challenge, Kathy noted. She kept her job at the hospital for a few months, and then dived in and started working full-time at the bookstore with Tom. Their two kids grew up at the bookstore.

Better inventory than a library

At the time, there were three to four other used bookstores within a five-mile radius. It didn't hurt any of them to be so close, but instead they drew customers who stopped by all the stores during an excursion, drawn to each one by their various specialties, said Kathy.

Now they're one of a hand-

ful of used bookstores in the Twin Cities, evidence of how owning a bookstore has changed over the 35 years they've been in business.

Today, folks are buying fewer of the "bread and butter" books--priced between \$20 and \$100--that the Stranskys relied on, and instead go for either the very cheap or expensive ones, according to Tom.

Kathy challenges the idea that books will disappear with the advent of electronic readers like the Kindle. She has noticed a trend in the last five years of young people buying books.

Amazon has made things much more accessible, she observed. "But you can't get what you can get from walking in here," she said.

She encourages people to slow down, come in, sit down at one of the many chairs sprinkled throughout the bookstore, and pull out a book. Kathy loves talking to people who come into the bookstore. If you give her an author or genre you like, she'll direct you to other books you might enjoy.

"We have a better inventory than the library does," Kathy stated.

Despite the ups and downs of the business, what drives the Stranskys can be summed up in three words.

"We love books," said Tom.



Tom and Kathy Stransky have known each other since they were 16 and 13, respectively. They grew up in the Nokomis neighborhood in South Minneapolis, and their dates involved visits to bookstores. They've owned Midway Rare and Used Books for 35 years. This photo ran in the Monitor in the 1990s.

By JAN WILLMS

Receiving an honorary degree in humane letters May 23 from Hamline University (HU) is just the latest in recognitions and awards that have been bestowed upon George Vane, who taught English at Hamline for 40 years.

When he completed his master's degree from the University of Chicago in 1948, Vane mistakenly thought a message of interest sent from HU was an invitation for an interview. He showed up on the campus unannounced. That impromptu meeting resulted in being hired, and HU has been a big part of his life ever since.

"I was only planning to stay a couple of years," he reminisced, "because everybody had told me this was the land of ice and snow. I was from Illinois, and we had decent winters. I thought this would be too much. But, I liked it, and I stayed."

Vane said he arrived at Hamline at a time when it was experiencing a lot of changes. "Hamline had been a small liberal arts college, a church-related college," he said. "But with the end of World War II that was changing. GIs were coming in as students, and they weren't interested in a lot of the old stuff that was going on."

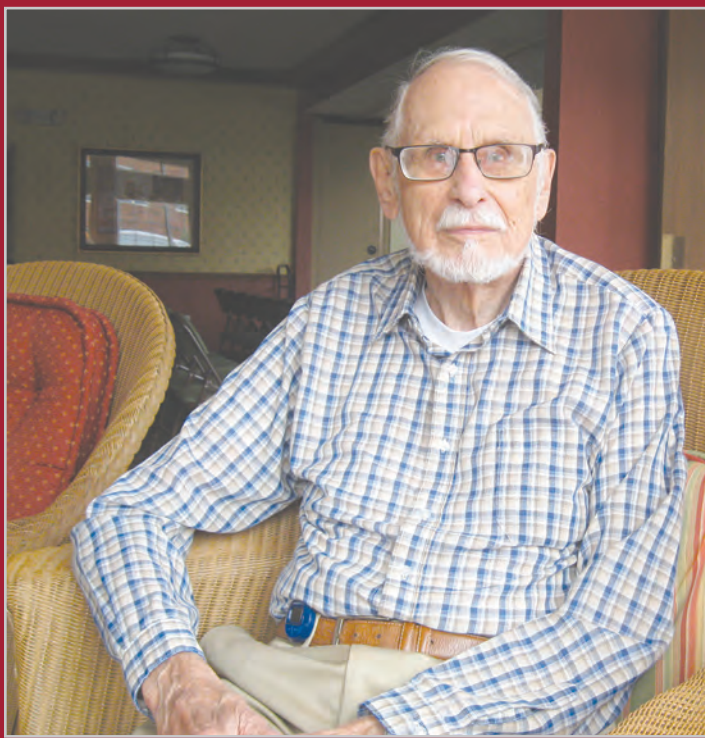
"There were changes in lifestyles," Vane continued. "Hamline had been a place where women had to sign in and out. There had been a lot of literary societies for women. Those went away."

Vane said new things took their place. Through government grants, foreign students were arriving, and that gave a global aspect to the university.

"And then, of course, they started building," Vane said. "When I came, there were these

Hamline University honors George Vane

Honorary degree for local resident is just the latest in long and distinguished career



old buildings. There were a lot of beautiful elm trees that went, as the building progressed. It's a different campus now, and I think a beautiful campus. It used to be very drab."

Vane said he also saw many changes in methods of teaching

over the years. "They've changed since I've been there," he noted. "I don't know if I could fit in now," he joked. When he first came, he taught four classes of freshman English and an intro to English.

"That went on for a few years, and those were some of

the hardest days," he recalled. "I had hundreds of essays to correct every week. As I continued, I got to teach more and more of the things I liked. As the department changed, so did our teaching methods."

When asked his favorite course to teach, Vane answered without hesitation, "Shakespeare." He said he taught the course using lecture, discussion and use of media.

"I felt the students needed to hear, and they needed to see, to really understand Shakespeare," he noted.

Vane earned a doctorate from the University of Minnesota in the 1950s. He received the Merrill C. Burgess Excellence in Teaching Award in 1967, Faculty Member of the Year award in 1988 and the Outstanding Faculty Award in 1994. The George Vane International Scholarship Fund was created by alumni in his honor to encourage student study abroad programs. He traveled with student groups three times to England. He has traveled extensively, both during and after his career at Hamline, to Japan, South Korea, Thailand, India, Iran, Lebanon, and South Africa.

During two of the trips Vane co-led with students to Great Britain, the group made brass rubbings. Hamline has a collection of around 1,100 rubbings, possibly the largest collection in the United States. After his retirement, Vane spent three years writing the guide to the extensive Brass Rubbings Collection. He wrote detailed descriptions of the rubbings and the persons they memorialized. He also assisted with making the collection available online.

Vane's close connection to

Hamline continues today. Since 1992, he has volunteered in the University Archives, where he spends four mornings a week. "It's in the library, in another room hidden from everyone else," Vane explained. "I think some people don't even know it exists."

He said he loves the work because it's about Hamline's history. "It gets me out, and it's enjoyable," he said. "With archiving you never run out of material because there is always new stuff coming in."

He is currently working on a project that involves a cache of letters from Henry Osborn, a professor at Hamline from 1887 to 1933, and his family.

Vane, who is 92, credits his work with "keeping me going." He looks back on his long relationship with Hamline with joy. "I started in 1948, and they can't get rid of me," he quipped.

He came to Hamline after a tour of duty in World War II, which he said gave him a little different perspective on things than some of the other instructors had. He was there during the Korean War and the Vietnam protests. "Things that went on at every campus during that time hit us," he said.

Vane said the most meaningful change for him personally was World War II.

"I was taken out of college and put in the army for three, four years. It certainly made me much more aware of what the world was like. Before the war, I had never thought I would be a university teacher. When I came back, I had a different perspective of myself and my abilities."

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