

Midway Como monitor

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Radio celeb has new slot

Fresh from levy victory, Carstarphen begins New Year on a roll

By JAN WILLMS

For Meria Carstarphen, starting her new job as superintendent of St. Paul Public Schools also meant trying to pass an education referendum. Part of the reason she was hired last year was to convince voters to approve a tax increase.

The district was asking for \$30 million dollars a year for the next six years. The state would provide \$7.5 million per year.

"No superintendent wants to come into a district and raise taxes," she said during a pre-election interview. "But I have been on the job, and I have been analyzing data. We have seen continuous improvement over the past years, and our dropout rate has been cut in half. We don't want to see St. Paul lose the momentum for that."

Carstarphen has been holding a series of Community Conversations, meeting with parents, businesses and members of the Legislature, as well as with chambers of commerce.

"There has been a transition in leadership," she acknowledged, "and businesses will be paying a lot. I just want them to feel good



St. Paul Superintendent Dr. Meria Carstarphen with Como Elementary student Yeng Moua. Carstarphen's quick start in the district was credited, in part, with the success of the recent referendum. (Photo by Terry Faust)

and know the facts behind the referendum. My impression is that people are very supportive, but I still have to work with the public for them to understand the value."

As it turns out, Carstarphen was right. Sixty-two per cent of voters did support the St. Paul Schools referendum.

"I am very proud of St. Paul and our voters," Carstarphen said following the election. "The vote was a real indication of how well our community is central to our schools and values our schools."

She said the passing of the

election was communication. "We gave people the truth and facts about the current state of our district," she said. "There was advocacy and grassroots work with Take Action Minnesota. They did phone banks and lawn signs, joined me at meetings and handed out information."

Carstarphen praised the aggressive fundraising campaign that

The Holiday Flower Show opens December 2



The season literally comes to life when hundreds of poinsettias are exhibited in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Sunken Garden's Holiday Flower Show, which runs December 2, 2006 through January 21, 2007. The 2006 Holiday Flower show highlights over 13 different poinsettia varieties based in deep colors of red wines, accented by pink, peach and white along with deep purple-blue salvia.

"I am very proud of St. Paul and our voters."

- St. Paul Superintendent Meria Carstarphen

referendum would provide funding for education essentials, early childhood education, all day kindergarten, special ed and English Language Learner programs.

"Our high schools will see relief in class sizes," Carstarphen added. "The referendum helps us fund the unfunded state mandate and gives us a small leg up."

She said one key element of

paid for media, and the assistance from both Minneapolis and St. Paul in getting the word out about the referendum.

Carstarphen's ability to convince members of the community about the importance of supporting increased funding for St. Paul Public Schools is only one of

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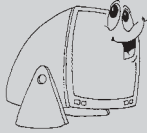
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Midway Como in a Minute

Correction

Due to a file transmission error, the November *Midway Como Monitor* included news briefs that appeared in the November 2005 issue. The November 2006 briefs have been updated and included below or incorporated into news stories in the December edition. Our apologies for the error, and just to set the record straight, the vacuum cleaner repair business alluded to those news briefs, aka A-1 Vacuum, is alive and well and operating at 666 University Avenue.

Pizza parlor dispute in hands of City Council

The dispute over a pizza parlor on Snelling Avenue is still in the hands of the St. Paul City Council. The council continued a public hearing November 15 on Fred Macalus Jr's request to open the pizza parlor in a former consignment shop at 735 N. Snelling Av. But at the applicant's request, the hearing was continued again until Wednesday, December 6. By that time Macalus may have found other off-street parking elsewhere and may not need a variance at all.

Four people addressed the City Council November 15, two in support and two in opposition. Some neighborhood residents are arguing that the community needs more variety in its restaurant offerings and that a pizza parlor would provide a place they could walk to.

But opponents continue to raise parking and procedural arguments. They have tried to argue that the appeal was filed too late, a point the St. Paul City Attorney's Office has researched and found not to be relevant in this matter.

A restaurant of the size and



The dispute over a pizza parlor on Snelling Avenue is still in the hands of the St. Paul City Council.

type proposed by Macalus needs 18 off-street spaces. The previous retail uses required 10 spaces, so the variance is 8 spaces. The building has just four to six spaces behind it but the Hagen family, his landlord, and Macalus said they would lease space from Hamline Hardware to the north.

City staff recommended approval of the variances on the condition that the restaurant owners and landlord lease space from Hamline Hardware or find another parking lot within 300 feet. Another condition limits restaurant hours from 4-11 p.m. The request is actually considered a minor variance because of its size and potential impacts. But the Board of Zoning Appeals voted this fall to deny the variance, prompting the appeal to the City Council.

City Council approves plans for Dubliner

If you got your fill of Christmas music and merchandise in the stores before Thanksgiving, how about making your St. Patrick's Day plans instead? The St. Paul

City Council unanimously approved a sound level variance November 15 for the Dubliner Pub, 2162 University Av. The variance covers the hours of noon-midnight March 16-17, 2007.

The Dubliner's request is the first of what is typically a slew of St. Patrick's Day noise level variances for outdoor parties and events. It is the holiday that draws the most noise variance requests in St. Paul.

The city has a noise ordinance that restricts levels of sound, especially at night. The ordinance can be applied to anything from a factory to a backyard party. If a bar-restaurant didn't obtain a variance to exceed noise its party could be shut down by police and licensing officials.

The Dubliner Pub typically erects a tent, provides live music and holds an outdoor party to mark the St. Patrick's Day holiday. But that requires a variance of the city's noise regulations. The Dubliner's parties have proved to be a point of controversy in the past between the pub and an adjacent hotel and restaurant. The neighboring business

owners have complained about noise and Dubliner patron behavior. They've also asked that the variance application be made earlier to give them time to weigh in.

No one appeared at the November 15 hearing to comment on the variance. The city has put several conditions on the noise variance in recent years to mitigate the problems, including directing speakers away from adjacent businesses, providing a minimum of 10 outdoor toilets, policing the property and holding the maximum noise level down to 95 decibels.

Troubled Iris Park site declared a nuisance

A troubled Iris Park dwelling has been again declared a nuisance building and will be the topic of upcoming public hearings if it isn't rehabilitated soon. The St. Paul City Council accepted the nuisance property determination for 1897 Feronia Av. November 15.

The residential building is owned by Woodbury resident Mahmood U. Hassan. In fall 2005 the property was also before the City Council to deal with building code violations. More time was given to make repairs but not all of the needed repairs have been made, triggering another inspection and the declaration of the building as a public nuisance. About two dozen code deficiencies were found in the recent inspection, including holes in the exterior of the house, a deteriorated roof and several problems with the heating and plumbing systems.

Repairs are to be made by late November. If not, the city's property code enforcement staff can start the abatement process to force removal or repair of the building.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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Episcopal Homes to start final expansion phase

By JANE MCCLURE

Years of expansion of the Episcopal Homes campus are coming to an end. The nonprofit senior housing corporation will soon start the final piece of its Iris Park campus expansion, with the \$9 million renovation of its nursing home. That will end an ambitious project that has added many badly needed senior citizen housing units to the Midway area and transformed a once-blighted area into a point of neighborhood pride.

Episcopal President Marvin Plakut presented plans for renovation of its 45-year-old facility to Merriam Park Community Council November 8. The campus is bounded by University, Fairview, Feronia and Lynnhurst avenues. Episcopal Homes provides a range of senior housing options from nursing home care to independent living, including the Episcopal Church Home nursing home, Iris Park Commons, Cornelia House and Seabury building. The nursing home was founded 112 years ago.

Recently Episcopal Homes announced plans to build 50 more senior housing units as part of the Lexington Park development at Lexington Parkway and University Avenue.

Any additional housing will also have to be built at sites other than Iris Park, said Plakut. "All of our space has been used," he said. In recent years Episcopal Homes has built new apartments along University and Fairview. A center parking area, green space and fountain have also been added.

The \$9 million expansion requires no zoning changes or variances. The building will gain a three-story addition, which will match the existing building's materials and architecture. Work will start in the next few weeks and continue for 16 months. It's hoped the work will be completed in March 2008.

Most district council questions centered on project timelines and parking demand. Plakut said the project should have little impact on the adjacent Iris Park neighborhood. He said if there are neighborhood problems or concerns those will be addressed right away.

Most of the construction equipment will be north of the nursing home, near the center of the campus. That is where an addition to the nursing home will be built. Plakut said there won't be interference with traffic on neighborhood streets.

But the project will bring an increase in parking demand during construction. Episcopal Homes hopes to use parking north of University Avenue that is owned by Goodwill Industries, to accommodate construction workers.

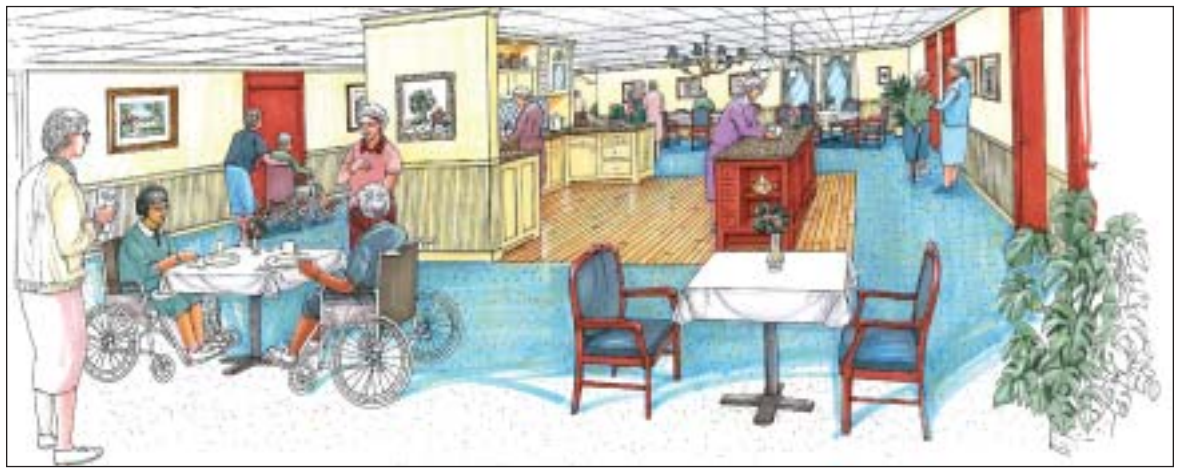
"Virtually everything will be upgraded in our facility," Plakut said. The renovation will create all private rooms, add more private bathrooms, expand the capacity of the transitional care center, create space for a memory care area and add two inner courtyards. Memory care unit residents will have a rooftop garden as well.

Most of the rooms will be single rooms, with the exception

of three couples' suite. The rooms will be arranged by "neighborhood," a concept that provides 15 to 20 residents' rooms with a shared kitchen, TV room and lounge with fireplace.

The nursing home currently houses 124 residents, but is licensed by the state for 131. Plakut said the renovation will allow the nursing home to be at its maximum capacity.

The existing dining spaces, arts and crafts areas, staff offices, gift shop, lounges and entryways will also be renovated. A sprinkler system will be added and the fire alarm system will also be up-



The Episcopal Homes renovation will create all private rooms, add more private bathrooms, expand the capacity of the transitional care center, create space for a memory care area and add two inner courtyards. Memory care unit residents will have a rooftop garden as well.

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Rock-Tenn paper recycling may land partnership with District Energy St. Paul

By JANE MCCLURE

The future of the Rock-Tenn paper recycling plant and its 500 jobs may be in the hands of District Energy St. Paul. A partnership between the Midway paper recycler and the downtown-based heating and cooling provider could result in a new power plant and energy source for Rock-Tenn and other West Midway industries. The partnership was announced at a November 14 community information meeting on Rock-Tenn's future.

More than 130 people attended the meeting at Langford Recreation Center to hear Rock-Tenn's plans and ask questions. District councils from Merriam Park, Hamline-Midway and St. Anthony Park, and the neighborhood association from Southeast Como in Minneapolis organized the meeting. The groups have joined together to form RTIN or Rock-Tenn Interested Neighborhoods.

While many questions centered on what types of emissions and air pollution various fuel sources would generate, there was also interest in the potential for a heating and cooling system that could tie into any redevelopment in the area. A new power plant would be near the planned Central Corridor light rail line and could tie into redevelopment that spins off of the rail project.

District Energy was chosen to partner with Rock-Tenn after the paper recycler discussed its long-term energy needs with several companies, said Rock-Tenn Plant Manager Jack Greenshields. District Energy will work with Rock-Tenn, the community groups and other interested parties to form a community advisory committee to work on issues related to power plant conversion. A task force will be set up, possibly as early as December.

Greenshields said no decisions have been made on a long-term fuel source for Rock-Tenn. One source of confusion may be that the existing Rock-Tenn on-site power plant is in the midst



The future of the Rock-Tenn paper recycling plant and its 500 jobs may be in the hands of District Energy St. Paul. A partnership between the Midway paper recycler and the downtown-based heating and cooling provider could result in a new power plant and energy source for Rock-Tenn and other West Midway industries.

of a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) review and has a hearing on that permit December 7.

District Energy would own and operate a West Midway power plant, if one is built. Currently District Energy burns clean wood to provide heating and cooling for a large area that includes most of downtown St. Paul and extends north of the state capitol. The non-profit power company provides about 80 percent of the energy needed in downtown St. Paul.

If a West Midway plant is built, it would not be located on Rock-Tenn's property but would be located nearby. Anders Rydekker, president of District Energy, said the plant would be similar in size to the downtown

plant, which is adjacent to the Science Museum of Minnesota.

"We're going to come in and look at all of the options," Rydekker said. One benefit of using clean wood and other forms of biomass that he cites is that the prices remain very stable, as compared to energy costs based on fossil fuels. "We're not in the business of providing fossil fuel-based energy," Rydekker said.

Without a permanent energy solution, Rock-Tenn would have to close down. The company has recycled paper here since 1908 and recycles about 1,000 tons of paper per day.

The factory will lose its steam line and steam power in mid-2007 when the coal-fired Xcel Energy High Bridge plant shuts down. The steam line runs

along the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks through area neighborhoods.

The new natural gas-fired High Bridge plant won't be able to generate steam. Rock-Tenn can burn fuel oil and natural gas at an older on-site power plant on an interim basis, but wants a more cost-effective energy source over the long term.

Some asked whether the existing power plant can be retrofitted to reduce emissions. But Rock-Tenn Environmental Manager Steve Haselman and Greenshields said that isn't financially feasible and has been rejected by the recycler's parent company. Adding more pollution controls would cost \$22 to \$33 million and would add \$4 to \$6 million in annual operating costs.

One option is a \$170 million garbage-burning facility, which would burn refuse-derived fuel or RDF. Rock-Tenn initially considered RDF but expanded its study to biomass after hearing objections to burning garbage. Burning garbage is very controversial as there is debate over whether emissions can be sufficiently cleaned up to be safe.

Building a new biomass or refuse-derived fuel plant could cost around \$200 million. The St. Paul Port Authority is studying construction funding options, which range from bonds to state and federal grants. Rock-Tenn could also try for state bonding bill funding, if the city, county or District Energy sponsor the funding request.

Burning biomass, in the form of clean wood or waste agricultural products, is one option on the table. Biomass could include trees, switch grass, silage waste from ethanol plants, wood waste from tree trimming, wood waste from manufacturing, or other sources. A study of biomass options, led by the Minneapolis-based Green Institute, is currently underway.

The potential need for more wood for a second District Energy plant has prompted another study. Much of the wood District Energy burns comes from Ramsey County's compost sites, some of which collect waste wood. Citizens can bring their sticks, branches and tree trunks to sites include the Midway site on Pierce Butler Route.

It's not likely more of that type of wood waste could be found in Ramsey County for Rock-Tenn's needs. "There's only so many trees in the metropolitan area and District Energy has their name on all of them," Greenshields said.

Ramsey County/St. Paul Public Health is currently studying other sources of waste wood, including an analysis of clean wood that is brought to the city's neighborhood cleanups. That study should be completed in March 2007.

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Carstarphen

Continued from page 1

many talents she brings to her job. She was previously the chief accountability officer for the public schools of Washington, D.C.

"It is really hard for people to do work around federal and state accountability," Carstarphen said.

"I have strength in working around testing and assessment, and strength in managing complicated urban school settings. I have been specifically trained in that," Carstarphen said she brings an urgency and focus to serve all children in the public school system. "I did not know that was something special," she said, "but I realize now it is."

Besides working in adminis-

trative positions in Tennessee and Ohio, Carstarphen spent time doing research and photography for the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C.

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No child gets a pass, regardless of race or economic level."

- St. Paul Superintendent Meria Carstarphen

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Episcopal expansion

Continued from page 3

dated. All windows will be replaced, and heating and cooling

systems and electrical systems will be updated as well.

The expansion will add about 20,000 square feet to the facilities.

Most of the financing for the project is being provided through a bond issue. Episcopal Homes has obtained final approval for



Superintendent Carstarphen says that if she feels a need for energy, she goes to a kindergarten classroom to dance and play. (Photo by Terry Faust)

girls about getting back in school. She also does one-on-one mentoring.

"I'm a middle-grade teacher," she said, "and I love that early adolescence. I spend time talking to student leadership and getting feedback from them."

She said that if she feels a need for energy, she goes to a kindergarten classroom to dance and play.

Carstarphen said that regarding children and their learning ability, the factor that makes the biggest difference is the quality

of instruction students are receiving from their teachers.

"It is really important that our teachers know exactly where our kids are and their understanding," she said. "We need consistency around what we teach and we need to be clear about our standards."

Carstarphen said she thinks it is important that teachers have high expectations of all their students.

She also emphasized the importance of reading. She said St. Paul schools offer 30 minutes of independent reading per day. She

said children read from a book that is just right for them, increasing their vocabulary and pace of reading.

"No child gets a pass, regardless of race or economic level," she said.

Carstarphen added that schools need to focus on math and science, as well as reading, to stay competitive.

"Minnesota alone needs 4,000 graduates to perform jobs in science and technology," she said. "We can't ignore any grade level."

Carstarphen is also working on her own education in the game of hockey. She said she finds herself more fascinated by the process of how the game gets started than the playing of the game itself.

"It's an art, a beautiful process with a solid foundation," she said. "Like the St. Paul public schools."

When she arrived here, outgoing school superintendent Pat Harvey offered some words of advice, not on running the school, but on being herself.

Harvey told Carstarphen to remember who she is and the things she values.

"She said what I would have expected," Carstarphen said. "We are in the business of people. We are producing future citizens who have to make tough decisions throughout their lives."

up to \$8.425 million in financing for remodeling and expansion of its facilities. The St. Paul City Council, acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Board, unanimously approved the conduit revenue bonds October 25.

The notes will be secured by

a mortgage on the nursing home and there will be no lien, charge or encumbrance on the City of St. Paul. Episcopal Homes has its campus at Fairview and University avenues in the Merriam Park neighborhood.

The city routinely issues conduit revenue bonds to nonprofit

entities. The organizations receiving the financing must meet a number of conditions, including work with the city's program of hiring women and minority contractors, meeting federal labor standards and using sustainable development practices in the project.

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Como Elementary students take honors in Big River Art Contest

By DEBORAH BROTZ

When Como Park Elementary students Yeng Moua and Hnub Yang went on their fifth-grade field trip to the Mississippi River and rode on the Padelford Boat last spring, they just couldn't stop thinking about what they saw. So, when it came time to make a poster about the river, they both knew just what they wanted to draw.

Moua and Yang were two of 10 St. Paul Public School students who were winners in the 2006 Big River Art Contest. Moua received honorary mention in the Mighty Mississippi theme category, while Yang was a winner in the Big River Journey theme category. Adia Vega, from Chelsea Heights Elementary, was a fourth-grade winner in the Caring for the River theme.

"It was great," said Nancy Stachel, Como Park Elementary principal. "It's fun for the kids to be recognized. They spend a lot of time learning about the river, which fits with Como Community Connections. They do a lot of environmental science."

Seventeen winning pieces of art were chosen from over 700 entries submitted by fourth-through sixth-grade students. The Big River Art Contest is part of the award winning program, Big River Journey. Both programs are coordinated by the Mississippi Na-

tional River and Recreation Area of the National Park Service (NPS). Throughout the school year, thousands of fourth- to sixth-grade students in the Twin Cities area are connected to the science and heritage of the Mississippi River through Big River Journey and the Big River Art Contest. Students' learning about the river is reflected in the art contest's three themes: Mighty Mississippi, Big River Journey, and Caring for the River.

The winning student art will be on display at the Science Museum of Minnesota in the Mississippi River Gallery starting Nov. 16.

Moua, 12, who came from Thailand a year ago, drew his poster, which consisted of the Mississippi River with a type of rainbow fish swimming in it and a beaver standing on a tree branch surrounded with trees and mountains, in colored pencils.

"I thought in my mind what I wanted to draw," he said. "It just kind of flowed freely as I did the big picture and then I concentrated on the details."

Moua, who is very shy and smiles a lot, was excited to enter the art contest.

"I wanted to compete with other artists and to see if my art was as good as the rest," he said.

Receiving honorable mention was thrilling for Moua.

"I was happy when I found out I was a winner," he said.

As a winning artist, Moua was recently recognized at a reception at the Science Museum of Minnesota on Nov. 16. He received a certificate from acting Park Superintendent Steve Johnson and also had to speak about his art, which was hard for him because he knows just a little bit of English.

"It was embarrassing," said Moua. "There were a lot of people so I got embarrassed."

Yang, 12, drew a cormorant, a bird that eats fish, standing on a rock; the Mississippi River; the high bridge; with trees along the side; in pastels.

Yang got the idea for her poster from the bird she saw from the paddle wheel boat.

"I printed the bird's picture from the computer," she said. "The teacher helped me. She told me to draw the river and to put the bird standing on something. It was difficult for me, but I got it done."

Since everybody in class entered the contest, Yang was surprised she was a winner.

"I was shocked," she said. "I was lucky because the judge chose my picture."

Speaking at the Science Museum awards ceremony was also difficult for Yang.

"It was embarrassing, but I



Dr. Meria Carstarphen looks over Como Elementary students Yeng Moua and his sister, Hnub Yang's award winning 2006 Big River Art Contest entries as 5th grade teacher Laurie Halvorson (L) and Como Elementary Principal Nancy Stachel look proudly on. Hnub was a winner in the Big River Category while Yeng Moua got an honorable mention in the Mighty Mississippi category. The event took place at the St. Paul Science Museum, November 15. (Photo by Terry Faust)

had a big smile," she said. "I told my story about how I was on a boat and saw the bird. Then, I started smiling, and I was happy."

Stachel feels it's important for students to be involved in the Big River Art Contest.

"The river is such an important part of life here in St. Paul," she said. "If you're looking at the science curriculum, the river is a key part of the community. It gives students the opportunity to experience success. For ELL (English Language Learners) who have difficulty expressing themselves because they have not mastered academic English yet, the

poster contest gives them the chance to express themselves in a medium that better matches their levels."

While the previous year Como Park Elementary had even more winners, Stachel hopes her students will continue to enter the Big River Art Contest.

"My hope is each year we'll have more winners," she said. "It's a great opportunity for the kids. It's a different way for them to express themselves. Some students are gifted artists."

This gives them a forum where those abilities are recognized."

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Ramsey County seeks funding from Legislature for light rail

By JANE MCCLURE

\$40 million in state dollars to assist with the planning and construction of the Central Corridor light rail transit project is a top priority for Ramsey County. The County Board, acting as the Regional Rail Authority, voted November 21 to seek funding for the project from the 2007 Minnesota Legislature.

But when and if light rail is built here, county commissioners are concerned that Ramsey County taxpayers not foot the lion's share of the operating and capital costs. Commissioners unanimously approved resolutions November 21 that call for state, regional and federal funding sources to cover more of the operating and capital costs for Central Corridor and all other transit projects.

Commissioner Janice Rettman indicated that concerns from constituents about the need to cover ongoing costs of central Corridor operations prompted her to bring the proposal forward. "I'm hearing from a lot of people who ques-

tion why Ramsey County property owners would have to pay so much of these costs, when the project is supposed to have a regional benefit," she said.

Central Corridor is an 11-mile light rail line that would connect downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul. Most of its route is along University Avenue in St. Paul.

The project, which is waiting to have its draft environmental impact statement approved by the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) has an estimated capital cost of \$932 million. Ramsey County's share of that is estimated at \$109 million.

State and regional officials have indicated that rail transit operating and maintenance costs should be funded in part with farebox revenues and in part with regional rail authority funds. The split would be 50:50.

Ramsey County's annual share of the operating and maintenance costs would be \$5.7 million, beginning in 2014. Those funds would come from property taxes.

Rettman's intent is that if the capital, operating and maintenance costs can be shifted, county taxpayers would see regional rail authority taxes reduced.

Other commissioners agree that the costs would be significant. "We need to get these costs off of the backs of Ramsey County taxpayers," said Regional Rail Authority Chair Rafael Ortega.

The Metro Transitways Development Board is asking state officials to limit regional rail authority contributions to transit projects to 10 percent of total capital costs. On the operating and maintenance costs, the transitways board is supporting a regional sales tax for transit funding. The transitways board is made up of elected officials from counties in the Twin Cities region.

The impacts of Central Corridor are already being seen by county property taxpayers. The need to set aside funding for Central Corridor preliminary engineering is pushing an 84.8 per-

cent property tax increase for the proposed 2007 Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority property tax levy. The county levied \$10,787,079 for rail in 2006 and a \$19,938,811 levy is proposed in 2007.

The proposed 2007 regional rail budget is \$19,167,198. While it is unusual to have a budget smaller than the levy itself, that reflects the uncertainty about how much will have to be spent on preliminary engineering.

Much of the additional funding in the proposed 2007 rail budget would go toward Ramsey County's share of Central Corridor preliminary engineering costs. That is the phase of the Central Corridor project in which technical details of project design, from station locations to on-street parking areas, are hammered out.

The \$40 million sought from the 2007 Minnesota Legislature would also go toward project engineering.

The 2007 Central Corridor request is one of eight transit

project requests supported by the transitways board. The Central Corridor request, which would help cover engineering costs, is the largest. The other Ramsey County request is for \$9 million for the proposal to convert the old Union Depot course into a downtown transit hub. The \$8 million would be used to help cover costs of engineering, property acquisition, construction, rehabilitation and environmental work.

Other projects the board is supporting include funding for transit lines throughout the region, including projects to St. Cloud, Hastings, Rush City and the southwest suburbs. The board is also bringing forward transit taxation and finance proposals, including a recommendation that the local government contributions to the capital costs of transitway projects should not exceed 10 percent.

Ramsey County requested \$50 million for Central Corridor from the 2006 Minnesota Legislature and was awarded \$7.8 million.

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Mischke part of 'Black Sheep Network'...

Well-known radio voice has new slot on the airwaves



Tommy Mischke posed with an old RCA mike before going on the air. His show touches the lives of his many loyal KSTP 1500 AM radio fans.

By JAN WILLMS

Although well-known talk show host and Midway resident Tommy Mischke has a new time slot on KSTP AM 1500, his radio presence hasn't changed.

Whether he is fielding calls from long-time fans, discussing oddities in the day's news or chatting with an overseas listener, Mischke offers the same unique broadcasting from noon to 2 p.m. that he provided when he worked the 9-11 p.m. shift.

When you are listening to Mischke, you conjure up an idea of radio as it must have been in its heyday, far from so many of the abrasive talk shows that spew across the airwaves today.

And Mischke realizes he is pretty much in a world by himself, as he broadcasts from what he calls the "Black Sheep Network."

"The Black Sheep Network was created to signify my outcast status at the station," Mischke said in a recent interview. "I was the lone non-conservative, non-political talk show host. I still am, pretty much."

Mischke's career in radio began in a rather haphazard way. He was in his early 20s, finishing up a journalism degree at the University of St. Thomas. He had plans to become a newspaper reporter. He was also driving a delivery van to earn some extra money.

Don Vogel had a comedic drive-time show on KSTP, and Mischke would call in, say his piece and hang up.

"I was a regular caller, and I became this character, the Phantom Caller," Mischke recalled. "I used a different name every time, and I would do mostly comedic bits in four or five different voices."

Vogel, whom Mischke described as a blind guy with a

great talent for mimicry and a little kid in a big man's body, decided to leave the Twin Cities for Chicago. For his farewell show, he brought Mischke on.

"I finally met him and said goodbye," Mischke said. "He had his last show in 1987 and went to Chicago for five years. When he returned to KSTP in 1992, I called him to see if I could do the Phantom Caller bit again. We went out for a drink and a meal together, and we grew to like each other. I eventually became his sidekick, and we were on the air together for 17 months."

Mischke said the pair had a classical break-up over clashing styles. "It was his show, and I got off," Mischke said.

KSTP called him to be a sidekick for a morning drive host, however, and he started that in November 1993. By June that host was let go, and Mischke was off the air again. The station then asked him to do late night on his own, and in June 1994 he began his 9-11 slot.

"I didn't develop my program consciously," Mischke said. "I had been taught the more you are yourself, the more you do what is in you, the better you are." He said the show is just him having fun, and he never really designed a specific format.

"The show became me," he said. "If people don't like your show, the chances are they don't like you either."

Mischke said he had been told at the beginning of his radio career that the average life expectancy for a show in the Twin Cities is about three years.

"I always expected to be fired and to do something else with my life," he said.

But for Mischke, who draws listeners of all ages and backgrounds, radio has clicked. He has done some unusual things

with his show that are typically considered taboo for radio, such as having periods of dead air.

He has brought listeners in to the studio to be guests on his show without any prior screening.

"Having people on the show doesn't backfire," he said. "Anybody who has lived a number of years has an interesting story to tell. Getting them to tell it is my job. Whether the caller is on for two minutes or two hours, you get them to tell their story."

He does recall getting in some trouble for one of his broadcasts.

"I didn't want to do the show one night, and so I asked if any listeners wanted to come in. About 20 people showed up, and I just left the studio. They had no responsibility to the station, and I did," he said.

"Was that great radio? No, but it was a great idea," he added.

Mischke has made random calls to Japan, speaking to whoever might answer the phone. He has also received calls from former Saint Paul residents, now living and working in other countries. One in particular tends to call when he has had a few.

Mischke seldom screens his calls, often picking up the phone himself. He takes the time to converse with anyone.

Although the station wants to appeal to the 29-54 year-old demographic, Mischke said he does not consider his callers for ratings.

He said he is not going to check the caller to see if he or she falls into a certain age group.

"I think the target audience can appreciate a 10-year-old or an 85-year-old caller," he said. "I get a kick out of the fact that little kids listen."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

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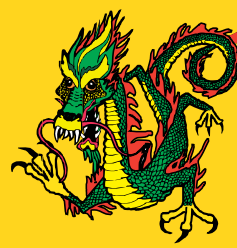
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The Bachelor

The colors are vibrant. The atmosphere is as festive as it can be. And the food? Well, it is a far cry from anything your great uncle Sven ever singed his taste buds on. But something about visiting a Caribbean restaurant on a nondescript stretch of University Avenue on a cold, colorless day in mid-November made me want to lay my giant head motionless on the table until, oh, I don't know, Memorial Day.

I mean, just imagine coming from a tropical paradise of bath-water-warm turquoise seas and playful spider monkeys who hand-feed you mango slices (just let me believe this one) and finding yourself in – Minnesota? What do you have to look forward to? Nine months of crunchy, black snow and Holidazzle? Yes, I understand that there are various compelling economic and social forces at play that cause people to emigrate from even the most utopian locales. But cold, hard reality and the determination to do whatever it takes to build a better life are two concepts I've never fully embraced. All I want is a hammock and a spider monkey butler.



Without Reservations

Tropical escape at University and Dale

Unlike myself, the folks at West Indies Soul are trouper who are determined to take lemons and make lemonade. Well, actually, I can't recall if they serve lemonade, but I do know they offer a satisfying dish of plantains, red beans and rice and a side of Caribbean cabbage. Pretty standard fare, I'm sure, for anyone from the islands. But for a pasty, lifelong Minnesotan it is a nice change of pace.

I've always been a big fan of fried plantains. The gooey, caramelized texture turns what is basically a plain ol' banana into a real treat. However, the red beans and rice that occupied a third of my plate lacked personality – a sauce with a bit of a kick could have easily remedied the situation and would have played nicely with the sweetness of the plan-

tains. But I was too despondent about the weather to stand up and walk the six steps to the counter to ask for sauce.

So for an authentic taste of the tropics, West Indies Soul is a great culinary tease. But if you wind up with your head laying

tised but I have rarely found them available.

On this visit, we sampled items from the regular menu – all pre-made and waiting to be dished up. I tried the jerk chicken (three pieces) on a bed of spiced rice and beans with a side of

So for an authentic taste of the tropics, West Indies Soul is a great culinary tease.

listlessly on the table, imagining that the clouds of chilled exhaust outside are actually a coconut-scented tropical breeze, just remind yourself that even Minnesota can conjure up a few pleasant days. You just have to wait until, oh, about mid-May.

The Food Snob

I've been an admirer of West Indies Soul for years. Precariously housed in various locations in St. Paul and Minneapolis, it was a triumph of determination for founder and owner Sharon Noel, a native of Trinidad. Now in two locations—the University Avenue storefront we visited and a stall in the Midtown Global Commons in Minneapolis—West Indies Soul seems to have achieved stability. And a fan base – a steady stream of customers came through the restaurant while we dawdled over our heaping plates.

I've visited the Minneapolis location several times recently, specifically for the Jamaican meat patties—vibrant yellow pies imported from New York and stuffed with spicy or mild beef. Chicken and vegetable fillings are adver-

touted by another customer. It was too warm to be iced and we couldn't wait the required half hour for it to cool.

On the next trip, I'll pick up three frozen meat patties to take home (only \$5) and enjoy the warmth of the Islands no matter how cold it is outside.

The Cheapskate

I usually get the rib platter at West Indies Soul, if I'm there on the days they have it on special, and I do recommend it. I too would have loved a generous dollop of dippin' sauce, but like the Bachelor, I was too lazy to get up and ask for it. Judging from the way I polished off the ribs, the lack must not have been too severe.

Here is my recommendation for all the cheapskates out there, for your first visit to West Indies Soul. Order a la carte, some combination of the following: Jamaican patties (\$2.85 each), rice and beans (\$2.85), fried plantains (\$2.95 per order), ribs if available (\$1.99 apiece), catfish (\$3.25), and jerk chicken. If you're there on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, try the Louisiana Gumbo with Rice (\$6) and let us know how it is. Oh ... and get several orders of extra sauce (25 cents each).

Contact us: withoutres@yahoo.com.
Read the blog: <http://withoutres.wordpress.com>

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In Our Community

Como High School presents 'Cinderella' Dec. 7

Como Park High School presents Rodger's and Hammerstein's Cinderella. Performances are Thursday, December 7th at 7 p.m., Friday and Saturday December 8 and 9 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, December 10th, at 2 p.m. A special DinnerTheatre package is available by advance reservation on Saturday, December 9. This package features dinner, a jazz combo and a chance to meet the cast as well as reserved seats for the performance. All other seats are general admission. Como Park Senior High School is located at 740 West Rose Avenue, 3 blocks west of Dale Street just off of Maryland and Grotto. General admission tickets are \$9 for adults and \$5 for students and seniors and are available at the door. For more information, please call 651-293-8800 ext. 1209.

Local scouts earn Eagle Scout Award Dec. 30

Three scouts, Jeff Anfang, James Coleman, and Robert Jameson have earned the highest advancement the BSA offers, the Eagle Scout Award.

They will be recognized in ceremonies on Saturday, December 30, at 5:45 p.m. This will be at St. Columba School, 1327 Lafond Avenue. These young men are part of approximately 4 percent who attain the rank of Eagle according to Scoutmaster Nick Denkinger.

Each candidate must earn a minimum of 21 merit badges and successfully complete a community service project. Jeff Anfang and James Coleman both worked on building and cleaning up bike trails for Afton State Park. Robert Jameson built a memorial garden arbor and bench for an Iraq war veteran at Cretin Derham Hall. They have all served in leadership positions and are excellent mentors for our younger scouts.

Free information sessions offered at St. Paul College

Attend a FREE "Start here" information session and tour the Saint Paul College.

"Start here" sessions introduce students to the programs at the College, inform them of the admission processes, financial aid, job outlook and other services. Spring Semester will be starting January 16th!

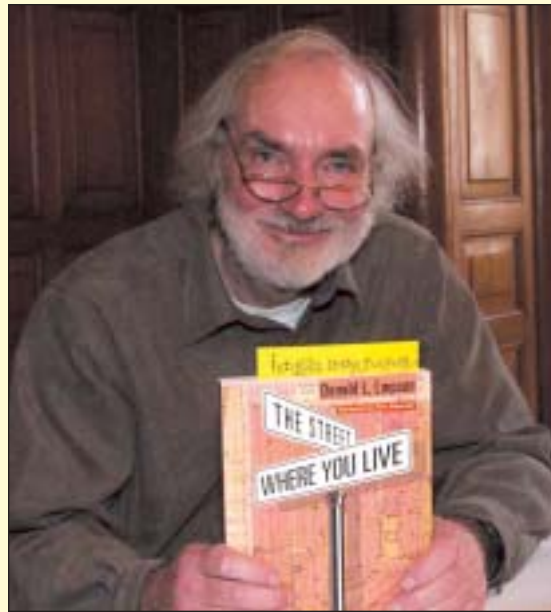
Sign up for a tour & information session by calling 651-846-1666 or go online to reserve a place

Author Empson speaks at Hamline Library Jan. 11

Hear the stories and explore the history of the Midway and our neighborhood's streets, parks, landmarks, and natural features with historian and author, Donald Empson on Thursday, January 11, 2007, 7-8:30 p.m., at Hamline Midway Branch Library Auditorium.

The Hamline Midway History Corps is excited to welcome Empson, author of *The Street Where You Live*, to the Hamline Midway neighborhood, and we hope you will join us for this opportunity as he draws on his extensive research that led to the new edition of *The Street Where You Live: A Guide to the Place Names of St. Paul*. Copies of his book will be available for sale.

The Hamline Midway History Corps Speaker Series is a free event held at the Hamline Midway Branch Library Auditorium (downstairs). The library is located at 1558 West Minnehaha Avenue, St. Paul. For more information about the Hamline Midway History Corps and upcoming events, see our website: <http://www.hamlinemidwayhistory.org>



Don Empson with a copy of *The Street Where You Live*. (Photo by Ellen Empson Photography)

at www.saintpaul.edu/starthere.

Attend one of these sessions: Tuesday, December 12, at 10 a.m.; Tuesday, December 19, at 10 a.m.; Wednesday, December 20, at 6 p.m.; Wednesday, January 3, 2007 at 6 p.m.

Tour of Hamline United Methodist December 9

Join us for a "Tour and History of Hamline United Methodist Church" on December 9, 2-4 p.m.

Learn the history of the Hamline United Methodist Church and explore its wonderful architecture with Mary Bakeman, historian and editor of the recently published *Casting Long Shadows: 125 Years at Hamline United Methodist Church*, and with the Church historian, Marguerite Pramann, and others.

Our afternoon will start with a presentation on the history of the Church, its design and construction, and its relationship to the people and neighborhood. The highlight of the tour will be the sanctuary with its stained glass windows, hand carved woodwork, and stonework designed and executed by Twin Cities artisans. Following the tour we will gather in the Church Commons for coffee, cookies, and socializing. Copies of *Casting Long Shadows* will also be available for purchase.

The Church is at 1514 Englewood Avenue, 2 blocks east of Snelling Ave. Please meet at the South entrance off the driveway behind the Church.

This free event is part of the Hamline Midway History Corps' ongoing series of meetings and events to share local history. Please join us for this exciting tour!

For more information about the History Corps see our web-

site: <http://www.hamlinemidwayhistory.org>

Aikido Studio opens on North Snelling

710 North Snelling is the new home of Aikido of Minnesota, a non-profit martial arts practice studio (dojo). Aikido of Minnesota was formerly renting space from the Midway YMCA.

Aikido—a Japanese word that literally means "the way of harmony and spirit"—is non-competitive. Self-defense techniques are practiced with part-

ners who take turns with each other.

Aikido of Minnesota opened Friday, December 1st. Adults of all ages are welcome. There are also children's classes. For more information, visit the dojo or see aikidominnesota.org, or call 651-291-2446.

Help a Child Learn to Read at the Library

The Saint Paul Public Library is looking for volunteer tutors for Read With Me, a literacy program offering free help with

reading and writing for first, second, and third graders. Tutors meet one on one with their students throughout the school year, allowing them to develop a close mentoring relationship. Tutors can choose to work at any branch

of the Saint Paul Public Library, and are especially needed at the new Rondo branch. Commitment is low: one hour per week in the late afternoon/evening or on weekends, and training is provided. For more information visit <http://www.sppl.org/families/read-with-me.html> or contact Annaka Larson at 651-266-7437 or annaka.larson@ci.stpaul.mn.us.

MOMS Club Seeks Members

Calling all at-home moms who live west of Lexington, north of Pierce Butler: Make some friends and have some fun! The St. Anthony Park/Como West Chapter of MOMS Club offers a calendar of daytime activities for mothers and their children, community service opportunities, and a monthly Mom's Night Out. MOMS Club is an international nonprofit organization that offers moral support for women who are home with their children full- or part-time. We are always looking for moms to join our group. For more information, please contact Tam at 651-646-2405.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

The Holiday Flower Show opens December 2

The season literally comes to life when hundreds of poinsettias are exhibited in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Sunken Garden's Holiday Flower Show, which runs December 2, 2006 through January 21, 2007.

The 2006 Holiday Flower show highlights over 13 different poinsettia varieties based in deep colors of red wines, accented by pink, peach and white along with deep purple-blue salvia. Some of the varieties featured are new to the market this season, including Prestige Maroon, Christmas Star Burgundy, and Silent Night Crimson Red. The rich colors pulled together create a brilliant contrast with the sleek white steel and beautiful stone of the Sunken Garden.

In July, when most gardeners are thinking about their summer plants, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Horticultural Staff began potting 500 small rooted cuttings in the Production Greenhouse.

The poinsettia is a native to Mexico and was cultivated by the Aztecs, long before the arrival of Europeans. During the 17th century a community of Franciscan priests found the bright red flowers blooming naturally on the slopes during the Season of Advent and they used it to adorn the Nativity Celebration. This custom soon became a tradition throughout Mexico. Today there are over 100 varieties of the plant and represent over 85% of all potted plant sales over the holiday season.

For reservations, call 651-487-8229.



The season literally comes to life when hundreds of poinsettias are exhibited in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Sunken Garden's Holiday Flower Show, which runs through January 21, 2007.

In Our Community

Continued from page 11
Como Park presents concert Dec. 14

Como Park High School Orchestra and Concert Band Concert, Thursday, December 14th at 7 p.m. Como Park Senior High School is located at 740 West Rose Avenue, St. Paul. 3 blocks west of Dale Street just off of Maryland and Grotto. Tickets are available at the door.

Job Corps kids give away Fair parking proceeds

Tubman Family Alliance, Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery, Make A Wish Foundation and the Sexual Violence Center all received donation checks on Monday, December 4 from the Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center. These will be awarded at assembly by the Student Government Association (SGA) at the Humphrey Job Corps Center. During the State Fair, Students raise funds by parking cars for 12 days and then donate the money to causes they've voted most worthy.

Hubert H Humphrey Job Corps Center provides the training and educational skills needed for long-term career success to students from all over Minnesota.

Learning to give back to their community is a life-long skill honed here. Join us if you can.

Conservatory Hosts a Holiday Afternoon Tea

Leave the cool weather outside and delight in an afternoon garden tea service surrounded by the majesty of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's gardens, including the Holiday Flower Show featuring over 900 poinsettias. The Holiday Tea Party will be held Monday, December 11, with two seatings one at 11 a.m. and one at 2 p.m.

Guests will dine on a five-course traditional tea service, as well as be taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the Conservatory and witness the Sunken Garden's Holiday Flower Show. The menu includes orange and cranberry scones, egg salad pinwheels, lemon tartlets and other more. This traditional tea service is hosted by volunteer Tea Ladies and the tea is provided by TeaSource.

Space is limited and reservations are required by calling 651-487-8233. Ticket prices are \$45 if purchased by December 1, \$50 after December 1, a portion of which is tax deductible.

Holiday Craft Boutique at St. Matthew's Church

2nd Annual Holiday Craft Boutique to benefit The Blue House orphanage for girls will be held December 9.

Robinson recognized for conservation achievements

Deb Robinson, "Neighborhood Naturalist" columnist, was recently recognized by the Ramsey Conservation District for her monthly column in the *Midway Como Monitor* and her other outstanding volunteer work.

In presenting the Media Public Awareness award to Robinson, Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman recalled how she had been so affected by one of Robinson's columns about a songbird made ill by moldy bird seed that she went out and bought all new feeders! Rettman also praised Robinson for not just writing about nature, but actively volunteering on projects to improve local natural areas. Robinson was also commended for her leadership on a new project, the "Como Park Woodland Restoration and Outdoor Classroom."

Certificates of appreciation and a gift certificate for a native plant of their choice from Outback Nursery in Hastings were also awarded to four other outstanding county residents. Greg Mackey of Mackey Construction was lauded by Commissioner Tony Bennett for his innovative erosion and sediment control practices on land under development in the City of North Oaks.

Ernest and Audrey Schroeder of Roseville were commended by Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt for their native vegetation shoreline restoration project on Lake Owasso. Judy Winiecki of White Bear Lake was also recognized by Commissioner Reinhardt for wetland and shore land habitat restoration efforts. The Clean Water Committee of the Sierra Club's North Star Chapter was praised by Commissioner Toni Carter for their "Green Community Campaign" and their display and educational

exhibit on water quality during Slice of Shore-view.

The other 85 guests who attended the recognition event on November 20 included volunteer rain gauge monitors as well as state and county agency officials and staff. The rain gauge volunteers were commended by Pete Boulay of the State Climatology Office of the DNR Division of Waters.

In recognizing the fifty volunteers in Ramsey County, Boulay provided a vivid history of rainfall monitoring and some of the big rainfall events in Minnesota. In closing, retiring District Supervisor Betty Cowie was recognized for her 20 years of service on the Ramsey Conservation District Board of Supervisors.



Dorothy Waltz, Chair Ramsey Conservation District Board of Supervisors, Deb Robinson, and Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman.

Handmade clothing, pampering items, dog products, food, Christmas ornaments, greeting cards, etc. White elephant table. Silent auction for

handmade quilt and altered book.

Tea/coffee and a sweet treat available for purchase. Sat., Dec. 9 from 9 to 5, Sun., Dec. 10 from

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.. St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 2136 Carter Avenue, two blocks off Como. For more info, call 651-387-8264.

Midway in a minute

Continued from page 2

The dwelling has triggered complaints in recent years from Iris Park neighbors, many of whom are rehabilitating the neighborhood's older homes. It's one of two properties on Feronia that the neighborhood has fo-

cused on over the past year. The other, the Crosby Block at Feronia and Prior avenues, is currently the focus of extensive rehabilitation efforts.

Residents prepare for first snow emergency

Snow flakes have already started flying so the city's first snow emergency may not be far be-

hind. The St. Paul City Council took actions in November to provide more space to tow "snowbird" vehicles to and to make it easier for persons whose vehicles are towed to pay fees and fines.

St. Paul declares a snow emergency when three or more inches of snow falls or when three or more inches of snow accumulates over a period of several days. The city announces snow

emergencies on its cable channel, on broadcast media and through a free phone call and email notification system. The public can visit www.stpaul.gov and sign up for the mail and/or phone notifications.

Or call 651-266-PLOW for information.

Every city street is either a night plow or day plow route. Night plow routes are posted with red and white signs. On

busier arterial streets there are signs on both sides of the street. These streets and one side of north-south residential streets are plowed between 9 p.m.-6 a.m.


Day plow routes, which have no signs, are plowed between 8 a.m.-5 p.m. These are east-west residential streets and the other half of the north-south streets that are night plow routes.

Vehicles left on the street can get a \$45 ticket. If the vehicles are towed, the first day's storage charge alone is more than \$160. That charge goes up \$15 for every day the vehicle remains in the impound lot.

The City Council has approved a change that allows the owner of a towed vehicle to pay all fees and fines at the impound lot. Previously the vehicle owner would pay the impound and storage fees at the lot, then go to the county's traffic violations bureau to pay the snow emergency parking ticket. Starting this winter the ticket charge can be paid at the same time the impound charges are paid.

The council also agreed to lease vacant property from the St. Paul Port Authority at the Southport Industrial Park, next to the police impound lot at barge Channel Road. Cost of the lease is \$8,000. This will provide more space for vehicles towed to this lot. The Barge Channel Road and a Como Avenue lot south of the Minnesota State Fairgrounds are the two lots used during snow emergencies.

- Compiled by Jane McClure



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Mischke

Continued from page 8

One of Mischke's most regular callers has been a retired undertaker in his 80s, who has been dubbed as Undertaker Fred. He calls in to talk about when his next Greek language group might be meeting, or he might sing a favorite old song. He even has his own theme music when he calls.

Mischke said some of the most interesting people calling in could be found in ordinary neighborhoods. "They can supercede the value of any author

more interesting for the listener," Mischke said. "The show feels more alive."

Mischke's radio performance over the years has drawn national attention, and not long ago he was tapped to syndicate his program. But depression, what he calls his Achilles' heel, intervened.

His bouts with clinical depression have sometimes taken him off the air for months.

"It was the death knell for national syndication," he said. "I have mixed feelings on that. My heartfelt take is that things happen the way they are supposed to happen, but there is always a



These days, he said he enjoys getting up and preparing for his noontime show. He spends about five hours of prep, working at an old typewriter and cutting out news stories, features and odd little bits that he will use on his show.

Although changing time slots shakes things up in radio, and some of his listeners are upset with his new schedule, he said he was getting bored with the late night and, more recently, early evening gig.

"I really like this time slot," he said. "Before, the show was waiting for me at the end of the day, and I never really found any way to neatly and concisely prepare for it."

Mischke also emphasized his love of the area he lives and works in.

"I work on University Avenue, and I live near Hamline University," he said. "I love the eclectic feel of this neighborhood, its nooks and crannies and odd little businesses with a mix of people."

As for his show, he said he decided a long time ago that he couldn't think of another job that utilizes all his talents at once the way this one does.

"If I could, I would pursue it," he said. "This is as close to a perfect job as exists for me."

And whatever time slot he finds himself in, he plans to keep his talk show unpredictable.

"You want radio that's teetering on the edge," he said.

"If I can take my recording equipment outside, it is so much more interesting for the listener."

you might have on," he said.

Mischke does have occasional theme shows, also. He did a special on the anniversary of the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, but not in a normal way. He put all his questions for that interview in the form of a song. He also went down to the Delta and interviewed many of the older Blues singers.

"If I can take my recording equipment outside, it is so much

sense of what might have become of that."

Mischke said he has tried all sorts of things to deal with the depression, which has affected him since childhood, but he has found no magic bullet. He said a bout can be tripped by stress or a series of stressful circumstances, but the jury is still out on the actual cause.

He has talked about his bat-

tles with depression on air and has offered a gentle voice of understanding for callers who suffer from some form of the disease.

Mischke has called radio a

reclusive medium, and he said he has gotten used to working alone. He is also a musician, but prefers recording to performing live.

Next deadline: Jan. 2



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THE LEADER IN IMPROVING OUR URBAN COMMUNITY

Midway Rainbow Foods undergoing major remodeling

By DEBORAH BROTZ

If you haven't been grocery shopping at the Midway Rainbow Foods store in awhile, you'll be pleasantly surprised the next time you stop in. The store, located at 1566 University Ave. W., is being remodeled and has a fresh, new look.

"They're not holding back anything on the remodel from the roof to the brand-new store tiles and lighting and heating," said Guy Price, outgoing Rainbow Foods Midway store manager. (Price just relocated to the Larpenteur Avenue Rainbow.) "They're really doing it right. It will last for another 15 years."

The inside of the store looks completely different.

"The store has all new cases, all new coolers, a new compressor room, new heating and air-conditioning, a new roof, and a new fascia to the front of the store," said Price. "It will look like the rest of Midway Center. It's going to tie in to the same decor package that is on the other stores."

The bakery end of the store now has some natural light.

"They've added three new windows to the front of the store," said Price. "That whole one side of the store was always dark."

Another big plus for the store is the new restrooms, located at the front of the store behind the registers.

"The very best thing they did was to put new restrooms in the store," said Price. "There are three stalls for women and three facilities for men. It was really



If you haven't been grocery shopping at the Midway Rainbow Foods store in awhile, you'll be pleasantly surprised the next time you stop in. The store, located at 1566 University Ave. W., is being remodeled and has a fresh, new look.

lacking at this store. The new restrooms are all tiled and stainless steel."

The store is being remodeled for several reasons.

"We want to make a better shopping experience for our customers," said Price. "Roundy's is updating the stores in general. The facility is aged and hasn't been remodeled in a long time. Everything in the store is basi-

cally new."

With the new SuperTarget coming to the Midway, Roundy's needed to remodel the store in order to stay competitive.

"Competition is coming to the area with Target opening in 2007," said Price. "We want to prove we're a better operator than they are. If they have a brand-new store and we had an old facility, we can't compete."

Price believes a new SuperTarget in the Midway will affect Rainbow.

"It will impact us, but I don't know how much," he said. "People will try it out to see how they handle perishables. We'll just have to be a better merchandiser and have fresher products, and then we'll keep our customers."

By remodeling the store,

Roundy's is showing its commitment to the area.

"They want to stay in the area," said Price. "There's always good business in the store."

The biggest thing about remodeling is that everything changes.

"Everything is relocated," said Price. "It's a different layout than what we had in the past. It's a nice new layout and it's customer friendly."

Guaranty Bank has been added to the store. A grand opening for the store has not been scheduled yet.

"This is a 13-week remodel," said Price. "It's an aggressive schedule. Everything is right on target. We have a brand-new produce section in the front, a new deli in the back, and a new line of ethnic foods. As you leave produce, bulk foods is on the wall, and ethnic is on shelves in the middle of the aisle. We have quite a diversified shopping crowd. We want to meet their needs."

Price believes Rainbow knows how to give customers what they want.

"The secret to the grocery business is to keep the shelves full so customers don't have to go somewhere else to pick up what they need," he said. "What we try to do is do our share of the market and give people a good shopping experience. People like stuff fresh."

Another change is that now Rainbow has moved all the natural foods to the aisles.

"They're grouped together on a rounded shelf, but they're in with the regular grocery aisle product," said Price. "People might want to try it. Natural food is a big seller these days."

Roundy's has also added some speed zones or self-checkouts.

"This helps people to get in and out of here," said Price. "They can add more if they're successful."

The store remodeling is important for a number of reasons.

"The customer deserves a nice place to shop," said Price. "The store was tired. It needed new shelves and a new compressor. They updated other stores in the area. They just completed West St. Paul, and Woodbury is remodeled. They're working on Maplewood. Finally, it was our turn."

Hopefully, every Rainbow store will have a turn to be remodeled.

"They plan on remodeling most Rainbow stores to bring them up-to-date," said Price. "It's important to let the neighborhood know we're going to stay here. We're not going anywhere."

Price hopes the remodeled store will give people a much different shopping experience than they've had in the past.

"I think our business will increase," he said. "It will definitely be a beautiful store when it gets done. Everybody likes to shop and go to some place that's new. No corners were cut on this remodel. It's a real nice facility here."

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Next deadline: January 2

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As I write this column on the day after Thanksgiving, I'm sitting comfortably outside in green grass. I hear kids playing basketball in a neighbor's driveway and I can hear noisy motorcycles cruising down Arlington Avenue. But I'm not fooled by this unseasonable warm weather; I know what lie ahead.

December brings ice, snow, cold, and the biggest challenge of the season: holiday shopping. Modern humans like us aren't well adapted to this northern climate and we end up spending most of the dark winter months indoors. However, there are ways to hone a naturalist's skills, keep cabin fever at bay, and stuff the stockings of the nature-lovers on our holiday shopping list.

The gifts that give the most pleasure are nature's gifts. (But it's not easy finding a gift like a paperwasp's nest, and how would you gift-wrap one anyway?) In my opinion, the next best gift choice is a nature book. And a bird book with an audio component is even better.

Nearly all bird books include at least a few pages about bird vocalizations and give tips to learn how to identify birds by ear. When tree foliage conceals the singers, or when the bird-watcher has limited vision, learning to identify birds by their vocalizations is a practical solution.

In Sibley's *Birding Basics*, Sibley writes about how to tune into the subtle characteristics of birds' songs and calls. Training yourself to listen for the song's pitch, quality, and rhythm can lift you to a whole new level of appreciation.

Author and artist, David Sibley, explains the shorthand



Neighborhood Naturalist

By DEB ROBINSON

Give the nature-lover on your list the gift of birdsong

method for drawing sonograms (visual representation of song) while out in the field. He also explains how to use vowel sounds to depict pitch. *Birding Basics* has a stocking-stuffer size and price at \$15.95 (Borders Books). But only one of the book's sixteen chapters is about birdsong and there is no accompanying audio CD.

The sheer numbers of birds in our Eastern region can intimidate the first-time birder. Focusing on local birds narrows down the field. *Birds of Minnesota Field Guide*, by local author Stan Tekiela, is a pocket-sized book. On the book's companion audio CD, Tekiela offers the listener mnemonics, which help beginners remember the rhythms of some birds' songs. A familiar example of a mnemonic would be the phrase that mimics the barred owl's voice, "Who-cooks-for-you? Who-cooks-for-you-all?"

Different birding guides are organized in different ways: by bird family, by bird habitat, even by the shapes of bird bills. In *Birds of Minnesota*, Tekiela simply uses the bird's color as the primary feature to finding the right bird quickly. And each bird has a range map conveniently printed on the same page with the bird. The CD and book are available separately for \$14.95



Illustration by Deb Robinson

each or as a set with case for \$31.95 (Garden Safari Gifts in the McNeely Conservatory).

Songs of Wild Birds, by Lang Elliott, is a new book this year that includes a CD. Like Stan Tekiela, Lang Elliott does most of his own photography and sound recordings. But Elliott's bird book is full-size with 50 birds from the entire Eastern region, including the soulful snores of the Atlantic puffin (a bird you're not likely to find in Minnesota).

Elliott's book has no obvious organization and no range maps. However, there is a wealth of personal anecdotes and facts in his essays. One interesting detail I learned from Elliott is that the thumping noises that ruffed grouse make with their wings are mini sonic booms (not chest pounding). This book also features sonograms from the recordings of each bird. The *Songs of Wild Birds* book with CD costs \$19.95 (Micawber's Books at

Carter and Como Avenues).

Birds in Song, by Les Beletsky, is the latest large-format bird book that features sound. The bird songs are stored on a digital audio player, not a CD. All 250 of the recordings come from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology including a very rare recording of an ivory-billed woodpecker. This bird book is no field guide; it's a lap-crusher with a price to match at \$45.00 (Border's Books and Barnes & Nobles Booksellers). Because of its price, I only tried the book out at the store, so I can't comment on the writing, but it's beautifully illustrated by four artists.

Not all creatures that sing are birds—some are amphibians. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Minnesota Field Guide*, another Stan Tekiela book, is available as a set with a CD of frog and toad songs for a modest \$14.95 (Barnes & Noble Booksellers). Knowing the voices of Minnesota's amphibians is probably the best way to identify them considering how seldom we see these little cold-blooded herps. Besides featuring the 14 individual calls of each Minnesota frog and toad, the CD has mixed chorus recordings, which can help you practice your identification skills. But you can always just listen with closed eyes and you'll be gently transported from December to a warm night in June.

Endnotes: Two more gift ideas for the naturalist: a membership in St. Paul Audubon Society: www.saintpaulaudubon.net, or a Como Park Zoo and Conservatory Education class: www.comozooconservatory.org *To contact this writer: dmrobinson@bitstream.net

Season's greetings
from Hamline University

*May your heart and home
be filled with the joys of
family and friendship
during this holiday season.*

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