



Achievement gap growing

Half of SPPS students failed a class during first quarter, and Students of Color are more than twice as likely to fail a class

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

The first quarter grades for this year are in for St. Paul Public School students, and it appears that racial disparities are growing worse with distance learning.

In 2019, Minnesota ranked 50th when it came to racial disparities in high school graduation rates. Nearly half of all St. Paul Public School students (grades 6-12) failed a class in the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year. Failing grades are two and a half times more common than last year, and Students of Color are more than twice as likely to be failing a class as their White counterparts.

This information was presented to the St. Paul School Board in a virtual public meeting on Dec. 15, 2020, in data broken down by racial and ethnic groups.

The numbers paint a picture of how students are struggling with the dual pressures of distance learning amid COVID-19. Students of Color, who make up 80% of the district's student population, are disproportionately affected.

School board member Jessica Kopp said, "School, as we've known it, hasn't worked for a lot of kids for a long time. There are so many things that we do a certain way, for no reason other than that's how we've always done them. From students, from parents, and from colleagues, I'm hearing that this is the time to finally start looking at doing things differently."

ACHIEVEMENT GAP >> 11



Student Engagement and Advisory Board Member Kalid Ali said, "I take every opportunity that comes my way as if it were the last one, for the betterment of myself and for others." (Photo submitted)

New kind of policing: Community Outreach & Stabilization Unit



St. Paul COAST Unit members include (left to right) officer Lori Goulet, social worker Sally Vanerstrom, and officer Jen Hale. They respond to mental health calls, as well other crises. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Police officers, social workers ride together on crisis calls

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

While communities everywhere are calling for a changed model of policing, a small unit within the Saint Paul Police Department has been taking a different approach for almost three years.

In March of 2018, the Saint Paul Police Department piloted a new unit dedicated to mental health crisis calls. The Mental Health Unit was made up of three officers, a

supervisor, and two licensed clinical social workers.

A year later, the unit was renamed COAST (Community Outreach & Stabilization Unit), and its range of services expanded to include chemical health and homelessness, as well as mental health. The COAST unit has now grown to six officers, a supervisor, three licensed clinical social workers, and one licensed alcohol and drug counselor.

Mental health calls rising

As COVID-19 and social unrest have unraveled communities in the last year, the volume of mental health calls to St. Paul 911 has grown.

Increased COAST staffing allows the unit to respond to calls involving people in crisis, make referrals to community mental health partners, and conduct follow-up visits to ensure continuity.

CRISIS CALLS >> 11

KEYSTONE EXPANDS

Food resources strained by higher needs, new site will provide more space

By JANE McCLURE

Soaring demand for food has strained Keystone Community Services' food shelves, including its longtime space at 1916 University Ave.

A new community food site, which will house an expanded food shelf, is eyed for 1790-1800 University Ave. Mary McKeown, CEO of Keystone Community Services, presented initial plans to Union Park District Council's land use committee Dec. 21, 2020. Keystone closed on the properties at year's end.

Keystone's move would be another change for the University-Fairview area. In December buildings at the intersection's northwest corner came down, including longtime stores and a former service station turned restaurant and later retail store. Those made way for an affordable housing project led by developer Reuter Walton.

"2020 has been a very interesting and challenging year for us," said McKeown. Keystone is one of the region's largest providers of food, with a second food shelf on Rice St. The nonprofit also hosted 21 "drive-through" food giveaways last year at local

KEYSTONE EXPANDS >> 6

North Star Ski Touring Club embraces silent sports

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

To a cross country skier, there are few sounds more magical than the swoosh of their skis on a freshly groomed trail – and Minnesota has no shortage of these.

According to Gail Lundeen Brand, members of the North Star Ski Touring Club (NSSTC) have joyfully skied every inch of the Midwest's trails and beyond. Brand is a board member of NSSTC, a ski club which started in 1967. Back then, skis were made of wood; the bottoms were treated with pine tar every fall, and scraped to a smooth finish

before the season began. That was a long time ago.

These days, the equipment has changed but the attraction to the sport has not. For people who love being active in winter (in a quiet, un-motorized way), cross country skiing is still as good as it gets.

Brand said, "The health and wellness advantages of cross country skiing include improving coordination, heart health, muscle strength, endurance, and balance. In addition, it's a great way to visit places you've never been before – and there's the potential for making life-long friends."

NSSTC welcomes skate skiers and classic skiers of all ages and experience levels from beginning to expert. Two years ago, the volunteer-led club decided it was important to offer a mentoring program for beginning adult skiers who have completed at least one formal lesson somewhere.

There will be no mentoring meet-ups until COVID-19 lessens, but anyone interested can still go the website at www.north-stars.org to get the process rolling. It's a good time to connect with a men-

SKI TOURING CLUB >> 6



Linda Grieme (left) and Gregg Kelley (right) have been members of the NSSTC for decades. They're drawn to others who love and value silent sports. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)



Up close with local families juggling work and online schooling during pandemic

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Canine Inspired Change brings healing through three deep dog breaths

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Midway-Frogtown Exchange helps reduce waste, foster connections

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EDUCATION

ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL

Meet Seng Fields and her family. She's a nurse at Abbott Northwestern who works four days a week, while her husband teaches for St. Paul Public Schools and has been home with their children. Maeve, age five, is a kindergartner at Chelsea Heights. Ava, age 13, is an eighth grader at Murray Middle School.

What's the biggest change for you this school year?

Children are not receiving instruction in person and miss socializing with peers.

What's the hardest part as a student?

Distance learning with instruction exclusively on screens isn't very engaging. I find that my teenager tends to do her school work from couch/bed and may sometimes find her "resting her eyes."

What's the best part?

Being home relieves the stress of the morning push to get out the door and to the school sites – and coordination between my husband and I regarding who picks up which kid from where and at what time.

What's going right for you this year?

We were able to spend more time with one another this year. Pre-pandemic we were a pretty busy family with both parents working and with both girls involved in multiple sports programs.

What are you and your family



Seng Fields and her family. (Photo submitted)

doing for your mental health?

We got husky puppies – although that has challenges in itself!

What tips do you have?

Be patient. Although it is nice to be able to spend more time together it is not always easy. Find ways to get outdoors, explore new hobbies and interests.

How do you think this will change you for the long-term?

Some interesting memories and appreciation whenever we can get back to a normal routine. Also, appreciation for the opportunities and privileges our family has during this challenging time.

UP CLOSE
WITH LOCAL
FAMILIES

*Juggling work
and online
schooling during
pandemic*

Compiled by Tesha M. Christensen

ELEMENTARY TO HIGH SCHOOL

Rodrigo Sanchez-Chavarria balances the needs of seven people in his house. Both he and his wife, Nubia Esparza, work from home, and he goes in for a few hours on Fridays at his University of Minnesota job as office manager of three departments. Daughter Isabelle (age 16) is a junior at Como Park Senior High School. Giselle (age 14) is a ninth grader at Highland Park Middle School. Santiago (age 9) is a fourth grader at Adams Spanish Immersion School. Rodrigo's inlaws, who are immunosuppressed, also live with them,



Rodrigo Sanchez-Chavarria with wife Nubia Esparza and children Isabelle, Giselle and Santiago Sanchez-Esparza. (Photo submitted)

which means they're careful about outside exposure.

What's the biggest change for you this school year?

Adapting to distance learning. When we went on lockdown, we hadn't been going to school because of the strike. Our expectations were just to survive last year. My wife and I are in a privileged situation. We can work from home and provide our children with technology and patience. There are a lot of kids we know that are struggling.

What's the hardest part as a student?

Not having a physical lo-

cation for them to go to changes their mindset. Your routines are off completely. There's a lot of having to corral your kid and motivate them to turn things in.

My high schooler is an extrovert. It's been a struggle for her.

Santiago is very routine-based. He needs the social interaction with his peers and teachers. There are good days when everything gets done at 2 p.m. and days when he gets really frustrated and has to take some time away.

What's the best part?

Being able to work from home makes me extremely accessible. I've gotten to spend a lot of time with my family and see what they're learning and engaged in.

My kids are in Dare to be Real which addresses racial inequities, and we've always been active in our community. They are Brown kids. They have to learn to navigate White spaces. All these things that have been going on lately have led to interesting discussions.

Doing more things together has been great.

What are you and your family doing for your mental health?

They take breaks during the day. We all went sledding yesterday for Giselle's 14th birthday with friends outside. We try to spend time together outside. I bought a used spin cycle bike the kids have been using. We watch TV together.

Giselle has always had an in-

UP CLOSE >> 3

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EDUCATION

Como High School students share glimpse into their senior year

Distance learning during the COVID pandemic has been challenging for students across the country at every grade level. Stories of low engagement and increasing failure rates have been widely reported in the news cycle.

But for motivated college-bound seniors who are balancing rigorous Advanced Placement coursework from home while also navigating the college application process, there is a unique sense of limbo.

Como's Class of 2021 has conducted their senior year entirely online, without the benefit of meeting teachers, counselors, or interacting with classmates. Finding motivation and manufacturing academic energy is tough.

Como senior Aidan Reynolds is a top student and talented tennis player. The Cougars captain lost a chance to play last spring, but hopes he'll have a senior season. In the meantime, he's trying to stay positive through distance learning.

"Staring at a screen each day has become monotonous and makes it difficult to stay on track.



Aidan Reynolds

It's made me appreciate being in-person for learning so much more," Reynolds said.

"I never expected my senior year to be like this. Though it's a small price to pay for safety, it's disappointing not to participate in decades-old school traditions and pep rallies. I appreciate the efforts made by the staff and student body to recover that sense of tradition virtually, but I think most of us are just concentrating on staying afloat."

Como senior Paola Guerrero Abrego



Paola Guerrero Abrego

Abrego carries a weighted GPA over 4.0 and is an aspiring artist. She shares the loss of personal connection caused by the pandemic.

"What I planned and expected got thrown out the window the moment we got closed off from school in March," Abrego said. "There's a lot of things that seniors were expecting to do this year, however with the pandemic, we won't be able to experience a 'normal' senior year."

"My focus has been split be-

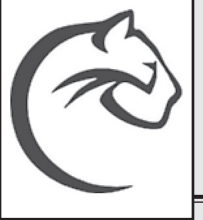


Hashi Abdulle

tween school and college. The college application experience is already hard, especially for those like me who are first-generation / new to the process. Most of us now have had to do everything alone, unsure of what we're doing and where to find help. While my counselor has been a huge help, there has been a lot that still confused me."

Como senior Hashi Abdulle has maintained his status on the "A" Honor Roll throughout distance learning, and has even

**Como
Park
Senior
High
School**



By **ERIC
ERICKSON**
Social studies teacher

found a silver lining. With fewer classes and more asynchronous learning, he's had to manage time differently.

"I feel I've already had the chance to experience what it will be like to be a college student, to be responsible for your time," Abdulle said. "I'm glad that I managed to tackle college applications and the FAFSA early on which has saved me from some anxiety."

Finishing college applications can feel good. Being confident about choosing the "right" school can be another stressor, especially when it's sight unseen. The Class of 2021's college visits have also been virtual. Let's hope that one day their classes won't be.

UP CLOSE

>> from 2

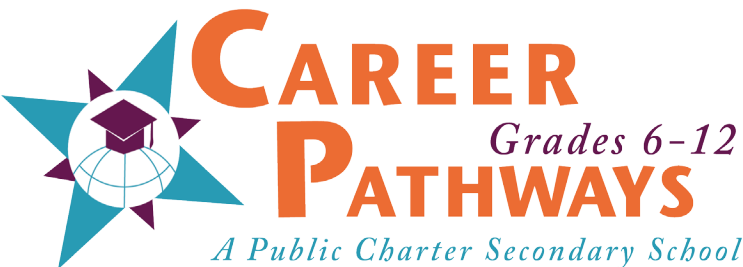
tuition for music, and now she's picked up the guitar. We are feeding their creativity as much as we can.

What tips do you have?

Enjoy the relationships. Enjoy all the time you're together. Sometimes being with family can be good and also frustrating

and exhausting. Know when to take a break. If you have a series of books to work on, do that. Work on creative things. Live day to day in a sense. No one has written a book on how to deal with a pandemic. Know you don't need to have all the answers. But be there for yourself and others. The most important thing is to show up.

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Happy New Year from Hamline University!

As we move into 2021, Hamline University wishes all community members a year of growth, learning, and healing from the stresses of the past year.

Connect with us to see what we're planning this year:



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Monitor Deadlines 2021

Publication typically second Thursday.	Deadlines typically last or first Monday.
Publication date	Deadline date
Jan. 14	Jan. 4
Feb. 11	Feb. 1
March 11	March 1
April 15	April 5
May 13	May 3
June 10	May 28 (Friday)
July 15	July 2 (Friday)
Aug. 12	Aug. 2
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Supporting local with 2021 Midway Chamber Directory

For longtime Midway residents, you may notice every spring you receive a copy of the Midway Chamber directory with one of the regular issues of the *Monitor*. The directory lists all Midway Chamber members and highlights our events and programming. It also includes advertisements from businesses, schools, and nonprofits who support our community.

Years before I worked for the Midway Chamber, I remember getting the directory delivered to my house. I remember using it to find businesses I could sup-

port and saw it as a very localized version of the Yellow Pages. One year I made a New Year's resolution to try a new restaurant in my neighborhood each month (like most resolutions, don't ask me if I made it through the entire year). The directory was able to help me find new places, some I still order from.

One positive trend from this past year is the urge from many to buy and support locally owned stores and businesses. Unfortunately, this trend stems from the poor economy and the major hit so many small businesses

Building a stronger Midway

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



have dealt with due to the pandemic. I hope people continue to see the value in supporting local once the pandemic ends and the

economy (hopefully) bounces back. Now is the time to pay back all those local businesses who have sponsored youth teams and donated auction items to nonprofit auctions.

The advertisers in the directory help make its publication possible. With the directory going to nearly 20,000 households, as well as commercial spaces and Midway Chamber members, advertisers are in front of many neighbors. My hope is with the push to support local, and the fact so many residents are staying close to their homes,

our advertisers will see greater support than usual from readers who get the directory.

The 2020 directory was published early on in the pandemic, and it's hard to realize almost a year has gone by (if you started working from home in March you are around 300 days into your "home office"). But getting ready to publish another directory is a nice way to reconnect with neighbors and remind them of the many businesses, schools, and nonprofits who make us unique. I hope *Monitor* readers will enjoy the directory and resolve to use it to help them support local.

To advertise, contact Denis@MonitorSaintPaul.com.

This is what I'm focusing on

Happy New Year! My heart is with you as we all continue to make it work in the pandemic. I'm looking to 2021 with determination to recover and rebuild.

COVID has demonstrated even more clearly the deep inequalities that exist in our community and across the globe. In Midway, those impacts are further exacerbated by damage left from last summer's unrest and it's been heartening to see so many neighbors and community leaders partner with city staff to keep families, restaurants, breweries, beauty shops, coffee shops, and other neighborhood businesses afloat.

Our office is proud to support efforts like the Midway Investment Co-Op led by Hamline Midway Coalition and CEZ; Midway United Fund's early-stage efforts with HMC and Union Park District Council; We Love Midway relief fund and more. These efforts combined will help community invest in property, build community wealth, and shape the future of our neighborhood, and 2021 will be all about advancing that.

Another focus for our office has been supporting those experiencing homelessness. Thanks to strong partnership from Ramsey County and some recently added resources from the state, we now have all the beds we need to ensure everyone experiencing homelessness in St. Paul can have a safe place to sleep indoors. But helping folks in these encampments at Hamline Park, near 94 and Snelling, Iris Park, and across the city find the right indoor space for them takes careful and intentional work.

City staff and county outreach workers – and a tremendous amount of neighbors investing their own personal time and resources – are working with folks every day to help. Trying to stand up immediate

Ward 4 news

By MITRA JALALI
ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us



shelter and housing options is absolutely necessary and yet, at the same time, it does not solve the long-term challenges in our housing system that have created these challenges in the first place. While the city of St. Paul is working very hard with Ramsey County to address the gaps, we must do more and we can't do it alone.

Finally, I'm proud to be serving on a new mayoral commission to continue our work on community first public safety. The scope of the commission's work will be to examine a large swath of our 911 calls and what alternative strategies and personnel could be used to respond to them. In other cities, a tremendous amount of cost and demand for traditional police officers has been relieved by developing alternative response teams to handle substance abuse, mental health challenges, and other scenarios where social work and support are equally, if not more, fitting responses than men with guns on their hip. I appreciate Mayor Carter's leadership and partnership in shaping this commission and look forward to these recommendations informing our budget conversations next year.

Thank you for all the work you've all done to support one another through this difficult time. As always, if there is anything our team can do to help you, please reach out to us (ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us)!

Letters

We let insurrectionists walk away, yet arrest Line 3 peaceful protesters

To the Editor:

We all watched in horror this week as insurrectionists stormed the nation's Capitol. Many of us questioned why this was allowed. Many of us questioned why so many who violently interrupted Constitutional processes were allowed to walk away. Many of us have shared our voice that this is not what the United States should be and it must be changed.

Then a few short days later, peaceful protesters standing up against Line 3 have been handcuffed and arrested. Their crime, standing up against the well-funded, well-lobbied creation of a pipeline which will devastate the environment for future generations.

We here in Minnesota and in the country really need to get our priorities straight. Fast.

Sincerely,
Tom Lucy
Como Park

Will Bill McGuire donate to St. Paul Housing Trust Fund?

To the Editor:

I live four blocks from the new stadium. It's a beautiful structure; futuristic, sleek and a much more pleasant look than some of the stadiums across the river. One can't help but notice, however, new contrasts already developing in the area.

Four blocks away in Hamline Park a series of tents line the basketball courts. On the south

side of 94, another group of tents lay on a vacant lot. A burned out strip mall is a reminder that several local businesses were recently evicted from the area with little help from the landlords (one of which, mind you, is Bill McGuire, owner of the soccer team and stadium).

Bill McGuire's estimated net worth is \$999 million. Poverty in the area is at 16.9% and likely rising. Unemployment is 5.1% and likely rising. 46.2% of renters here are considered cost-burdened. And rent rose by an average of 10% in the last year. Inequality is rising with the buildup of the area.

While I love the soccer team, it is fair to ask the owner of Bill McGuire to help out residents going through hard times in St. Paul, as an offer of goodwill. We live in a time of economic hardship, a pandemic, and growing inequality and I suggest he could follow the lead of 900 cars at a Brainerd Dairy Queen and "Pay it Forward" in our community.

I implore Mr. McGuire to donate \$2 million to the St. Paul Housing Trust Fund, which would be used to build and retain affordable housing and provide housing assistance for those in need. A fairer St. Paul is a safer St. Paul, a more stable St. Paul. A more stable St. Paul is a better business climate for a man like Bill McGuire.

Stuart Orlowski

Mr. Ales why I volunteer, error in December paper

To the Editor:

I was mentioned in information in the December 2020 In Brief section with inaccurate

information. I was not spoken to in regards to this brief either. The brief was "Young people help at the Midway YMCA." It shared that I'm a fifth grade supervisor (a position that doesn't exist). I am a Learning Lead at Bruce F. Vento Elementary. This is my 14th year as a teacher in St. Paul Public Schools (second year in the LL position). This means the part about 15 years since ninth grade doesn't add up either. It's a little over 20 years. Thanks for aging me down.

Mr. Ales is the reason I continue to do volunteer work. He's encouraged young people to give back to the community on their own time. I continue to help support Mr. Ales and the Friendship Club because it promotes volunteering as a life long value.

Humboldt grad 2003
Nikki Schilling

Editor's Note:

Thanks, Ms. Schilling, for letting us know of our error. We have corrected our online brief. The information was submitted to us as a press release from another community member.

Corrections

In the December 2020 article titled, "Trash fees increasing," there were two errors. We'd like to clarify that the extra charge for yard waste collection is \$120 per season. Additionally, the 58,214.15 tons of trash collected was from the time period of June 2019-July 2020, not June 2018-July 2019 as stated in the article.

We apologize for the errors.

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Story ideas always welcome.

Keep in touch with the *Monitor*. Letters to the editor under 200 words and news releases for publication can be sent via e-mail to news@monitorsaintpaul.com. Unsigned letters will not run.

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The *Monitor* is for profit and for a purpose – and we don't sacrifice one for the other. We consider ourselves a zebra company, one that

is both black and white, both/and. As a media company, we work to highlight issues, solve real, meaningful problems, and repair existing social systems. We are working with our readers and advertisers to create a more just and responsible society that hears, helps and heals the customers and communities we serve.

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THE SAME AMERICA

Tensions rose as people stared at the TV screen, at each other. As eyes met, the questions began, and so did the ridicule. Comments spread like wildfire, catching everyone's ears as they tore through neighborhoods, social media platforms, and families. Unsettling, even hidden opinions quickly rose to the surface, quickly became the center of attention.

"This isn't who we are."

"It's so embarrassing."

"What a poor representation of America."

The list could go on and on.

She stares out of her window, trying to make sense of it all, but burning with an anger she wasn't expecting. What do they mean by these comments? Why was this so surprising? She glanced down at her skin, her beautiful black skin, illuminated by the lamp next to her bed. Funny, she thought to herself. I don't think this attempted coup, this violence, is very surprising at all.

"If you don't like America, leave and go home."

"Black garbage."

"God, 'you' people are a handful."

The words echo like voices in her mind, seemingly unfit to survive inside a person's soul. They linger, their damp, bone-chilling aggression ringing loudly within her. The Capitol wasn't a surprise

Capturing moments

By ABHA KARNICK



because these daily comments aren't a surprise. The America I know so well, she thought, was exactly what the TV was playing over and over again. The shame of who we really are stings every day, not just on the days it makes news.

If this isn't us, then why am I treated the way I am? No, in fact, this is us. An America of repression and racism, of hate and irrationality.

This is the "us" she sees every day. Why must it be broadcast for everybody else to finally see it, too?

We are the same America as we've always been. How then, will we change?

Abha Karnick is a south Minneapolis resident with East Indian roots who graduated from Hamline University in 2019. Her passion lies in storytelling and finding moments to capture.

{ Development Roundup }

By JANE McCLURE

Wilder Square changes

The Wilder Square project is moving ahead, with assistance Dec. 9 from the city. The St. Paul City Council, acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Board, unanimously approved a \$1.27 million HOME Loan and the issuance of up to \$17 million in tax-exempt housing revenue bonds by Ramsey County. The city and county are working with new owner CommonBond Communities on the Frogtown project.

Built in 1974, Wilder Square is an 11-story elevator building with 136 units. Most of the dwelling units have one bedroom, with fewer than a dozen two-bedroom units. The building also has a community room and shared laundry facilities, as well as a 100-space parking lot.

The large site contains a play structure, a maintenance shed and green space. Surrounding uses include cooperatively owned townhomes, single family homes, businesses to the north and Frogtown Farm Park to the south. It's a short walk to Lexington Parkway, Dale St. and University Ave. and the transit lines there. The building's residents are predominantly seniors and

adults with disabilities.

CommonBond plans a \$32.49 million renovation of Wilder Square, which will take about a year. Plans call for residents to stay at the property during the renovation, likely moving from one unit to another.

Seven units will be modified to be full ADA compliant accessible units. New plumbing and mechanical systems are planned and windows will be replaced.

Day care gets go-ahead

The home of the Work It co-working space could become a day care, with St. Paul Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) approval of a major variance Nov. 30. The 5-1 BZA decision was not appealed to the St. Paul City Council within 10 days, so the decision is final.

Property owner Anne Hendrickson asked the BZA to allow the major variance for 635 N. Fairview Ave. The property is an existing office building and was converted for use as a coworking space a few years ago. But the COVID-19 pandemic has affected demand for such shared uses.

Hendrickson wishes to convert the building primarily for use as a childcare center. But the property is zoned for industrial use. The zoning code requires

that if a childcare or day care center is in an industrial area, the care-related use is supposed to be an accessory or add-on use to the property's primary use. For example, a factory could add a separate day care for its works as an accessory use.

For 635 N. Fairview, the day care will be the primary use of this building. That drives the need for the variance.

Hendrickson said the front yard of the building will be fenced as a play space. The property has had environmental testing. If soil in the front yard is found to be contaminated it will be removed.

Hamline Midway Coalition recommended approval of the major variance, as did BZA staff. The owners of the Fairview business Center at 641-655 N. Fairview Ave., Hillcrest Development, opposed the major variance. That property owner is in a dispute with Hendrickson over property access.

Public hearing on Alatus

The much-debated Alatus development near Lexington Parkway and University Ave. goes to the St. Paul Planning Commission Zoning Committee at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14 for a site plan review public hearing. A recommendation on the site plan would go to the full commission by month's end.

{ Monitor in a Minute }

By JANE McCLURE

Homeless camps to close

The push to close homeless encampments and relocate people goes on this month. St. Paul and Ramsey County officials are trying to get the homeless into shelter and out of the cold. Eight of the city's 81 active encampments began closing in mid-December. The area encampments include state-owned land at Interstate 94 and Snelling Avenues, Iris Park and Hamline Park.

The scramble for shelter space is ongoing as homelessness reaches crisis proportions. Other shelters are opening or on the drawing boards, including the former Bethesda Hospital and a vacant Luther Seminary dormitory in St. Anthony Park neighborhood. But with year-round shelters full, the need to find space continues.

The St. Paul Department of Parks and Recreation recently opened the Harriet Island Pavilion and the Duluth and Case Recreation Center as interim

shelters. People can stay there before moving to other shelters. Parks and Recreation Director Mike Hahn describes the situation as a public safety as well as a public health crisis.

By mid-December, the city had about 319 people living in 81 encampments. City and county staff and staff from social services agencies are working to find resources for everyone. "Each person needs their own solution," said Deputy Mayor Jamie Tinch. Options include hotel programs, shelters for people who have COVID-19 or who need other services.

"We're working in unprecedented ways with our stakeholders," said Council President Amy Brendmoen.

The move of people to shelters has met pushback from some advocacy groups for the homeless. Several groups have sprung up in the area, to provide food and supplies to the camps. Advocates contend that some people are afraid of or distrust government and social service agencies, and that they see encampments

as a viable option. Tinch and some elected officials counter that everyone needs a safe, dignified place to live.

The eight encampments were chosen for action because of potential fire hazards, said Tinch. The Kellogg Mall Park encampment was cleared December 21, but not before the site's third fire in several weeks. The December 18 fire destroyed seven tents, according to the St. Paul Fire Department. Multiple propane tanks and cylinders of varying sizes were involved in the fire, which is presumed to be accidental. No one was injured.

One challenge city and county officials have is that members of the public drop off firewood and propane tanks to keep people warm, often in response to pleas on social media. "We're asking the community not to provide propane tanks or heating materials," Tinch said.

No to crosswalk, yes to lights

Capital projects in Frogtown and South St. Anthony Park made the cut in the 2021 Long-Range Capital Improvement budget (CIB), but other neighborhoods were shut out. The St.

Paul City Council in December approved the 2021 neighborhood-focused project requests.

The neighborhood projects split \$1 million for 2021.

Safety improvements for the North End's Lewis Park was the top-ranked project city-wide. Lighting improvements at Charles and Rice in Frogtown ranked second, with a larger scale lighting project for Charles-Arundel coming in fourth. Speed humps on Charles ranked ninth, and pedestrian improvements on Raymond near Seal Hi-Rise ranked 10th.

But about 30 projects failed to make the cut, including a crosswalk for the Como by the Lake apartments, Como Park kiosk and trails, safety improvements around Como Lake, filling of a sidewalk gap on Concordia Avenue, signage and wayfinding measures near Northwest Como Recreation Center, improved lighting along Fairview Ave. beneath Interstate 94, a "Como Bark" dog park, bike-pedestrian improvements along Gilbert Street, and a Nordic ski loop at Como Park.

Wine store ordinance corked

A proposal to change the distance requirement between wine-only shops and off-sale liquor stores has been laid over until Jan. 27.

The ordinance change is led by council member Jane Prince, in response to a constituent request from a Dayton's Bluff restaurant that wishes to open a wine shop. The owner of the Yoerg Brewing Company wishes to open the Vin de Pays wine shop next to his brewery/restaurant, saying it is a means of economic survival. But the shop wouldn't meet distance requirements from other East Side liquor stores.

The ordinance change would allow wine-only shops to operate within one-quarter mile of off-sale liquor stores. The current distance requirement between all such shops is one-half mile.

The measure has support from the city's Business Review Council and several district councils and small business associations. But it is opposed by off-sale liquor store owners and the Minnesota License Beverage Association.

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KEYSTONE EXPANDS >> from 1

tions including Allianz Field. Drive-through events provided food for 32,000 people since June.

Keystone served more than 28,000 people in 2019 with food, basic needs and crisis support and expects that number to significantly increase when 2020 totals are completed. "Hunger relief is a very critical issue," McKeown said. Final numbers for 2020 weren't available but she estimates that food service request were up 93 percent in 2020 from 2019.

"Hunger relief is a very critical issue," McKeown said.

The need for a new space precedes the pandemic. Keystone has been looking for a new food and crisis services site since 2019, at one point eyeing the University-Lexington Parkway area. The University-Beacon Avenue site would allow for building space of 20,000 square feet, as compared to the 7,000 feet the agency has now. The current food shelves lack storage and refrigerator space. Keystone must rent space at other locations.

Plans call for remodeling the two buildings at the property, Hafner Furniture at 1800 University Ave. and Bonded Auto Repair at 1790 University Ave. McKeown cautions that the buildings will need "pretty significant renovation

tions" before Keystone can press the properties into service.

"We're pretty excited about the space," she said. The facility will be within a short walk off the Green Line Fairview light rail station, and is near two bus routes. It will also have parking in the rear and drive in-out space for the two current food mobiles, which serve as food shelves on wheels. Keystone would like to add a third food mobile.

Community outreach is underway, as is facility predesign. McKeown said predesign work is to be completed by February. Then Keystone will launch fundraising for the project, to renovate and equip the facility. One ask will be to the 2021 Minnesota Legislature, for \$3 million.

It's not known what the total project costs will be. Last year Keystone received a pre-development planning grant for the project from Metropolitan Council.

Keystone is asking the district council and other community groups for help with community engagement as the facility takes shape. One idea is for larger, more user-friendly volunteer work space. Another idea is to move more of the agency's services, such as tax help and emergency services, to University Avenue from the current space at Merriam Park Community Cen-

ter, 2000 St. Anthony Ave.

Keystone's move to Beacon and University came about because plans for a mixed-use development there were shelved. In March 2020 developer LIG Investments unveiled plans for a proposed five-story, 146-apartment building with retail space on its first floor. Market-rate apartments were planned, in a mix of different unit sizes. The district council committee recommended denial of a conditional use permit and density variances needed for the project after much debate and two split votes. Some land use committee members said they couldn't support the project because of its lack of affordable housing.

The project was never submitted to the St. Paul Planning Commission and was dropped.

While excited about the Keystone project, some committee members said they are sad to lose the mixed-use project. Some described the University-Beacon location as an ideal spot for a neighborhood anchor.

Keystone was asked by committee members if it would consider being part of a larger building, with housing on the upper floors. The nonprofit reached out to the previous developer but didn't get a response, McKeown said. While nonprofit leadership did discuss being part of a larger project, "housing is not our area of expertise."

North Star Ski Touring Club embraces silent sports

>> from 1

tor, to talk about how to dress for warmth and comfort while skiing, to start to learn about waxing, and to get some tips on where to buy new or used equipment.

Once the ski season starts in earnest and it is safe to gather again, organized trips will resume. According to Brand, "Trip leaders are encouraged to take club-sponsored safety and first aid training. We make sure there is a volunteer leader bringing up the rear on all of our outings, as well as up front. No one will be left behind on the trails. There's a supportive culture of how we lead trips. We encourage people to buddy up with others who are at the same level, and to ski in groups of at least three."

In the past, NSSTC has sponsored reasonably priced day, weekend, and week-long trips to cross country skiing destinations near and far. Member-only trips venture to ski lodges in northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ontario and points beyond. The forested

trails of the Upper Midwest are considered some of the best skiing in the country.

Membership costs \$20 per year, per household, regardless of family size. At present, the only scheduled activities are monthly ZOOM meetings about cross country skiing technique and history – and about Minnesota's great outdoors. Brand said, "We are following the governor's recommendations carefully; the most important thing is to stay safe right now."

Cross country skiing may be the passion of the North Stars, but they find ways to have fun together all year. In the off-season, they can be found hiking and biking local trails, canoeing, kayaking, dancing, and picnicking.

They also roll up their sleeves every fall and brandish hand tools, rakes, and chain saws. Club members take their brush clearing responsibilities seriously, as they prepare cross country ski trails for the coming season. Through a formal grant program and organized volunteer activities, NSSTC contributes to

developing and improving trails across the state.

While cross country skiing is a fairly inexpensive sport, remember that trail passes are required in state and county parks. The money they raise goes to improving and maintaining trail systems.

There is no cost to ski on trails groomed for both classic and skate skiing at the Como Golf Course, Highland 9 Golf Course, and Phalen Golf Course.

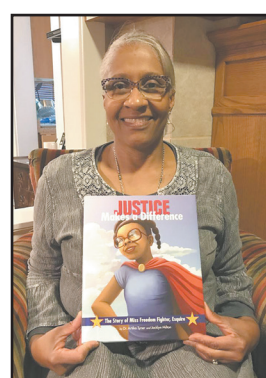
The Como Park Ski Center, at 1431 Lexington Parkway North, also rents equipment. Skis, boots and poles cost \$15 for a two-hour block of time. All equipment rentals must be reserved online at the city of St. Paul website.

Email North Star Ski Touring Club board member Gail Lundeen Brand with questions about club membership at brand2132@gmail.com.

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PPGJLI children's book takes top award in Minnesota Author Project contest

The children's book, "Justice Makes a Difference: The Story of Miss Freedom Fighter, Esquire," has been selected as the winner in the first annual Minnesota Author Project competition in the Communities Create category. The children's book was co-written by Dr. Artika Tyner and Jacklyn Milton, and illustrated by Jeremy Norton.



Co-author Jacklyn Milton (Photo submitted)

"We're extremely honored," said Tyner. "This is an opportunity to share about how we all can make a difference in the world."

The competition and the Communities Create category is sponsored by the Minnesota Library Foundation in partnership with Library Journal, BiblioBoard Library, and MN Writes Reads. The Minnesota Author

Project celebrates Minnesota organizations and communities that are producing written creative works. The book was submitted under the auspices of Planting People Growing Justice™ Leadership Institute (PPGJLI). The PPGJLI seeks to plant the seeds of social change through education, training, and community outreach. "We're creating change through promoting literacy and diversity in books," said Tyner. "Representation in books is essential if children are to be inspired as the next generation of leaders."

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Local health center emerges from financial mismanagement to continue serving community during coronavirus pandemic

By CHLOE PETER

A woman came into Open Cities Health Center (OCHC), 409 N Dunlap St., St. Paul, crying. She had just lost her job and didn't know how she'd pay for the insulin she needed.

Without insurance, a subscription to insulin for as little as 90 days could cost thousands of dollars. According to a Washington Post investigation, rationing insulin and deaths related to going without insulin have increased in the U.S. as insulin prices have increased.

At Open Cities Health, the woman was able to receive a subscription to insulin for \$88.

OCHC has been open to the community for more than 50 years. It provides health services such as chiropractic, medical, behavioral health, eye health, dental, and social services. Patients are never turned away based on their inability to pay. Open Cities Health has a "sliding fee" option. Patients are encouraged to work with billing staff to create a payment plan that works for them. They see patients from infancy into old age and now offer COVID-19 testing as well.

"I didn't know where else to go," Miguel Sanchez, a patient at OCHC, said. "I was talking to a nurse who recommended Open Cities Clinic, and I thought it was too good to be true."

Sanchez has been a patient at OCHC for three years. He has glaucoma, a condition that damages the optic nerve in the

OPEN CITIES HEALTH CENTER PROVIDES FREE CARE



Matthew Bauer, OCHC eye doctor

"I didn't know where else to go. I was talking to a nurse who recommended Open Cities Clinic, and I thought it was too good to be true."

~ Miguel Sanchez, patient



Summer Johnson, OCHC staff

eye. Without treatment, Sanchez would've likely become blind. Before coming to Open Cities Health, Sanchez was turned away because he couldn't pay. With only a part-time job and without insurance, Sanchez mentioned feeling as if he had no other options besides living with the condition.

At Open Cities Health, Sanchez was able to receive treatment at no cost. Some, however, worry that without the incentive of getting paid more doctors will not spend as much time on their patients or give less dignified care. Matthew Bauer, an eye doctor at OCHC, strongly disagrees.

"I do not believe we should get paid based on the number of things we do," Bauer said. "I think we should get paid based on the care we give people."

Bauer has been working at

Open Cities Health for 11 years. He started the eye clinic at the Frogtown location and helped grow it into the six exam rooms that it is today. Now, two other eye doctors are working at OCHC, and they started a program in order to teach medical students the line of practice. Now, COVID-19 has limited how much the clinic can do. Face shields, masks and distancing protocols make in-patient care more difficult.

The pandemic has created more obstacles than just following guidelines for the clinic. Even though more people may need affordable healthcare currently, the clinic has been seeing fewer patients. Before the pandemic, Bauer would see 60 patients a week on average; now he sees around 40.

"If we're not taking care of as

many people, there's less funding available to us," Bauer said.

According to OCHC's Chief of Strategic Development, Summer Johnson, funding primarily comes from the number of patients being seen, the government and donations. This is, however, not the first time that OCHC has struggled with money. According to an investigation by the *Pioneer Press*, the clinic faced significant financial difficulties at the end of 2019. The organization had "been struggling under the weight of long-standing erroneous financial practices, operational inefficiencies and staffing shortages," according to Johnson.

"Through strategic reorganization, operational changes to enhance efficiency, key partnerships and philanthropic support, we were able to stay open and continue to serve the 10,000 pa-

tients a year that rely on our services," Johnson said.

Along with improving how Open Cities Health functions, federal stimulus and donations have helped the clinic continue to stay open throughout the pandemic. All donations go directly to patient care. Donations can be made at opencitieshealth.org/donate.

In looking toward the future, Open Cities Health is making plans to sustain financial strategy long-term.

"We are the healthcare safety nets of our communities and we fight every day for the vulnerable and under-served," Johnson said. "While these may seem turbulent times; nonetheless, we remain committed to our mission of ensuring we are a constant, trusted resource in this community."

Bauer recalled that an older man had come into the clinic a few months prior. His vision had drastically declined over the years and had been declared legally blind. He told Bauer that he had given up hope after being turned away from other doctors because he was unable to pay his bill. The man was able to receive eye surgery at Open Cities Health Center, and his vision improved all the way back up to 20/20.

"We really try to make people feel like their concerns are valid... and treat them like a human being that deserves the right to health care," Bauer said.

Hubbs Center offers free job training for English language learners

By EMMA HARVILLE

When Talita Silva left her small town in Brazil to work as an au pair in St. Paul last December, she dreamt of using her two-year visa to travel the U.S. and improve her English in order to one day become a flight attendant.

Instead, the coronavirus pandemic halted all travel, and Silva found herself spending most of her time with her host family, learning and experiencing what she could from the family's home. Knowing she needed to improve her English, Silva began to search for a school that would sharpen her language skills for free.

She soon found Hubbs Center, a St. Paul nonprofit that offers a wide range of free adult education and job training classes, and enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course.

"When I came here, my English was really, really bad," Silva said. "I keep improving, but it was terrible. Hubbs Center had a lot of patience. They were so friendly and gave me a lot of information."

Pleased with her experience, in October Silva decided to also register for a 12-week online Introduction to Nursing Assistant course, one of several job training classes Hubbs Center offers. With growing interest in the medical field, Silva said she's no longer focused on becoming a flight attendant.

"I have many people in my

Adult education school provides learning opportunities for those looking to improve basic skills, earn a GED, prepare for employment or learn English

Students and their teacher in a College Readiness class at the Hubbs Center in 2018, which prepares students for college level work in reading and writing. (Photo submitted)



life who help me, so maybe now I can have an opportunity to do the same for other people," Silva said.

Silva's teacher, Kathleen Bjornson, has taught the nursing assistant class for several years and explained why the program is a great gateway into the medical field.

"Because it's free, it gives you an introduction where you can say, 'Yeah, I could do this,' or maybe 'No, this is not for me,'" Bjornson said. "And then you know that, before spending more time and then eventually money doing it."

Adult Basic Education Assistant Supervisor Karen Gerdin said the goal of Hubbs' job training classes is to prepare students

for careers while simultaneously increasing their academic skills. So while a student is learning nursing, she said, that student is also developing reading, writing and math skills.

On an average, in-person day, Gerdin said Hubbs serves around 700 students, with anywhere between nine to 30 students in a class and more than 70 different languages spoken. Many of these students come to Hubbs to learn English, so the center develops classes specifically for these students.

"I think the nursing assistant class originally came to be because there were people going to Red Cross classes and their English level wasn't high enough, so they weren't able to succeed,"

Volunteer Coordinator Ruth Rodriguez said. "So we're kind of specialists in working with English language learners and people who are working at the basic skill level."

A goal of Gerdin's has been to get all of Hubbs' job training classes online – doing so would allow not only a greater classroom capacity but also specialized curriculums for students at a higher reading level. The pandemic has been a blessing in that aspect, she said, as it forced teachers to do their curriculums virtually.

Bjornson, however, misses her students and said she has faced challenges in conducting her classes in a virtual setting.

"It is hard to exactly dupli-

cate that atmosphere," Bjornson said. "There are ways of having the students interact, but they have to download a lot of different apps sometimes for that. Their computer skills might not be strong enough, or maybe they're doing it on their phone instead of a computer. There are a lot of barriers, but we're making it work."

Silva echoes Bjornson, adding that her Brazilian background has made staying productive in her classes while stuck at home even more difficult.

"Brazilians, we like being together," Silva said. "It's hard for me because I grew up on a farm, so I don't like to sit at home. So when I am in class at school, I can be very, very focused. But now, here online, I am not 100% focused."

Hubbs is always looking for grants and foundation money to both start up and continue job training classes. Now, they're also focusing on staying in the loop about new classes that could be beneficial and referring students to other centers that may fill needs it cannot.

"That's always something we look for in the future, and currently," Gerdin said. "How can we continue doing what we're doing? What new or needed job training is out there that we should offer to our students?"

Students interested in taking Adult Basic Education or job training classes at Hubbs can register through an online form.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

TOGETHER

Urban Farm and Garden Alliance promotes community healing through alliance of eight community gardens

By SAVANNAH ROMERO

As the school season ends, Megan Phinney, coordinator of the Children's Gardening Program at Urban Farm and Garden Alliance (UFGA), gets ready for new and returning children to flood the gardens for the summer months.

Phinney recalls planting peas very early in the Peace Garden her first year doing the program. A whole family of kids ran up and down the block as she was picking peas from the garden. She asked them if they wanted to try the peas, and like some kids they were turned off by the idea of eating green food. But shortly after they tried the peas, she couldn't keep them from picking and eating the peas.

The Children's Gardening Program is made up of 10 sessions starting around the middle of June after the kids are out of school. They are 90 minutes each week and are usually held on Wednesdays. They use hands-on learning and some science background to gardening, as well as fun and creative activities.

This summer they had a new opportunity to connect with a composting business in Wellington, New Zealand.

"They have this business where they pick up food waste with a trailer on a bike, and then they compost it," Phinney said. "When it's finished, they go put it in the garden."

Phinney mentioned that both the kids and their parents were very excited to be able to learn from people who live on the other side of the world. Building connections is something UFGA strives to do, especially with groups that also accomplish good work.

Phinney said that the children's program is still developing, but it has been a fun journey seeing not only the children's garden grow but also the children develop through this gardening experience.

"A lot of them have grown up with us," Phinney said. "There are kids who were really young when we started, and now they are teenagers. The intern that we hired at 12 is now 18, and she's amazing."

UFGA's mission is to bring the community that has been torn apart by Interstate 94 back together by creating green space and sharing healthy, nutritious foods. One way they pull the community together is an event called "Afternoon Out." Afternoon Out is designed to allow elders, younger kids and people who work second and third shifts to be able to join during afternoon hours.

"We close our street, and the past few years we've had a boun-



Community members gather to share a meal. UFGA works to bring together the community divided by Interstate 94. (Photo submitted)

cy house," said UFGA Co-Coordinator Melvin Giles. "We have groups like the Humane Society, and groups that represent jobs where people can find out information about jobs."

UFGA first started in 2014. It is a collaboration of eight community gardens and a group of backyard gardeners with the goal of promoting reconciliation, healing, peace, social and environmental justice through gardening and sharing food in the Summit-University (Rondo) and Frogtown communities of St. Paul. UFGA also connects with other organizations and institutions such as University of Minnesota, Bethel University, Hamline University, The Storymobile and AfroEco.

These partnerships and relationships have created access to healthy nutritious foods and green space for residents in neighborhoods that have struggled due to problems associated with predatory loans, high levels

of unemployment, and a complicated history of Interstate-94 splitting the historic Rondo neighborhood.

"I like helping folks to realize that they can grow their own food, they can save money, and it's a nice way to kind of build community harmony and for people to get to know each other," Giles said.

Giles said he is passionate about this alliance and wants to bring peace and healing within the community. He shared this experience that made a lasting impact on him as a community organizer. A couple of years ago, he and other members of UFGA brought some Somali youth to meet with some Micronesians in Minnesota, and they traveled together to Moorhead and back to the Twin Cities. During the trip, these young people got to share their cultures, and eventually they let their guards down to embrace one another without any judgments.

HEALING

Irreducible Grace teaches youth healing techniques in tumultuous 2020

By MOLLY KORZENOWSKI

Eleven young activists connect on Zoom with Irreducible Grace Foundation (IGF) team members every other Sunday afternoon. These student activists listen as the IGF team members talk about how to maintain their own well-being and quell the nerves that come with leading a social movement. They discuss how to speak to officials in power and how to lead a group effectively.

"We are now working with a new cohort of young people who are activists, and they've been on the frontlines of the protests," said Darlene Fry, founder and executive director of IGF.

Latrese Johnson, a 16-year-old from Highland Park High School, was one of two students hired on staff at IGF this summer. Johnson was already an activist before getting the Gold Member position on IGF staff. She was a co-founder of her middle school Black Student Union, the former president of her high school Black Student Union and part of a community activist group called Metaliberation. But after the death of 19-year-old activist Oluwatoyin Salau in June, Johnson said she was inspired to take her activism in a different direction.

"After her murder, I really wanted to dedicate most of my activism to people like me, young people like me, black girls like me," Johnson said. "Having organizers that reflect the identities of the people we are trying to serve and represent creates a sense of community."

Johnson pitched her idea to her mentor and IGF program director Jan Mandell, who worked with her to create a workshop specifically centered around healing of racial trauma. Students from Highland Park, Washburn and even a girl from the University of Minnesota attended Johnson's session in August. Johnson taught a few sessions, and Mandell applied for a grant so the project can continue in the future.

"It's never going to stop; we're activists forever," Johnson said. "We meet to stress the importance of needing to preserve ourselves for the future."

According to its website, Irreducible Grace Foundation is "a youth empowerment organization that fosters trust and community between youth who have faced disparities and the institutions that have failed them." IGF empowers students of color by providing mentoring, life skills, employment, leadership training and self-care through artistic practices. The website also said the organization reaches over 6,000 youth and adults every year.

"I've been intentionally using our mind-body tools and practices that we have learned in



The Greenhouse Garden is on the property of NeighborWorks Home Partners and is currently sustaining the youth farm. (Photo submitted)

UFGA was awarded Ramsey County's Farm Family of 2015. Looking forward, UFGA will be working in the Peace Garden with Engineers Without Borders from the University of Minnesota to set up an accessible pathway, a green house and a water catchment system to use the rainwater for watering the garden.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

KEYSTONE BRINGS FOOD TO COMMUNITY THROUGH FOODMOBILE PROGRAM

Local nonprofit differentiates itself by giving people choices

By LOGAN MURPHY

For some people in need, going to a traditional food shelf brings feelings of anxiety and shame. About seven years ago, Minneapolis-based nonprofit Keystone Community Services had an idea to change that. They would buy a food truck and make different stops around the Twin Cities area. They would make it feel more like a place for the community members to shop what they needed.

It was the night of Keystone's 75th charity gala, and its members were asking for money to buy the Foodmobile. A little to their surprise, they ended up raising all the money they needed to buy the Foodmobile during that one night. This program has been met with success and is growing.

At last year's gala, Keystone asked for donations to buy a second Foodmobile, and once again the money was raised in one night.

"It's just really amazing," said Jen Winterfeldt, Director of



The two Foodmobiles make multiple stops in St. Paul each week, offering food choices. Find the schedule at keystoneservices.org. (Photo by Logan Murphy)

Development and Community Engagement at Keystone Community Services.

The Foodmobile program is still a relatively small operation with 10 to 15 volunteers and one full-time staff member, but they still make a big impact on the local community, serving 3,600 different people last year. Many of them are repeat shoppers.

One of those shoppers is a woman named Jean. She said she had never needed any assistance before but had recently started having some medical problems, and much of her money was going to her medical bills. She

said she was very nervous to go to the Foodmobile for the first time, but the volunteers greeted her warmly to make her feel at home. They then chatted about her favorite foods and the kind of recipes she was going to make. She said it felt like she was shopping with her friends.

"I've heard so many seniors in particular really describe the Foodmobile like it doesn't feel like a handout; it just feels like a community," Winterfeldt said.

The Foodmobile doesn't just provide food: It provides healthy food. A report by Wilder Research states that nearly 350,000

Who is using the Foodmobile?

- 25% of people who receive food from the Foodmobile are children and 24% are adults over the age of 55.
- 75% of Foodmobile participants self-identify as people of color.
- 33% of participants are from Suburban Ramsey County.
- 98% of Foodmobile participants have a household income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Minnesotans live in a food desert. This puts Minnesota in the bottom 10 states in terms of access to a grocery store.

"They don't have to be making a choice of whether they can afford a bag of carrots or some of this other produce that is more expensive than this box of mac and cheese," Winterfeldt said.

The Foodmobile goes to 25 different metro locations a month. For times and locations, visit [Keystone Community Services website](http://KeystoneCommunityServices.org).

"We bring food to those who don't have access to a car or have some other kind of transportation

barrier," said Foodmobile manager Eleanor Heberlein, "those who couldn't otherwise access our two brick and mortar locations."

The Foodmobile uses a partnership model. Its partners help with everything from the physical location, marketing to even providing volunteers. This also allows the Foodmobile to tailor food options for different venues. A distribution to the University of St. Thomas might be different from a delivery to downtown St. Paul. For example, an area with a high Asian population may be given more choices that they are familiar with.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives of many. The Foodmobile is no exception. In the past, shoppers were able to go into the Foodmobile and pick out everything they wanted. Now the volunteers prepack all the essentials to save time while still trying to give as many options as possible. They have also seen a rise in shoppers since the pandemic has begun.

Keystone is looking to expand this program as the demand for it continues to grow. With the additions of the second truck, Keystone is looking to hire more full-time employees.

COACHES WALK ALONGSIDE YOUTH TO KEEP THEM OUT OF PRISON

By JHENNA BECKER

Bryale Winters, joined by his colleague, Crystal Vital-Schwartz, knocked on the door of a 16-year-old youth's house for their initial meeting. As the youth's community coach, Winters' job was to help him find a job and figure out his goals.

But when they showed up at the house, the youth wasn't there. His aunt was there as the trusted adult required to attend the initial meeting.

"Let's go find him," the aunt said.

Vital-Schwartz and Winters went back into their car and began to follow the aunt around the neighborhood.

"We'll get this face-to-face, but sometimes it does take a while," Vital-Schwartz told Winters. She knew that Winters had experience working with young people and understood it would take time for the 16-year-old to be ready to trust the coach.

After checking a friend's house, they started to drive back to the youth's house.

Two teens were walking down the street, and the aunt's car stopped. She leaned out the car window. "Hey! We're looking for you!" she called.

Vital-Schwartz's car pulled into the parking lot after the aunt.

"Give me a couple of minutes," Winters said.

Vital-Schwartz watched as Winters chatted with the youth, starting a connection.

Vital-Schwartz is the Youth Services Manager for the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) program where Winters

Model Cities JDAI program provides mentoring for Ramsey County youth to promote positive adult relationships and give access to resources

also works. Launched in 1992 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, JDAI is a part of Model Cities, a nonprofit organization that helps Frogtown residents in various ways, which include food drives and mentorship programs.

In the JDAI program, specialized community coaches with a wealth of backgrounds are tasked in providing supervision to youth who have had previous offenses. Their goal is to minimize the risk of re-offenses and to help the youth complete their court-ordered obligations, finding educational opportunities, and making the necessary referrals for further assistance. Being able to connect with the youth as a mentor becomes essential for these coaches.

"We do know that every positive interaction they've had in every kind of positive adult relationship that they have in their life is actually helping their brain to develop into a stronger, more resilient brain," Vital-Schwartz said.

In his experience as a coach, Winters knows that there isn't a typical candidate among the youth. There are kids in group homes, kids with both parents, and kids with one parent, etc.

"A lot of these kids, they've come from places where they

can't trust too many people, and they're not open with how they feel about things," Winters said. "So that's the biggest thing, for me, is just seeing a kid wanting to talk to you about certain things, wanting to do better than their circumstances that they have."

In Winters' initial meeting with the 16-year-old, he had to let the youth know that community coaching is not a consequence. He was not a probation officer; he was to be a mentor.

"What a community coach is, is really an advocate for the youth," said Kizzy Downie, chief executive officer of Model Cities.

On a typical day with a youth, Winters spends one to four hours talking with the youth and getting something to eat. The length of time of coaching also varies, from six months to over a year.

"It really is individualized for each young person," Vital-Schwartz said. "I think that's the beauty of our program; it's there's not like one size fits all."

Coaching comes with challenges. Winters said he has had an experience where he lost contact with a youth for a few weeks. It can be difficult to interact with the youth via virtual calls because some families do not have access

to wifi.

Vital-Schwartz also works with coaches to get teens access to other things they need, such as dental care and driver's education classes.

"The model for community coaching is that it takes a village to make sure youth and children have what they need," Downie said.

JDAI works with Ramsey County, where probation officers refer juveniles on probation to community coaching. This kind of partnership has produced positive results. Based on Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2017 report, detention admissions in Ramsey County have dropped by more than 70%.

JDAI under Model Cities aims to break the negative long-term effects of incarceration, especially for youth of color, who have historically been overrepresented under the judicial system. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's JDAI Deep-End Initiative 2020 report, national data show that African American youth are four times more likely to be in custody compared to white youth.

JDAI's Deep-End Initiative was launched in 2014 to further the goal of juvenile justice system

reform. It aims to reduce confinement for youth of color and fight the "deep end" of the system where the youth will find it difficult to get out. Ramsey County reduced the deep end placements by 60% since 2014, and African American youth accounted for 91% of this change, according to the JDAI Deep-End Initiative 2020 report.

"What you're doing is supporting young people because our systems are not designed for our young people, and they're especially not designed for our young people of color," Vital-Schwartz said.

Model Cities' JDAI program is funded by Ramsey County, Youthprise and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The latter focuses on activities that support youth in obtaining employment skills. Even though the age range the JDAI supports is 10-21, the normal age range is around the ages of 15 and 16, since that is a prime age for young people to begin looking at employment and career opportunities.

While it takes lots of time and efforts during the mentoring process, some success stories have kept the coaches moving forward. Winters said the 16-year-old youth he had helped became an encouragement. After Winters helped him find a job and organize goals, such as establishing a routine to exercise at the gym more regularly, the youth eventually got a job at Chipotle in November 2019.

On the youth's first day of work, he sent his coach a selfie of himself in the uniform.

For 20 years, Bethel University has supported the Frogtown Summit-University Partnership, whose mission is to build intentional, long-term relationships in the two neighborhoods. The FSU Partnership takes the form of student internships at non-profits serving the two neighborhoods; participation in community events; and direct involvement from whole classes at the university in projects. This special section was funded by the Bethel FSU Partnership and organized by professor Yu-li Chang Zacher.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Irreducible Grace teaches youth healing techniques

>> from 7

IGF to calm my body, focus my mind so I don't get sidelined by anxiety and fear," Mandell said.

During a global pandemic and in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, the Frogtown non-profit organization adjusted to best serve the community. In-person workshops shifted to Zoom calls. Hand sanitizer was made available, masks were required in doors, and socially distanced yard meetings were held over the summer.

"It's really hard for us as an agency because we are so hands-on," Fry said. "We talk about trauma, about people in difficult situations. It brings up emotions. Where we used to be able to hug someone, console them and help through that, we can't do that anymore."

Despite the emotional challenges of distance learning, Fry said the organization remained in a good place financially. IGF received a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan which allowed it to continue paying its employees through the quarantine months. According to Fry, the organization barely had to reduce employee hours.

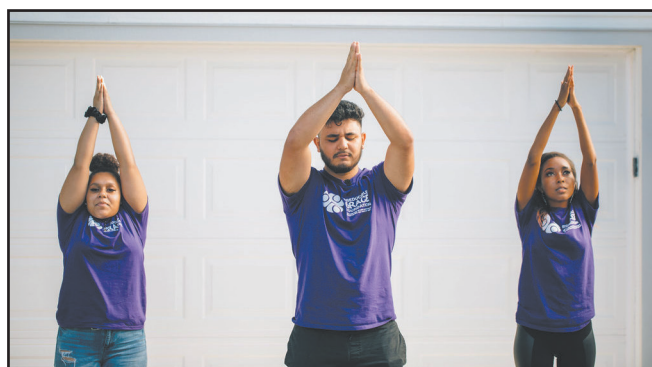
On top of that, IGF gained a sizable program in January, right before the pandemic hit. Although the money was originally intended to support new programs, the provider allowed the organization to redirect the funds to support operating costs, including the purchase of food for families suffering economically.

"We literally had young people who had no food in their house," Fry said. "You just don't think that a pandemic's going to happen. That's typically not something we have to do, so we had to do that, as well."

The grant funder also provid-



Through creativity, IGF brings healing to communities during a time of isolation and racial injustice



"We talk about trauma, about people in difficult situations. It brings up emotions. Where we used to be able to hug someone, console them and help through that, we can't do that anymore."
~ Darlene Fry

ed IGF with a professional videographer, allowing the organization to begin work on a video series called IGF Kids. The series, released in September, teaches healing tools to kids from kids at the organization. During the pandemic, executive coordinator Tara Reddinger-Adams was able to learn animation, creating short animation scenes for the series. According to Fry, the videos will pilot in eight St. Paul elementary schools.

"The videos really helped

us because we planned to do all these workshops in person, so with the need to switch, everybody got creative," Fry said. "The work that we do is still needed; it's just needed in a different format."

The video format also allowed for new outreach opportunities. Johnson said that a session was held over a Zoom call for a group in Colorado.

"Virtual meetings limit us, but in a way it also connects us to people we probably wouldn't

be able to meet with," Johnson said.

Videography wasn't the only change IGF went through in the past year; the organization also had the opportunity to form new partnerships during the wake of George Floyd's death. The Midway Rise UP coalition formed when the owner of the damaged Midway Shopping Center negotiated leases and displaced business owners. IGF held healing circles for the tenants, some having owned their stores for over 30

years, to help them work through their emotions.

"Doing the healing circles is something that is our work and was our work, but doing it in the context of that aftermath and that community was a newer opportunity for us," Fry said.

The organization also created videos urging people to vote in the 2020 election, by using voices of community members to talk about the importance of it. Fry said the youth are civic-minded and ready to take on the project.

"I am always humbled and inspired by the resilience of our young people," Mandell said.

According to Fry, the effects of "pandemic fatigue" have been felt by the IGF community as COVID-19 cases in Minnesota and nationwide increase again and outside temperatures become too frigid to meet in person.

"I think the issues of racial inequality and the depths of it and not having gone through the Derek Chauvin trial... is also weighing on folks," Fry said. "They're doing the best they can given the situation that's so unknown for all of us."

Fry spoke to Mandell, the program director, about the purpose of IGF during these trying times. The conversation went back to their mission statement: Creating safe spaces and healing for youth of color. Fry started asking why this was even necessary to begin with.

"So often our young people want to help other people and not necessarily do their own self-care," Fry said. "It's that piece about if you continue to give out yourself without replenishing yourself, then you end up empty and then eventually the people around you will end up empty."

Contact Irreducible Grace through its website at <https://www.irgrace.org> to join sessions or get involved.

Ain Dah Yung Center bridges gap for young adults transitioning to stable life

By EMMA EIDSVÖOG

On University Avenue in St. Paul, yellow, green and red paint covers the walls of a new housing unit for homeless teens and young adults to transition into living independently. The Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung Center (Good New Home in Ojibwe), focuses on supporting youth with knowing their Native identity, finding jobs and living in stable homes.

"Many Native youth do not have a sense of who they are as young Native people, due to decades of historical trauma that is still very present today," said Deb Foster, the director of the Ain Dah Yung Center since 2009.

The Ain Dah Yung Center (ADYC) includes an emergency shelter for runaway and homeless Native American youth, family advocacy, chemical dependency prevention programming, street outreach, children and family case management, mental health services, ICWA court monitoring/legal services, child welfare advocacy and transitional housing.

Foster and others at the center noticed the gap found in

Nonprofit works to provide permanent supportive housing for young American Indian adults while COVID-19 related precautions limit contact, support

homeless youth turning 18 and losing benefits and aging out of foster care, while faced with the reality of adulthood: work, school and rent. The "Good New Home" addresses this problem by providing homeless young adults a place to call their own and provides the time they need to gain the experiences to become truly self-sufficient.

Nov. 20, 2020 marked the one-year anniversary of the Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung building. With 42 beds available, the permanent supportive housing project provides apartments to homeless youth ages 18-24. The residents pay 30% of their income to rent.

ADYC began leasing the Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung housing units in October 2019 and was fully leased by February 2020. With the rise in COVID-19 cases, the center moved to virtual operations a few days before Governor Tim Walz an-

nounced a statewide shutdown. The center received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan in April, a loan program meant for small businesses that were losing money and faced staffing cuts. That loan, along with funding from many foundations and donors the center already works with, helped ADYC stay afloat financially.

The struggle came when trying to run the center and other operations with half the staff and reducing the number of youth they could serve due to respect for safety standards set by the COVID-19 restrictions.

"Just like that, there was no face-to-face contact, the residents couldn't come in, sit down and tell us how their day's going," Foster said.

Teachings on traditional tobacco, medicines and beadwork went online. American Indian drumming, singing and language was taught through Zoom. Initially when they needed to move

to mostly virtual, the residents did miss some time discovering their cultural identity and personal goal achievements. Powwows and classes were moved to virtual, postponed or cancelled. This posed a problem for youth with little access to technology like iPads or computers. ADYC staff worked in partnership with Ramsey County and other partners and were eventually able to secure computers for all the youth and families they work with.

"These kids are just trying to survive," Foster said. "Most have been homeless for five plus years and struggling, then finally have an apartment that they can call home. Our support suddenly becomes virtual; and they can't go anywhere. The world becomes hard and scary."

While Native Americans make up 2% of Minnesota's population, they account for 22% of the youth homeless population.

Foster said what sets Mino

Oski Ain Dah Yung apart from other housing projects is its emphasis on establishing cultural identity for the youth right from the beginning. The facility teaches Native traditions so the youth can say, "I know who I am and I'm proud of who I am." The establishment of a positive self-identity is a critical first step towards their success while initiating goals in education, jobs and other areas.

Other benefits include learning from Transition Coaches and other staff, who teach entrepreneurial skills, workforce training, financial management and things like Medicaid and insurance. The facility includes a workforce training center, cultural activities center, food shelf, clothing closet, a mini-credit store, a state-of-the-art community training center, and an art gallery along with a community kitchen.

"We know that once our young Native people have opportunities to strengthen and/or establish a sense of true self-identity, they can successfully work through all their other life goals," Foster said.

Achievement gap growing

>> from 1

'What are we going to do about it?'

According to Kopp, the rise in failing grades was disheartening, but not surprising, for those who heard the data presentation. She said, "The pandemic has laid bare what was already there. My feeling from the superintendent and the district staff is that the negative effect of our racial disparities is undeniable. The next question is, what are we going to do about it?"

There are 36,000 students in St. Paul's Public School System, and they are experiencing school in many different ways. Kopp thinks the board needs to hear from students about what works for them – and what doesn't – on everything from the structure of the school day to the content of their classes. She said, "We've nibbled around the edges of change for a long time in our public schools, but we need to take a much bigger bite. There's

energy and desire for this right now."

One student's story

Kalid Ali is a senior at Como Park High School, and holds down two part-time jobs. He is also a student at the University of Minnesota through the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Program, and a member of the Student Engagement and Advisory Board (SEAB). The board currently has seven members from four St. Paul high schools: Central, Como, Harding, and Highland Park. Several of the representatives are first-generation immigrants. The role of SEAB is to amplify student voices and concerns, and to bring them to the attention of school board members.

Ali came to the U.S. from Ethiopia in 2013, when he was 10 years old. He was placed in ELL (English Language Learner) classes upon arrival, and stayed there for the end of fourth grade and the beginning of fifth grade. English is not a compulso-



St. Paul School Board Director Jessica Kopp said, "Part of the problem with distance learning is the distance aspect, but there's so much more at play. We have to get this diagnosis right." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

ry language in Ethiopia, and Ali only knew half a dozen English words when he arrived. However, he learned quickly and soon asked to be placed in all-English

Superintendent Joe Gothard:

"While elementary school aged children will start to be phased back into classroom learning starting Feb. 1, secondary students (grades 6-12) will remain in distance learning for the time being. We are working on ways to support middle and high school students who may be falling behind in their learning. This includes a new opportunity for students who are struggling to receive in-person learning support at their schools." ~ From www.spps.org

speaking classes.

Ali is now advocating for ELL students in his role as a SEAB representative. He said, "ELL students make up a quarter of the students in the district, and more than half of them received failing grades in the first quarter of this year. Our families value education more than anything else. Many of our parents didn't have had access to a good education, and they desire it strongly for their children. But the district is losing immigrant students because the education style may not be working for them."

"The school board has to try and engage with the parents of students, even when there is a language barrier. They should hire translators, or offer English classes for them. Then the parents could impress upon their kids that distance learning is not something optional."

Both Kopp and Ali underscored that the pandemic poses additional challenges for immigrant students. Many of them are essential workers in their families, providing necessary income to keep their families going. Also, older children are expected to care for younger siblings while their parents are working outside the home.

Share your input

The school board will host a series of special meetings regarding reopening schools in District #625 for school year 2020-21. Meetings will begin at 5 p.m. The public may monitor open portions of the meetings via live stream at www.spps.org/boe.

- Monday, Jan. 25
- Monday, Feb. 1
- Monday, Feb. 8
- Monday, Feb. 22

Crisis calls >> from 1

Sergeant Jamie Sipes, a 26-year-veteran of law enforcement, supervises the COAST Unit. He said, "Mental health calls are on the rise. By pairing social workers with police officers, we feel we are better able to respond to community mental health needs. Our social workers bring their mental health expertise out into the community where it's needed."

Showing up differently

COAST unit members travel in minivans marked only with a small police insignia. The law enforcement officers wear dark navy

shirts and khakis instead of traditional uniforms. Social workers ride along as equal partners. According to Sipes, "These are visual cues that say we're here on a police call, but our team is going to do things differently."

Amber Ruth was the first licensed clinical social worker to join the COAST unit. She said, "I appreciate being on the scene with the officers. As social workers, we're able to assess people in crisis in their situation. We can directly refer them to resources, which keeps them from getting lost in the shuffle."

To date, the COAST social worker positions have been funded by Regions Hospital, People Incorporated (a community

provider of integrated behavioral and mental health services in Minnesota), and other organizations.

The goal of COAST is to connect people in crisis with the care they need, helping to reduce mental health crisis-related arrests and repeat calls for service. Sipes explained, "All of our SPPD officers receive 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. With the increase of mental health crisis calls, responders need to know how to handle these difficult situations."

According to the Minnesota Crisis Intervention Team website, there is currently little to no CIT training offered at police academies for dealing with mental

illness. It's up to individual police departments to undertake that work and, in the city of Saint Paul, it has become mandatory.

The CIT model promotes the use of verbal de-escalation skills before using force when confronting a mental health crisis. CIT training has been proven to decrease the risk of injuries or death to both officers and those suffering from mental illness, while also reducing the number of repeat 911 calls.

Help is available

The National Alliance on Mental Illness states that one in five people will experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime. The following resources

are listed as COAST partner organizations, and their services are available community-wide:

- Ramsey County Crisis Line 651.266.7900
- Children's Mental Health 651.266.7878
- Veteran's Crisis Line 800.273.8255

In addition, the Ramsey County Adult Mental Health Urgent Care Center is located at 402 University Ave. E. Its Crisis Line is answered 24/7 at 651.266.7878.

Contact Sergeant Jamie Sipes at 651.266.5840 for more information about the Community Outreach & Stabilization Unit of the Saint Paul Police Department.

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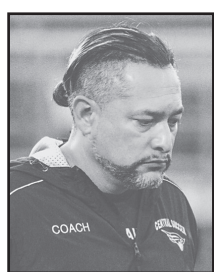
New year brings new board members to Hamline Midway Coalition

The Hamline Midway Coalition (HMC) Board of Directors welcomes newly elected members David Alborno (subdistrict A), Nneka Constantino (subdistrict B), and Karl Hahn (at-large), and returning members Steve Samuelson (subdistrict B) and Scott Kruger (subdistrict C), who currently serves as HMC's president.

The Hamline Midway Coalition launched the election with a call for candidates in October followed by an socially distanced in-person information session at Burning Brothers on Oct. 15 and an online social hour on Oct. 28, 2020. Voting began on Nov. 25,



Karl Hahn, at-large



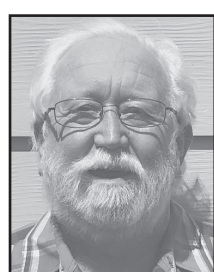
David Alborno, A3



Nneka Constantino, B2



Scott Kruger, C3



Steve Samuelson, B3

the day after the coalition's annual meeting. The election concluded on Dec. 11. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unlike in years past, voting took place entirely online. Community participation in the election

rose from 75 voters in 2019 to 120 voters in 2020.

"New board members will strengthen projects such as the neighborhood plan and the investment cooperative projects and pro-

vide additional support to the environment, transportation and development committees," said Kate Mudge, HMC Executive Director.

Alborno, Constantino, Hahn, Samuelson and Kruger will begin

their terms at the next meeting on Jan. 26, 2021 at 6:15 p.m. For more information about these meetings and other events, please see the HMC News and Events webpage.

HMC is District Council 11, one of 17 non-profit agencies charged by the city of Saint Paul to represent local neighborhood's needs around transportation, land use, and community development. However, like many district councils, HMC's reach is far broader and includes initiatives for safer streets, the previously mentioned investment co-operative, and support for resident-led initiatives in the community.

COATS FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLECTION AND FREE GIVEAWAY

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Pastor Joshua Miller • 1566 Thomas Ave. • St. Paul
www.jehovahlutheran.org • 651-644-1421

Banfield to open site on Larpenteur

Banfield Pet Hospital has purchased and plans to expand an existing veterinary clinic on Larpenteur Ave. just west of Lexington.

Banfield has acquired Larpenteur Animal Hospital, 1136 W. Larpenteur. It will also lease the building to the west, at 1144 Larpenteur, and add a vestibule connecting the two buildings, according to David W. Sorenson, the project manager with Colliers, which is doing the construction work for Banfield.

Demolition work already is underway in the west building, Sorenson told District 10's Land Use Committee on Jan. 6. The company hopes to begin new construction in the 1144 building in February and finish by end of summer. The 1136 building then will be renovated in fall. When finished, the clinic will be more than 8,000 square feet. The project does not require variances or zoning changes.

Banfield has more than 1,000 locations nationwide. The company hopes to maximize the Como site's proximity to the University of Minnesota's veterinary school, Sorenson said. The project will include new landscaping, additional lighting, and some parking lot revisions, including the likelihood of eliminating the driveway at Dunlap just south of Larpenteur, Sorenson said. The addition connecting the two buildings will include an elevator to provide accessibility that does not now exist, he said.

Dale and Front, on Jan. 15, 22 and 29.

Distribution will be 1:30-3:30 p.m. (or until supplies run out). Reservations are highly recommended; to reserve your box, fill out the form at www.district10comopark.org/mealbox.html. The boxes provide two meals of six servings each.

Call or link into D10 Meetings

Pandemic or not, renters, homeowners, and other community members are always welcome to participate in District 10's board and committee meetings. You can join either by video conference or by phone.

To obtain links, phone numbers, or other access information,

District 10 Como Community Council

By MICHAEL KUCHTA,
Executive Director
district10@district10comopark.org



send a request by email to district10@district10comopark.org. Or, call 651-644-3889. Upcoming meetings:

- Board meeting: Tuesday Jan. 19
- Neighborhood Relations: Tuesday Feb. 2
- Land Use: Wednesday Feb. 3
- Environment: Wednesday Feb. 10

All meetings begin at 7 p.m.



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Free Food Fridays return

The Como Community Council and Sanneh Foundation are partnering to again distribute free meal boxes on Fridays in January. The meal boxes are available to Ramsey Country residents dealing with financial hardships because of Covid-19. The meal boxes will be distributed in the north parking lot of Niem Phat Buddhist Temple, at



Jill and Dan Miller (985 Chatsworth) are the inaugural winners of the Como Community Council's first Holiday Decoration Celebration. The Millers have been Como residents since 2005, but this is their first year putting up lights, a move inspired in part as a way to uplift the neighborhood as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. They won cookies from Cookie Cart. Runners-up included: 758 Parkview (Elizabeth Bauman) and 1675 Victoria (John and Khai Pham). (Photo submitted)

IGF, schools team up to provide mental health resources to students

Saint Paul-based Irreducible Grace Foundation (IGF) has entered into a partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools and ISD 622 (North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale) to provide socially-distanced mental health resources for students and their families. Designed for students in grades K-5, the 25-part "IGF Kids" video series teaches mindfulness, music, and breathing tools, led by student instructors

and animated real-life scenarios.

"This series was informed by and infused with the life experiences of our culturally and racially diverse young people," said IGF's Founder and Executive Director Dr. Darlene Fry. "These young IGF members teach their peers about the emotional vocabulary, biological roots, and mindful movements needed to restore balance."

Irreducible Grace Foun-

dation is now offering the IGF Kids series to school districts nationwide. "With unprecedented pressures on children's mental health," said Dr. Fry.

"Saint Paul Public Schools' investment comes at a crucial time for families across the city. We believe young people across the country need these tools for their mental wellbeing."

Learn more by watching visiting igrace.org.

FROGTOWN

Canine Inspired Change hopes to bring healing through three deep dog breaths

Non-profit moves from an in-home business to the Wilder Center in midst of COVID-19 pandemic

By MAKENNA COOK

Seven-year-old Danielle Graczyk sat on the kitchen floor of her one-level house, curled up into her dog, Sally. The blankets wrapped around her comforted the two to sleep.

Sally had been brought to Graczyk's family by her uncle, who had been wrapped up in drugs and violence his whole life. Seven-year-old Graczyk begged to keep the dog until her parents gave in. Little did they know the effect this one dog would have on the rest of Graczyk's life.

Growing up in a household that lived paycheck to paycheck and a neighborhood that with a high amount of poverty and crime, she was oftentimes surrounded by trauma and addictions.

"My family did the best they could," Graczyk said. "But you can't do better than you know better."

Having Sally at her house was one of the first times Graczyk felt at peace about her surroundings.

"To me then, in my young mind, dogs meant comfort and love and predictability, and I could really communicate with her," Graczyk said. "People represented unpredictability and sometimes danger. You just never knew what you were going to get from them."

As she grew up, Graczyk tried a handful of life paths including college and bartending.



Both ended up leading her to a lifestyle of partying.

"During that time I was basically just trying to figure out how I can just be with dogs all the time and still party and not have to worry about anything," Graczyk said.

It wasn't until 16 years after she started her career in professional dog training that Graczyk realized she needed to get help.

"It wasn't that easy," Graczyk said. "It was a series of about two years of me trying to get sober on my own... finally I told somebody that I trusted that this is what is happening and I really need help."

That is when things began to change. She was given an opportunity at the start of her recovery to bring dogs to a local school that worked with children diag-



Kids learn patience, love and kindness through working and playing alongside dogs to boost self-esteem, emotional awareness, frustration tolerance and treating other people with respect. (Photos courtesy of Canine Inspired Change)

nosed with emotional behavioral disorders.

"I responded yes! Yes! Yes!" Graczyk said. "It was the biggest yes of my life. I got this email and I was like this is it for sure."

Being shown in recovery that remaining humble and performing acts of service was the right way to navigate the world, Graczyk jumped at what she thought would be a one-time opportunity.

After her initial visit to the school, doors began opening for Graczyk to create her own non-profit business, Canine Inspired Change, to continue to bring dogs to that school and many more.

Canine Inspired Change is an organization that teaches patience, love, and kindness through working and playing

alongside dogs in order to boost self-esteem in individuals at all points of their life. The organization moved from an in-home business to the Wilder Center in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The curriculum was formed by both Graczyk, whose background is dog training, and a licensed behavior analyst, Beth Childs. It focuses on reminding individuals that they matter and, even though life may not be what they expected at the moment, they can get through it with the right tools.

Childs has been in the human services field for 20 years. While working as a behavior analyst as her day job, she serves on the Canine Inspired Change board in her freetime. Recently her dog, Hank, was certified as a

Canine Inspired Change therapy dog, so now the pair is teaching some of their own classes.

"A lot of the key components I work with tie into CIC, things like self-esteem, emotional awareness, frustration tolerance, patience, and treating other people with respect," Childs said.

They use situations that arise while working with dogs to teach tools for real life situations. This gives students a positive experience practicing emotion regulation.

Childs said the way they measure CIC's success is to see the responses from the participants of their classes.

"Well, are they coming back?" Childs said. "Are they using these skills they've learned working with a dog and are they able to incorporate them into their real life day to day interactions?"

Childs said they are seeing a difference being made even through online dog therapy Zoom classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also offering other creative ways to get involved including a brand new podcast, Canine Inspired Podcast, and online dog training.

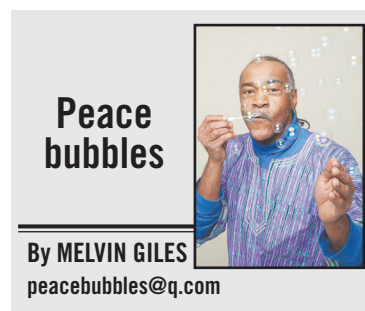
"There's still a main focus on the self esteem piece, like I still matter even though I am at home more often and may feel more isolated than the people I normally connect with, I still matter," Childs said. "A big piece of CIC is saying I matter, so being able to do that on a one-on-one zoom setting is really cool."

Let's practice being optimistic

Happy grateful New Year Monitor readers,

I started writing this month's column full of hope and gratefulness for surviving 2020. However, I can't recall ever wanting a year to end and feeling good riddance to the gift of a year of living; I hope I never-ever feel so unsettled about the gift of being alive on our beautiful blue, green, and colorful planet. Unlike, many

holiday gifts, we can't return or exchange the Gift of Time or the Precious Gift of Lives we loss in 2020 and still are losing today due to foolishness, arrogance, bad leadership, and personal everyday selfishness. With that said, I am shaking off 2020 with humbleness, deep sadness, and hope with the loving and gentle energy of my family, friends, and community soulmates and



champions of social, racial, and economic justice; with their help I will cultivate, meditate, and appreciate the synergy of being Op-

timistic throughout 2021!

I invite and encourage you to also join me and many others who are thinking and believing in the power of being optimistic! To start 2021, I've been playing/listening to the local Sounds of Blackness soundtracks, in particular, Be Optimistic, Hold On (A Change is Coming), Your Spirit ft., and I Believe and Kirk Franklin's Smile. I would love to finally venture into the stock market world and buy stocks or invest in YouTube since it has become my portal for my music therapy.

Also, as a member of the Urban Farm & Garden Alliance (UFGA), I participated in creating and reframing songs that can be used for COVID-19 prevention. We created a spring, summer, and a fall song/video; however, the song we wanted to reframe in 2020 was 'A Few of My Favorite Things,' which we didn't do, yet. Fortunately, I caught a wonderful Saturday Night Live (SNL) skit of the song reframed in simple and creative ways. It was simple because the lyrics were expressing the singers' desires and the joyful realities of being present. I loved it and look forward to UFGA and/or maybe you creating a musical video of 'A Few of My Favorite Things' reframed for a COVID-19 prevention message.

I also want to share words of wisdom or food for thought as we practice being optimistic for 2021. These pearls of truth come by way of the Rev. Dr. Ronald Bell, who was officiating and blessing a December 2020 Zoom wedding. He motivated and em-

powered the happy couple with ingredients for facing personal and life-long challenges. He told them "1. Stop (Be Still), 2. Breathe (Take-in the Life Force), and 3. Relax (Be guided by the Higher Loving Spirit). Rev. Bell shared a deeper message for each step that is too long for me to share and that I'm still trying to absorb into my heart and mind. However, I immediately knew he was delivering a divine message and a gift for a life-long partnership and companionship for this couple who was making the ultimate commitment and bond between two individuals who were Jumping the Broom of Togetherness of Foreverness-Unconditional-Love! Rev. Bell's inspiring words, particularly in the face of uncertainty, upheaval, darkness, and the unknown, is a bright message and light for all of us.

Yes, I am optimistic for 2021! I will also keep the message of my father, the Rev. Robert B. Giles, Sr., close to my heart: to "let patience have her perfect way" and as a flashlight as we continue to move out of our local and global COVID-19 and injustice (George Floyd killing) pandemic darkness into a brighter and optimistic 2021. Be well.

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FROGTOWN

ComMUSICation looks ahead to next stage

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Youth participating in ComMUSICation programs speak many different languages including Spanish, Hmong, Karen, Oromo, Somali, Thai, and Vietnamese.

The common language they all share, besides English, is the global language of music.

"ComMUSICation (CMC) is one of the only youth programs in the Twin Cities that uses music as the catalyst for social change," said founder and executive director Sara Zanussi. She and her team empower young people with skills for success through music-making in St. Paul's Frog-town, Eastside, and North End neighborhoods. They have no expectations about previous music experience or ability. Every interested child in fourth to 10th grades is welcome.

Closing achievement gap with music

CMC has been housed in the offices of the Mt. Airy Boys and Girls Club since 2015. At the start of the pandemic, CMC's performance programs went online. While participation numbers have dropped with the stressors of the pandemic, Zanussi said, "There have been some silver linings. While these times have been uncertain, evidence of the transformative power of music is not."

She described how the after-school choir program worked before the pandemic hit. While there were a few soloists, most of the kids sang together as part of an ensemble.

Zanussi said, "As an ensemble, our choir had no fear of performing – even in huge venues like at Orchestra Hall, the Mall of America, and U.S. Bank Stadium. Obviously, the pandemic has changed our ability to perform. The silver lining is that it has required our youth to take ownership of their own musical journey."

Zanussi said, "Since March 23, our students have been broadcasting from their homes on ZOOM. We have a ninth grade choir member named Aaliyah, who used to be quite shy about her singing voice. She wouldn't turn her camera on when practicing with the choir. Now she sings solo with her camera on, and exudes confidence. I was skeptical about the impact we could have virtually, but I see a new confidence growing – which is a significant life-skill for success."

CMC is currently working with about 50 fourth to 10th grade students between two in-school programs and their after-noon choir program. Zanussi explained, "We're committed to serving St. Paul's historically most under-resourced youth and families."

"We provide young people a chance to experience group music-making in a safe, caring community. Our goal is to help close the education achievement gap through high quality, holistic music-making with a diverse core of teaching artists."

Next Stage Initiative

CMC plans to move into its own space once COVID-19 is under control. Zanussi said, "We're launching an initiative called The Next Stage to help us fund our new home. The proposed building is at Rice St. and University Ave., and will be very accessible for our families. It has everything we need: practice and performance spaces, an on-site homework help program that will also provide dinners, a parking lot, and easy access to public transportation."

On average, families pay \$20 a month for a child to participate in CMC. There are full scholarships available, and cost is not a barrier. In normal times, tuition goes toward staff costs, snack and dinner three times per week, uniforms, sheet music, bus transportation, and other costs associated with monthly performances. The actual cost to the organization is closer to \$3,000 per school year for each student. "Grants," Zanussi said, "are what keep us alive."

She explained, "We're working to provide a safe and caring environment for each young person. Our kids are surrounded by the effects of poverty in their neighborhoods. We're breaking down participation barriers. We've introduced a number of virtual singing opportunities for St. Paul youth, and we welcome new singers. Our young people are continuing to sing and build community with other choir members and staff."



"I'm not shy anymore."

*-Aaliyah,
9th grade*

Transformative power of music

Carey Shunskis joined ComMUSICation as music director two years ago. She leads the Performance Choir on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoons, and Voice Class on Wednesdays. She said, "We understand that everyone is having their own challenges with the pandemic, but we have been impressed by how our kids keep showing up. We've had great attendance and great participation. We can't ask for much more than that."

Shunskis described a recent collaboration that 12 CMC youth participated in during November/December. The collaboration was originally designed to be held in-person, but was switched to a virtual platform. MPLS (impulse) is the name of a semi-professional adult choir whose emphasis is bringing choral music out of churches and concert halls into non-traditional venues.

Their artists worked with CMC students and California-based composer Danny Clay in a series of composition and performance workshops. Musi-

cal games inspired each choir to compose their own sounds and phrases, which they notated and taught to each other. The final performances premiered virtually in December, and can be viewed at www.commusicationmn.org/social-media.

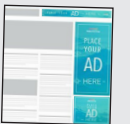
Shunskis remembered, "Our youth were kind of nervous at first. Not only were they being asked to sing solo, now they were in charge of their own music-making too. A fifth grader named Olive said, 'I never thought of myself as a composer before.' When all of the rehearsals were over and it was time to perform, our youth were emboldened."

One of the immediate needs in their new space will be 20 music stands, which cost \$50 apiece. If you're interested and able to donate to the ComMUSICation music stand fund, email Sara Zanussi at director@cmcmn.org.

To learn more about the ongoing work of ComMUSICation, visit www.commusicationmn.org.



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REBUILD REPAIR RECYCLE

Midway-Frogtown Exchange helps reduce waste, foster connections



By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Eight years ago, environmental activist Erin Pavlica was looking for a used, rideable stuffed horse for her young daughter's Christmas present. These toys are expensive, and Pavlica had no intention of buying one new. She made a post to the Hamline Midway Neighbors Facebook page and connected with someone who had just what she was looking for.

Pavlica is a dedicated zero-waster, thrifter, and re-user of most things needed for her family of six. That stuffed horse got her thinking, "What if there was a buy/sell/barter page just for Midway and Frogtown?" A longtime Midway resident, she has many friends and connections in both neighborhoods.

Connecting neighbors to neighbors

Midway and Frogtown border each other, separated by Lexington Ave. In setting up the exchange, Pavlica wanted it to

Erin Pavlica's daughter in 2013, riding the used upholstered horse that became the inspiration for the Midway-Frogtown Exchange. The group offers a place for Midway and Frogtown neighbors to buy, share and barter. (Photo submitted)

be accessible for everyone whether or not they had a car. The exchange has grown steadily over the years. At last glance, Pavlica said, "There were 427 comments on the holiday gift search page today."

You name it, and chances are someone else just might have what you want and be willing to pass it along. One person's trash is another person's treasure. The site was envisioned as a place to trade goods in the beginning but, Pavlica said, "It's nice to be able to make a little money these days, and things are priced very reasonably."

There are certain items not allowed for sale on the site such as baby formula. Items bought with coupons are also not allowed for sale at full price.

Keeping exchanges local

The Facebook group has grown to nearly 5,000 followers of all ages and backgrounds. Due to the size, a new member must be added by an existing member or by one of the two administrators: Erin Pavlica or Chris Miller. A new member's Facebook profile must indicate that they live in Saint Paul. If a prospective member's Facebook profile has no residency information, their request will be ignored. An exception can

be made for persons working in Midway-Frogtown.

All transactions must take place in the neighborhood, either at the seller's home or somewhere public.

The physical boundaries for this group run from Transfer Rd. to the west and 35 E to the east; from University Ave. to the south and the Burlington Northern railroad tracks to the north.

Where else can you find a glass top stove for \$100? Heirloom ruby red popcorn grown by the seller? High-end, yet fairly priced, costume jewelry for every occasion?

As Pavlica said, "We all have our own circle of stuff, and sometimes we just need to pass it along. Textiles have become one of our worst environmental nightmares. There just aren't many ways to recycle clothing anymore, so why not pass them on to someone who can use them?"

Pavlica has just completed Ramsey County's first six-week Recycling Ambassador Program. She said, "I'm a huge zero-waste advocate. It's a core part of my being. One of my favorite things in life is connecting people to other people, and to things that can be reused or repurposed imaginatively."



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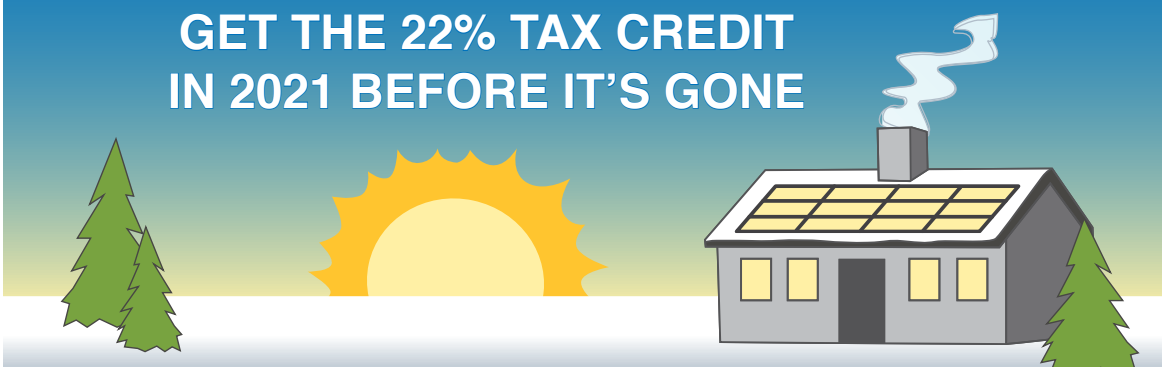
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