



## THE CIRCLE OF PEACE STORY

*Changing hearts, changing minds and changing lives over a meal in Rondo*

By JAN WILMS

It began as a conversation among neighbors.

Russel Balenger remembers when his sons were younger and in a row with a couple of families. "I went to the heads of the families and said we had to stop this right now, and we did. Years later, at my previous employment, I was in a board meeting and wanted to set up a conversation among gang members to stop the violence. My grandson had been shot twice, and so we were faced with it again, with the next generation," he said.



Russel Balenger

Balenger had been leading restorative justice projects for some time, and he had a roadmap of what he needed to do. "I just didn't know the players this time, and I had to go out and find them."

CIRCLE OF PEACE >> 10

## Medica moves to Midway, focusing on economic inclusion

By TESSA M. CHRISTENSEN

Medica hopes to impact the community for the better and create more diversity and economic inclusion by opening its first location in St. Paul.

An office with 50 staff members will operate out of the Wilder Foundation at Lexington Parkway North and University Ave. as soon as staff return to working on site. Until then, the new staff members are working from home.

"Medica as a company has had a focus on diversity and economic inclusion – calling it out as a goal for the last couple years," observed Medica employee Greg Bartsh, who has lived in the Mac Groveland neighborhood for 20 years. He's married to a St. Paul girl. "As events across Minneapolis and St. Paul unfolded last spring, with George Floyd's death and the civil unrest that followed, all of us as employees and members of the community saw the issues related to inequality play out firsthand."

Their Minnetonka-based staff included people across the spectrum. Some were out protesting. Other were deployed National Guard members. At listening sessions held by Medica, they learned the issues hit closer to home than many had realized, according to Bartsh.

They asked themselves: "Are we doing enough as an organization to help move this larger community forward towards a more equal and just place to live?"

MEDICA >> 3

## Standing in the streets for justice



St. Paul School Board member Chauntyll Allen (center), with Black Lives Matter Twin Cities Metro, was among speakers at The People vs. Derek Chauvin Rally for Justice in Minneapolis on March 8. "I know we're a long way from actually gaining our rights," said Allen. "That's why we're standing in the streets." The week before, Allen called attention to a proposed St. Paul ordinance that would have defined any gathering of five or more as a public assembly that needed a permit, and would "create unrealistic, unsafe, and unfair rules about what kinds of objects protesters can bring to protests, without restricting police violence or reining in law enforcement's frequent use of tactics that escalate conflict." The city council withdrew the ordinance on March 2 for additional study. It came at the same time that Hennepin County hung up posters at the government center with strict restrictions on protests that they replaced a few days later. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

## Is Round Two coming?

*City readies as Derek Chauvin trial begins*

By JANE McCLURE

Minneapolis and St. Paul are braced for civil unrest as the trial of former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin commences. City councils in both cities have been receiving updates on plans to allow peaceful protests and demonstrations, yet prevent the violence and property destruction that roiled the cities in May 2020.

Chauvin is going on trial for the May 2020 death of George Floyd. Chauvin is seen on video putting his knee on Floyd's neck outside of a south Minneapolis convenience store.

University Avenue, downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis and Minneapolis' Lake Street were hit especially hard by property damage in the wake of civil unrest after Floyd's death. Several arrests have been made and more suspects are sought. Many agencies are making plans. Metro Transit is telling bus and train riders to be prepared for potential service disruptions. Area district councils and business groups are also discussing steps they can take to prepare.

ROUND TWO >> 16

## 'Stable Weight: a Memoir of Hunger, Horses, and Hope'

*Hamline-Midway resident publishes debut book about eating disorder*

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Eating disorders affect every gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Longtime Hamline-Midway resident and writer Lisa Whalen knows that only too well.

Her debut book was out in print on March 2, and is available through Hopewell Publication (www.hopepubs.com) and on Amazon. The book chronicles her years of living with an eating disorder, and the surprises she found along the path toward healing.

Whalen is a college professor whose struggles with food started back in high school. An undiagnosed eating disorder turned her life upside down until she sought treatment through The Emily Program at age 28.

She said, "I had tons of shame about my relationship with food. My eating disorder didn't even have a name, but I became a very restrictive eater. I'd get run down from limiting my food choices,

and then overeat. Feeling ashamed about over-eating, I'd over-exercise. It was an endless cycle."

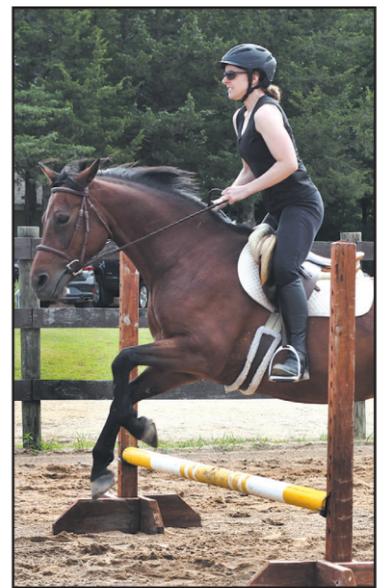
**Was it the chicken or the egg?**

As is typical of many people battling an eating disorder, Whalen also struggled with another issue. In her case, it was serious depression. Looking back, she said it was hard to know if the depression or the eating disorder came first. In her memory, they couldn't be separated.

Being evaluated and treated for depression was the first of many steps Whalen took toward reclaiming her life. She learned how to manage her depression, with help from her therapist at The Emily Program. The same therapist suggested it might be helpful for Whalen to write about her struggle, even if she never intended to publish.

Whalen learned that her eating disorder was tied to a life-long habit of perfectionism, going all the way back to childhood and striving to be "a good girl" all the time. The idea of laying bare such deep personal ground through her writing was terrifying.

STABLE WEIGHT >> 12



Lisa Whalen, author of the memoir *Stable Weight: a Memoir of Hunger, Horses, and Hope*, started jumping after she figured out how to ride on the flats. She remains a dedicated equestrian, and is a volunteer at the Animal Humane Society. (Photo submitted)



HOME IMPROVEMENT:  
Bee lawns, real estate  
market during COVID-19

PAGES 8-9



BLANKET DRIVE  
They don't take  
warmth for granted

PAGE 13



So you want to retire...  
What do you do  
about your business?

PAGE 16



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# Seeking justice, caring for people: preparing for the days ahead

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

As the criminal trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin begins, the Twin Cities will once again be front and center in confronting the trauma of racism, police brutality, and White supremacy.

To help clergy and community members prepare, United Theological Seminary is offering a new web-based series called "Disrupting White Supremacy." On Tuesday, March 2, the first dialogue, called "Seeking Justice, Caring for Community: Preparing for the Days Ahead," was launched via Zoom. Its purpose was to prepare listeners for the upcoming trials of the former police officers accused in George Floyd's death.

This program was the first in a two-year series. The project has a non-denominational and anti-racist orientation, and will address political issues of concern at the local and national levels with different guest voices in the months ahead.

Series moderator Rev. Dr. Gary Green II said, "This first conversation is meant to help our communities develop the resources to support and care for each other, while disrupting the ways White supremacy functions behind the scenes to create circumstances where Black bodies are routinely killed."

**In this moment**

Rev. Dr. Green II is an assistant professor in pastoral theology and social engagement at United Theological Seminary. He moderated the discussion between Rev. Steven Belton (President and CEO of the Twin Cit-



Rev. Dr. Gary Green II

"White supremacy is an idea that has been used to construct our society. Whiteness is assumed to be superior, and Blackness is assumed to be inferior. Start to listen to the words around you, maybe even coming out of your own mouth: blackball, blackmail, black list, sold down the river. Rarely do we have conversations about the insidious ways that racism works; the stuff that is just baked into our system." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

ies Urban League) and Rev. Traci Blackmon of Ferguson, Mo. Both Rev. Belton and Rev. Blackmon have been prominent public voices and ministers in response to the killing of Black men and women at the hands of police

across America.

With the first "Disrupting White Supremacy" dialogue, the lead-up to Chauvin's trial was at the forefront of the discussion.

SEEKING JUSTICE >> 3

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**Rev. Traci Blackmon**

“To be Black in America, no matter your social class, is to always be living in some state of racialized trauma. George Floyd is not the only reason people are showing up for these protests. People are hurting in so many different places. As to the role of clergy, I can only speak from the context of my own experience in movement work. Any movement is fluid. In Ferguson, following Michael Brown’s killing at the hands of police in 2014, leaders were chosen by the

community. Clergy may assume that because they lead in the pulpit, they lead in the streets – but it isn’t usually that way. As clergy, we need to respect the leaders that the movement chooses.”

**Rev. Steven Belton**

“Black community is not a monolithic thing; it is both complex and fragile. We need to honor the anger and trauma that has built up in our community, because there is a compiling effect to it. In terms of what people need, I like the saying, ‘Different strokes for different folks.’

“The Black church venerates images of Jesus as the Great Physician. Clergy members need to be writing out prescriptions for self-care right now, because different people need different things. Don’t forget the very young and the very old, the homeless, and other people on the edges. Hurting people are more likely to hurt people. We need to be providing trauma-centered care in our community.”



**SEEKING JUSTICE: United Theological Seminary launches ‘Disrupting White Supremacy’**

>> from 2

Rev. Dr. Green II said, “Racial justice is multi-faceted, collaborative, complicated work. One of the first steps is learning to see White supremacy – and understanding how it functions.”

**Learn to see White supremacy**

“In the context of what has happened in the Twin Cities, we tend to focus on forms of racial violence that are directed at Black and Brown-skinned people (as in the killings of Jamar Clark and George Floyd.) But there is also a lot of harm done that isn’t necessarily visible.”

Rev. Dr. Green II went on to describe the countless times he has been in stores minding his own business, only to have his thoughts disrupted by a White customer asking him where they can find a certain product. He said, “The assumption is that be-

cause I’m Black, I work there.”

Experiencing White supremacy first-hand runs the gamut from micro-aggressions to terror. Rev. Dr. Green explained, “While George Floyd’s death was traumatic, I experienced it as part of the broader trajectory of Black men and women being killed at the hands of police. Like many others, I experience the fear that comes from the potential for violence regularly. My body responds every time I see a police car.”

Rev. Dr. Green II explained how he believes the cycle of racism is perpetuated, even among well-intentioned people who consider themselves progressive: a racist event happens, people are triggered to respond, the shock wears off, and those same people settle back into their own rhythms. He said, “We need to be having ongoing conversations about how to disrupt White supremacy, and not keep responding just in moments of visible crisis.”

**Anti-racism as a lifestyle**

Rev. Dr. Green II said, “The pace of change around racist policies has been glacial. Just living

in this world in a neutral way is contributing to the wrongs that exist. It is not enough. Disrupting White supremacy will have to be a daily struggle for all of us if we are going to see real change. It has to become a life-style rather than a project.”

He continued, “I do have hope though, because of what seems like a genuine eye-opener this time. Perhaps due to the pandemic, people around the world witnessed George Floyd’s death. His killing didn’t happen in an instant, but took nearly eight minutes. Every moment was caught on film. We’re seeing differently than we were before this happened. The daunting part is in knowing how much sustained work has to be done to break the structure of White supremacy down.”

The March 2 broadcast was recorded and will be released as a podcast once edited. The next “Disrupting White Supremacy” broadcast will be sometime this summer. To learn more or to register for upcoming events, go to <https://spas-elca.org/event>. The suggested donation is \$10, but anyone can attend regardless of ability to pay.

**Medica moves to Midway** >> from 1

“We said we could do more,” said Bartsh.

“While there is still so much we need to learn, there is one thing we know how to do. We’re an employer. We create jobs. We create good jobs.”

The starting job at Medica is in support, and staff receive training to do their jobs well. It provides a solid understanding of the company, and Medica focuses on promoting from within, Bartsh pointed out. “Many of the supervisors and senior directors

in the organization started in the call center,” he said.

When they looked at their staff, they saw it was largely White, and realized they would need to be more purposeful in shifting that.

They decided to embark on a first for the organization. They would open an office location in a diverse community and pull from that community for their workers.

At Medica, Bartsh heads up the individual and family insurance division for those who don’t get insurance through their employer or get it through Medicaid. The work covers eight states. He’s been with Medica for 10 years, and wanted to be involved

in this new project in part because it is four miles from his home.

Medica partnered with Greater MSP, St. Paul Chamber and the Midway Area Chamber of Commerce to narrow the location to the Wilder Foundation, which sits in a neighborhood that had been hit during the civil unrest.

It jumped to the top of the list for a few reasons, according to Bartsh.

Medica needed secure, office space suitable for its staff with access to transportation.

It is also at the corner of four unique neighborhoods.

With his experience in public policy, Bartsh also valued the

philanthropic work of Wilder, especially in terms of health care and economic development issues.

“It was really a win-win-win for us,” said Bartsh.

Staff at the new office will answer calls and process claims. These are new jobs that did not exist at Medica before. Nearly all of the staff are new, although a few supervisors will come from the Minnetonka location to liaison and train. All jobs at Medica include health benefits and 401K from day one.

Medica has collaborated with Ramsey County and St. Paul to identify qualified candidates, and is working with other orga-

nizations to develop a workforce.

The goal is not only to pull from the neighborhood for the Midway office, but to expand their network for hires at the Minnetonka headquarters. The staff members who have been hired come from the five zip codes surrounding the office.

“This is step one for us,” said Bartsh. “We’re really going in with our ears open and our mouths shut. There is more we don’t know than what we do.”

Medica has regional offices in Duluth, Fargo, St. Cloud and Omaha.

“We’re excited to be part of the neighborhood,” said Bartsh. “St. Paul has been extremely welcoming.”

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# Breaking schools' rules: school-to-prison pipeline explained

*Why everyone should care and work to help stop the funnel and negative effects on society*

Schools and prisons should never be in the same sentence; however, the school-to-prison pipeline is real.

For far too many students of color, entering the gateway to incarceration begins with a referral from the classroom to the courtroom. This phenomenon is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund described this pipeline as "funneling of students out of school and into the streets and the juvenile correction system perpetuates a cycle known as the 'School-to-Prison-Pipeline,' depriving children and youth of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and participation in our democracy."

The emergence of the school-to-prison pipeline has been impacted by trends in school disciplinary practices and zero tolerance policies. It is our challenge to dismantle this pipeline and create new pipelines to success for all children. In order to undertake in this endeavor, we must first become knowledgeable on this contemporary civil rights issue.

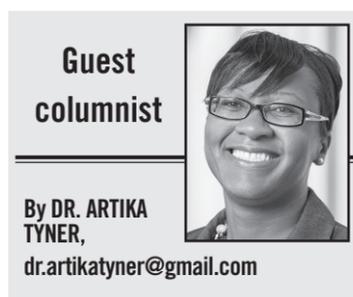
Students enter into the juvenile justice system through an interaction with a police officer in the community or through a referral from schools.

**There are two main contributing factors that have led to the expansion of the school-to-prison pipeline:**

**1) School disciplinary practices.** Nationally, a public student is suspended every second and a half. This equates to 3.3 million children being suspended each year. One study found that 95 percent of out-of-school suspensions were for nonviolent, minor disruptions such as tardiness or disrespect. Previous studies have shown that even a single suspension can double the odds of that student later dropping out. A simple math equation emerges: missed days in the classroom plus missed learning opportunity equals a decreased likelihood of a student's ability to successfully complete high school and enter the pipeline to future success through higher education and vocational pursuits.

**2) Zero tolerance policies.** Zero tolerance policies can also serve as a gateway into the school-to-prison pipeline. Schools are increasingly reliant on zero tolerance as a tool to curb misbehaviors. However, their use may be too drastic. Violence is down at public schools since 1990 — down by 30 percent. Further, less than one percent of all violent crimes happen on school grounds. Therefore, in some instances the enforcement of zero tolerance policies can be far-reaching, therefore increasing the likelihood of interaction with law enforcement and future incarceration.

This pipeline must be dis-



Guest columnist

By DR. ARTIKA TYNER,  
dr.artikatyner@gmail.com

mantled and strategic action is required. Changes in three main categories must be enacted.

First, positive climates must be created that focus on prevention rather than punishment. Students would be better served through interventions informed by restorative practices from school administrators to handle disciplinary actions rather than relying on resource officers and the court system.

Educational programs and counseling services should be increased and made available, along with training and tools for teachers to effectively deal with misbehavior. This holistic approach will aid in ministering to the needs of children while supporting learning goals.

Secondly, the development of clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations is critical, along with consequences to prevent, de-escalate, and address disruptive behaviors. As an adjunct to this, we must improve behavior, increase engagement, and boost achievement. Students must be made aware of what's expected of them and learn key tools for managing these expectations as a part of life skills development.

Lastly, we need to ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement to prevent a reversion to the methods and policies that made the school-to-prison pipeline possible. Disciplinary policies and practices will need continual examination and analysis.

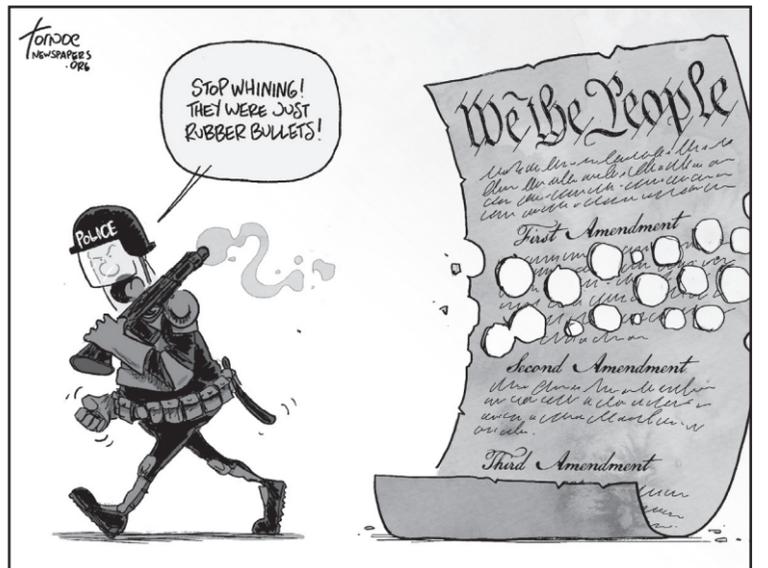
The emergence of the school-to-prison pipeline is detrimental to the success of thousands of children across the United States. Entering the pipeline creates a gateway into the "tangled web of mass incarceration." Now more than ever we need a vision for dismantling this pipeline in order to support student engagement, learning, and academic success. The wisdom of Sitting Bull offers a new pathway to the future: "Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make

for our children." This a call to action for educators, school administrators, elected officials, parents, and community leaders.

You can learn how you can help to prevent, challenge, and change the school-to-prison pipeline by watching my lecture in the Comcast/NBC Universal Social Justice Series on the School-to-Prison Pipeline.

You can also participate and be part of the solution by visiting #SJSSBeyondTheHashtag, #SchoolToPrisonPipeline, and #RacialJustice.

Through her organization, *Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute*, Dr. Artika Tyner seeks to plant seeds of social change through education, training, and community outreach.



## RECOGNIZING LEADERS

On Feb. 25, 2021, the Midway Chamber of Commerce held its annual celebration. In a typical year, this would mean dressing up and having a plated dinner in person with 300 attendees on a Saturday night. But this has not been a typical year and the event was moved to a Thursday over Zoom. Despite the changes, many of the same components remained including announcing award winners. Every year, the Midway Chamber accepts nominations for leadership awards in five different categories, which get narrowed down to finalists by our events committee and voted on by our board of directors. This year, we added a Resiliency Award for a chamber member who showed resilience during this difficult time of COVID and civil unrest. Here are the winners.

**Rookie of the Year:** Open Cities Health Center. Given to

a newer member of the Midway Chamber, the Rookie of the Years award recognized Open Cities Health Center. Open Cities provides much needed support to our neighbors, including the most economically disadvantaged. Open Cities, which opened in 1967 in the basement of St. James Church, now sees over 10,000 patients annually throughout the Twin Cities and this year was one of the first sites for COVID-19 tests.

**Nonprofit of the Year:** Ujamaa Place. Ujamaa Place provides a holistic transformation for young African-American men experiencing inequity at the intersection of race and poverty. They help them achieve brotherhood, stability, and personal success. Services include housing, education, employment, wellness, criminal justice, culture and community.



Building a stronger Midway

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

As they celebrated their 10th anniversary in 2020, Ujamaa Place can now say they have transformed the life of over 5,000 men and has maintained a 4% recidivism rate – compared to 68% nationally.

**Large Business of the Year:** Xcel Energy. Xcel Energy showed their community support this year, helping those impacted by civil unrest, racial injustice, and the pandemic. In the spring, they donated over 300,000 surgical masks to frontline workers battling COVID-19. In the summer, they offered equipment re-

bates and free consulting services to businesses impacted by civil unrest. As the new school year started, Xcel was one of a handful of companies taking part in a \$1 million donation to help fund distance learning pods for low-income students.

**Small Business of the Year:** The Lab. Following the start of COVID-19, hand sanitizer was one of the hardest products to find, and also one cited as important in helping stop the spread of germs. The Lab, a brewery located at 767 Eustis, shifted gears and started producing bottles and jugs of sanitizer. After the murder of George Floyd, The Lab began highlighting black-owned businesses with a local market titled "Black Business is Beautiful." With the motto "our wallets have the power to change racial economic disparities" the event is now occurring monthly and features African-American vendors.

**Volunteer of the Year:** Christine Noonan, Minnesota

**State Fair.** A member of the Midway Chamber's board, the executive committee, and the events committee, Chris is a dedicated volunteer who prepares for meetings and offers several great ideas. Her work ethic shows in how reliable she always is when given a task. In addition to volunteering for the Midway Chamber, Chris also volunteered on a day when the Midway Chamber asked for volunteers to help distribute food at the Midway YMCA.

**Resiliency Award: Bole Ethiopian Cuisine.** The Midway felt the loss of Bole last May when a fire burned down the building which housed Bole, Bole Express and Napa Auto Parts. Owner Solomon Hailie showed his resilience by finding a new location in a close-by space (1341 Pascal) and will reopen his new doors in March.

The Midway Chamber is appreciative of all the work by these recipients to help build a stronger Midway.

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**Owner & Editor:**  
Tessa M. Christensen, 612-345-9998  
Tessa@MonitorSaintPaul.com

**Advertising & Marketing:**  
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Denis@MonitorSaintPaul.com

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# Representation matters - put 'We are Water Protectors' in hands of Indigenous kids

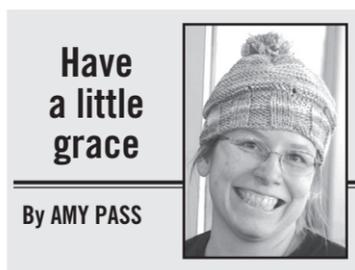
In an effort to get further outside the confines of my limited perspective as a white woman in South Minneapolis, I started following the Facebook pages of a number of Indigenous tribes in Minnesota this summer. With all of its flaws, Facebook offers this unique opportunity to know what's happening in quiet and often forgotten communities. By following those communities and sharing the news they post, we have the opportunity to amplify those forgotten voices and bring just a little more justice and equity to the world.

One of the pages I follow is Native News Online, where I read about the FIRST Indigenous winners of the Caldecott Medal, an award given for the most distinguished American picture book published the previous year. "We Are Water Protectors," illustrated by Michaela Goade, written by Carole Lindstrom won this year's medal.

My family immediately wanted to find a way to support the

book. My daughter and I started tossing around ideas. Our nieces have birthdays coming up. We could purchase the book for them. But then we started thinking about the kids in our community. We live less than a block from Little Earth of United Tribes. These are the kids represented in "We Are Water Protectors," and we started wondering how we could get this book into their hands. People with resources (mostly white) won't have any trouble getting this book. They should most certainly read it, too, but kids who see themselves represented in this book are way less likely to have the means to get a copy.

And representation matters so much. I realized that when I found myself crying at Kamala Harris' speech after the election. (Or years earlier when I found myself ridiculously tearing up over Wonder Woman in the theater.) I have heard story after story of children who saw the Obamas in the White House and com-



mented on seeing someone with their own skin color.

Not only does representation matter but art and stories have the power to move us in ways that ordinary speeches and the news do not. My cousin-in-law commented after the inauguration that what moved the nation most that day was not the oath of office but the music and the poetry. What moved me most following the uprising this summer was the way that artwork poured out everywhere. Art and stories have the power to change us, to challenge us, and to heal us.

For these reasons, we decided to reach out to our neigh-

bors at Little Earth and ask if it was a good idea to set up a way for people to sponsor a copy of We Are Water Protectors to give to the children at Little Earth and other Indigenous families in the community. We wanted to be respectful of that fact that there are so many other needs, and we weren't sure that this was where we should focus our attention. But our friends gave us a big nod of approval and agreed to help distribute books when they came.

And so, this project was born. We are asking all of you to consider sponsoring a book (or several). The sponsorship page is on my daughter, Aurora's, website. She's a high school senior taking classes at the Institute for Production and Recording through the High School Advantage program, and building a website is a course project this semester. As has frequently been the case for her, Aurora decided to take a school assignment and turn it into an opportunity to work toward equity and justice for our community.

She got straight to work learning the platform to put a shop on her website, and within a few days she had a page ready to go. And it's ready for you!

Our hope is to raise enough funds to get a book into the hands of every child at Little Earth. Additional books will be distributed through organizations that serve Indigenous families in Minneapolis. This means that we would like to see at least 300 books sponsored. Books will be purchased through Birchbark Books, an Indigenous-owned, local, independent bookstore.

We are grateful for the partnership of the Midway Como Frog-town Monitor in sponsoring this project! YOU can help by sponsoring a book here: [bit.ly/book-sponsor](http://bit.ly/book-sponsor)

Amy Pass earned her master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Bethel Theological Seminary. But perhaps her greatest lessons have come from raising two children and maintaining a 21-year marriage.

## A SIMPLE THING: BUBBLES

It's just another day in quarantine. The Minnesota winter feels extra cold as negative temperatures discourage walks and breaks away from laptops, people, and small spaces.

She thought this was going to be another one of "dad's dumb ideas," the almost-alliteration she expected to play on repeat with her father's ideas. Her little brother danced around with the wand in hand.

"I LOVE bubbles!!" he exclaimed over and over again.

"Grab your hat," she said grumpily. She pushed him out into the snow and closed the door behind them. The frosty wind met her warm cheeks, making her wince with regret at coming outside. The south Minneapolis alleyway was lit with street lamps as soft snow fell. It was quiet except for an occasional siren or car honking. She watched her brother try hopelessly to blow bubbles, his one eyebrow raised as he concentrated on the task at hand.

Why can't we blow bubbles inside, she thought to herself, annoyed as her toes grew colder and her hands numbed. After another minute full of failed attempts, his eyes met hers.

"I can't do it..." he sighed sadly. "I can't get the bubble to form. You do it."

She reached hastily for the container, eager to create one



bubble and then call it quits. She grasped the wand and blew slowly and carefully. A bubble began to form and then quickly popped.

"Not so easy, huh?" her brother smirked. She rolled her eyes and tried again. To both of their surprise, a glistening ball slowly bounced off of the wand and landed in the snow. Before their eyes, it began to freeze. The edges curled slightly and a dome was formed. The light snow falling from the sky added a cake-like topping, creating a sparkle effect. They both stared for a minute, the cold and bitterness of the day, no, the past year, absorbing into nothingness.

But see, the most simple of things in life are always waiting to surprise you. Even when it's -10 degrees outside.

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.

## Push for legislation, non partisan unity on catalytic converter thefts

By ABU NAYEEM

If you haven't had your catalytic converter stolen this year, chances are you know someone who has. The catalytic converter is a device located in the exhaust system underneath an automobile that filters harmful emissions. It is made with rare and valuable metals. Thieves steal and sell the stolen catalytic converters to legitimate scrap-metal dealers. In early 2020, the value of the rare metals has sharply increased and, as a result, there has been a national surge of thefts. For the city of Saint Paul, compared to last year, it is reported auto-accessory thefts have increased by 300%.

Catalytic converter thefts are an economic crime that disproportionately impact lower income households, and renters because they are less likely to have a garage or secure parking area. Replacing a catalytic converter can cost up to thousands of dollars. In the event that it's partially covered by insurance, there are still hefty out-of-pocket expenses and potential increases in policy premiums. A neighbor reported that the thieves that took her converter caused additional damage to the vehicle that will bring her total repair bill to \$5,700 - about the value of the car.

Sensible legislation would place regulations on scrap-metal



buyers. Our state legislators have been slow in getting meaningful legislation to pass likely due to partisan bickering. Currently, in both the MN House and MN Senate there is a respective bill introduced by Republicans (SF206, and HF330) and Democrats (SF890 and House bill to be announced). Even though they have similar content, they are likely to be voted for/against across partisan lines. At the state legislature, the Democrats hold a majority in the House and Republicans hold a majority in the Senate. It is likely two different types of bills will be pushed forward prolonging the passage of a finalized bill... essentially political gridlock.

This is not acceptable! President Biden has called for bi-partisan unity in Congress. In reality, it is naive to believe that two opposing political parties that gaslight each other will cooperate on most issues. Bi-par-

tisan unity is advocated when the dominant party asserts compliance over the minority party through moral pressure. Instead, we should strive for non-partisan unity, where the citizens' interests are prioritized over party interests. In tangible terms, our legislators should come together earnestly to tackle the issue and the proposed bills (include companion bill) should be a stand-alone bill, so legislators can vote directly and it can be passed swiftly.

**How can you help?**  
As citizens, we can pressure our legislators to put aside their differences to support effective legislation via a pressure campaign. I have created a petition that serves as a living document of those impacted/concerned with catalytic converters thefts. Please sign it, and share your story in the comments: <http://chnq.it/8hBHJtVwP>

Also, I'm going to be organizing an interactive virtual meeting bringing legislators, and citizens together focused on creating action and broader awareness to push for non-partisan unity. There will be more details. Feel free to follow the the campaign of twitter page: <https://twitter.com/RConverters>

Frogtown resident Abu Nayeem is a community organizer, and data specialist. He has a masters of science in agricultural & resource economics from UC Berkeley.

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# Is Round Two coming?

>> from 1

St. Paul council members Feb. 24 raised questions about law enforcement response, and urged that care be taken to not inadvertently put innocent people through racial profiling. They also asked questions about business protections and what everyone should look out for.

The primary focus for law enforcement is to protect people, protect property and to protect free speech rights, said St. Paul Police Department Deputy Chief Stacy Murphy. "The St. Paul Police Department is committed to

protecting free speech." The majority of those who wish to protest will be peaceful. But violent and dangerous behaviors will not be tolerated, said Murphy.

Murphy outlined the steps being taken, including weeks of specialized training. The former Sears store on Rice Street has been a training ground, where almost 1,000 first responders have been trained in recent weeks. St. Paul's law enforcement is part of a group called operation Safety Net; a parallel training and planning process is in place for Minneapolis.

St. Paul Police have also been meeting with business associations to discuss how business owners can protect themselves against another round of property damage. Business owners are urged to put measures in place including better lighting and se-

curity cameras that have the capacity to record and save video. Boarding up or laminating doors are options.

Loose items such as outdoor decorative elements should be removed or secured. Businesses should also check with their insurance carriers about what is covered and what is not.

Police are also meeting with groups that plan to protest. Murphy said police have a good working relationship with most of the St. Paul groups that will stage protests and demonstrations.

Jury selection for the Chauvin trial started March 8, said Murphy. Opening statements are set for March 29. It's not known how long the trial and jury deliberations will last, or when there will be a verdict. The trial is expected to draw people from around the country and possibly



Kimberly Handy-Jones, whose son Cordale Q. Handy was shot and killed by St. Paul police in 2017, drove from Illinois to speak at a March 8 rally in downtown Minneapolis. "I see justice comin'," she said. "There is enough of just us to get justice. We just have to keep our boots on the ground." (Photo by Jill Boogren)

## { Monitor in a Minute }

By JANE McCLURE

### Midway Center site of fire

Midway Center at 1544 University Ave., which was extensively damaged during civil unrest in May 2020, again had a fire Feb. 15. The St. Paul Fire Department was called to the former Family Dollar store after smoke was seen there. By late morning, the fire was out and crews were doing cleanup. It was believed the fire started in a rooftop air conditioning unit.

The shopping center was extensively damaged during civil unrest in the wake of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis. Just days before the most re-

cent fire, the city issued a letter to New York City-based property owner RK Midway Shopping Center LLC declaring the structure to be a nuisance building. The building was inspected last year by city officials. Its certificate of occupancy was revoked. The building's framing has severe damage and part of the roof is caved in.

The city's letter and findings launch a process through which the building owners could go through legislative hearings and be told to remove or repair the structure. According to the initial letter, the city's structural engineer has informed RK Midway that there must be a com-

plete assessment of the building's structural integrity by an engineer licensed and registered with the state. The process includes deadlines for action, detailed plans for building removal or repair and eventually a hearing before the city council.

Tenants moved out of the building last spring as their leases were terminated. One former tenant, Thien's Cajun, has reopened at 712 University Ave. as King Cajun Boiling Seafood.

### Frogtown site plans

The corner where a long-time Frogtown bar stood will be transformed into office space, with Feb. 19 St. Paul Planning Commission approval of a needed conditional use permit. The commission approved a permit

the world.

Staffing changes are going into place to handle the anticipated volume of 911 calls and

to deploy mobile field forces as needed. About 1,000 National Guard members will be deployed in St. Paul.

to allow building height at 981 University Ave. to go to 42 feet 9 inches.

The Frogtown Neighborhood Association made no recommendation by the time the staff report was submitted. The redevelopment was found to be consistent with the neighborhood plan.

### Wilder Square moves ahead

A technical change in funding for the Wilder Square project won approval Feb. 10 from the St. Paul City Council, acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Board.

Wilder Square is an 11-story building at 750 N. Milton St. It has 136 apartments occupied mainly by low-income elderly and disabled residents. New

owner CommonBond Communities is planning to extensively rehabilitate the structure and update the apartments.

Last year city officials approved a deferred HOME loan in an amount up to \$1,270,000 for the Wilder Square project. Due to the need to expend existing federal funds within a set time, city Planning and Economic Development staff recommended that the HOME and federal community Development Block Grant or CDBG dollars be swapped.

The swap doesn't affect the project itself. The purchase and rehabilitation cost is at \$32.9 million. CommonBond is drawing on a wide range of funding sources for the project. The intent is to renovate apartments and not displace existing residents.



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## Upcoming Meetings

### Development Committee

March 11th at 6:30 pm

### Environment Committee

March 22nd at 6:30 pm

### Board Meeting

March 22nd at 6:30 pm

### Transportation Committee

April 5th at 6:30 pm

All meetings are open and welcoming to the public. Visit the HMC website for details. You can also call or email for information!



## Dates and Times

Saturday, March 13th

10:00 am

Thursday, March 18th

6:30 pm

Hamline Midway neighbors are invited to attend virtual community conversations about the 10-year plan for the neighborhood. Join us on Zoom and help shape the future of Hamline Midway!

For a link to join or call into the meeting, visit HMC's website: [www.hamlinemidway.org/neighborhood-plan](http://www.hamlinemidway.org/neighborhood-plan) or call 651-494-7682.

MN350 can't reconcile building new carbon-dependent natural gas plant with Xcel's goal to be carbon-free

# 'Energy we can't afford'

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

MN350 wants people to question whether natural gas is really clean-burning, safe and abundant energy, and they are fighting Xcel's proposed new billion dollar fossil gas power plant in Becker, Minn.

Xcel has been in the news since last year, when environmentalists applauded their decision to close two coal-burning plants in Minnesota, en route to providing carbon-free electricity by 2050.

A coalition of Twin Cities environmental organizations are working to stop the proposed fossil gas plant from being built in Becker. The name of their campaign is "Energy we can't afford." The coalition includes MN350, the North Star Sierra Club, Community Power, and the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

Chelsea DeArmond, founder of the St. Paul MN350 chapter, is leading the campaign. She said, "Xcel has gotten a lot of positive publicity about their stated carbon-free goal. What's talked about much less is that Xcel, and other Minnesota utilities, are planning to build large natural gas plants to generate electricity in the short term. We feel that building new carbon-dependent power – to get to being carbon-free – just doesn't make sense."

According to DeArmond, "Natural gas should be referred to as fossil gas because it is one more outdated, non-renewable fossil fuel like coal and oil. It is dirty, dangerous, and expensive. It is bad for our climate, and it is



MN350 member Jean Comstock spoke at a Day of Action event last fall at Xcel Headquarters in Downtown Minneapolis. The deadline for filing public comment in the "Energy We Can't Afford" campaign is April 12. (Photos courtesy of MN350)



bad for our pocket books.

"If the construction of new plants and accompanying infrastructure moves forward, Minnesotans will be stuck with the damage for years to come. Low-income communities and communities of color have the most to lose, since they spend more of their income on energy bills and tend to live closer to proposed fossil gas pipe lines, pumps, and power plants."

### Only natural when it is in the ground

Xcel received special authority from the state legislature three years ago to build the natural gas plant in Becker, bypassing the traditional route of getting approval from state regulators. Public reaction to the plan has

met with harsh criticism. Environmentalists are pushing back against continued reliance on fossil fuels in the midst of a climate crisis.

DeArmond said, "At MN350, we see this plant proposal as a big step backwards. We have so many exciting technology options to get us to carbon free electricity. People don't understand how dirty fossil gas is, all along the pipeline. The only place fossil gas is natural is when it's buried in the ground."

MN350 member and communications volunteer Jay Lieberman said, "Minnesotans must consider the full impact of using fossil gas: from extraction, usually by hydraulic fracturing (or fracking), to transportation through extensive pipelines to

power plants, and, ultimately, to burning it in our homes. Fossil gas is mainly methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gasses there is, and methane is released into the atmosphere at every step of that process."

Clean energy advocates say using fossil gas as a bridge to a carbon-free future might have been acceptable 10 or 20 years ago, when renewable technologies were just getting off the ground. The cost of wind and solar have been dropping steadily though, making it unnecessary to continue relying on fossil fuels.

### Campaign to address fossil gas plant construction

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has agreed to receive public comments on this

### What does the 350 in MN350 mean?

350 stands for parts per million, which is a way of measuring the ratio of carbon dioxide molecules to all other molecules in the atmosphere. Scientists, climate experts, and government officials agree that 350 ppm is the "safe" level of carbon dioxide. Right now, the earth's atmosphere is over 400 ppm, and growing by 2+ ppm of carbon dioxide every year.

### Submit a public comment

Xcel Energy is proposing to build a \$1 billion fossil gas plant in Becker, Minn. that would emit 3.6 million metric tons of carbon annually. The plant would exacerbate climate change and environmental racism and, in the long run, would be more expensive than clean, renewable energy, according to MN350. The organization is working to collect 10,000+ public comments on Xcel Energy's proposed plan. Visit [www.energywecantafford.org](http://www.energywecantafford.org) to file a comment before April 12.

issue until April 12. To submit a public comment to the PUC, go to [www.energywecantafford.org](http://www.energywecantafford.org). The site includes sample comments and links to talking points.

DeArmond said, "I actually feel good about our chance for this campaign. I was ready to act on principle in the beginning, but I think we have a chance at winning if we can mobilize enough support. We can create a healthier, more prosperous, and just future for our state by saying no to fossil gas during a climate crisis. It's energy that Minnesotans can't afford."

MN350 is part 350.org, an international climate campaign active in 188 countries around the world. To learn more about local action teams and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.mn350.org](http://www.mn350.org).

In addition to clean energy, MN350 volunteers are working on transportation issues, pipe line resistance, education and community outreach campaigns.

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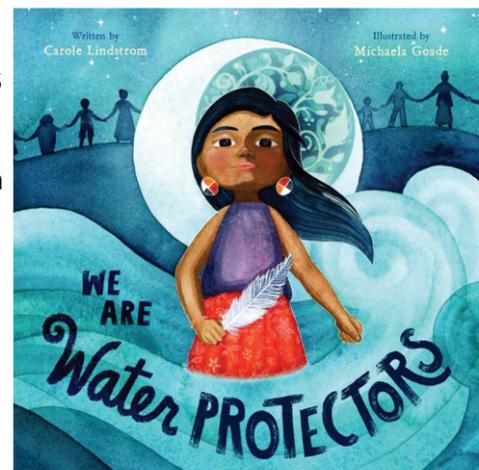
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Midway Como Frogtown Monitor **officially sponsors this project.**

## BEE LAWNS PROTECT POLLINATORS AND YOUR PRECIOUS TIME

## Guest column



By Russ Henry,  
Bee Safe Minneapolis, Minnehaha  
Landscaping

There are better ways to spend your spring and summer than mowing the lawn. The noise, smell of exhaust fumes, heat, and humidity add up to a less than pleasant chore. How many perfect Saturday afternoons have we sacrificed to appease the fickle gods of sod? Time-wasting may not be the only concern when it comes to lawn maintenance. We also need to ask ourselves if we're doing right by the environment in the little patch of Earth, we call our lawn. Many St. Paul homeowners are choosing to reclaim their weekends and support wildlife through a transition to no-mow-bee-lawns.

We need bees. Seventy-five percent of the world's plants and 30% of human food crops depend on bees and other pollinators to reproduce. The way we manage lawns and landscapes can have a profound impact on bee health. Common landscaping practices such as short mowing and pesticide use leave little support for bees in our landscapes.

All of our damage to the environment adds up. Many species



Bumblebee and  
Joe Pye Weed

of bees and other pollinators are facing extinction. Loss of habitat, and pesticides have led to rapidly rising rates of extinction. According to the United Nations, current species extinction rates are 100 to 1000 times higher than normal due to human activity. The good news is that you can help bees, butterflies, and save your weekends at the same time.

The easiest way to protect pollinators at home is to replace your regular lawn with a bee-lawn. Bee friendly lawns are grown with a mix of blooming ground cover combined with no-mow grasses. Bee lawns are visually appealing with blossoms throughout the season, while also providing food for bees and other pollinators.

Some local landscaping companies have already started offering bee lawns. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, here's how to grow your own bee lawn at home.

#### Transitioning to a bee lawn

There are two basic methods that I use for transitioning regular grass lawns to bee lawns. Both methods utilize the same seed mix. To ensure quality, you'll want to purchase bee lawn mix from a Twin Cities based seed vendor. Make sure the mix you purchase includes Dutch White Clover, Self-Heal, Creeping Thyme, and at least four types of no-mow fescue grass.

#### Rapid Bee Lawn transition

The "rapid transition" method for installing a bee lawn, can happen over the course of a few weeks, if you follow these steps:

1. Remove existing lawn with sod cutter, and aerate bare ground with a core aerator. Both are available for rent locally.
2. Spread compost up to one inch thick over lawn area.
3. Spread seed according to instructions on the bag, usually about 4 pounds per 1000 square feet.
4. Cover with biodegradable,

wood fiber based "net-less" roll out seed mats, available at Twin Cities seed vendors.

5. Water 2-3 times per day until seed is evenly sprouted. Sunny areas tend to dry out quickly and may need more watering. Your goal is to keep the ground damp at all times during seed sprouting.

6. Re-seed and continue to water any areas that don't sprout with the rest of the lawn.

#### Moderate bee lawn transition:

If you are patient and would rather avoid up-front cost, you may decide to perform a "moderate transition" which may require a couple growing seasons to complete. Here is how it's done:

1. Three times per season (early spring, late summer, early fall) aerate and over-seed your existing lawn using a core aerator.
2. Run aerator 2-3 times over all parts of the lawn.
3. Seed according to instructions on the bag, usually about 4 pounds per 1000 square feet.
4. Watering is optional for the moderate transition method because seed sprouts in holes left by the aerator.
5. Repeat seasonally until clover, self-heal, and thyme are well established.
6. Moderate transitions can be started any time during the spring, summer, or early fall.

#### Maintaining a bee lawn

- Mow less. The best approach for bee lawn maintenance

is to mow only one time at the end of the season in late August. This will help control taller weeds. If you feel you need to mow more to keep up with the neighborhood aesthetic, that is also okay for bee lawn plants. They can be mowed weekly if needed.

- Eliminate pesticides, fertilizers, and irrigation. Bee lawn plants do better without pampering, and pesticides are contributing to bee extinction.

- Anytime you mow, keep your mower deck height adjusted as high as it will go and keep your blade sharp. Never mow shorter than 3.5" in a bee lawn.

The Minnesota Legislature recently set aside funding to encourage homeowners to grow bee lawns. You can find more information about this grant program at the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources website.

There has never been a better time to support local pollinators by transitioning to a bee-lawn. Bee lawns are perfect way to enjoy a nature-filled pollinator paradise outside your front door, and get your weekends back!

*Russ Henry is a landscaper, naturalist, gardener, soil health specialist, and educator. He is devoted to pollinator protection and is the founder of Bee Safe Minneapolis. As the owner of Minnehaha Falls Landscaping and a certified soil life consultant, he scientifically explores and supports soil health, the foundation for beauty and productivity in all landscapes.*

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Russ Henry,  
owner

#### GETTING READY FOR SPRING!

With everything going on in the world, people have an increasing need to enjoy their home landscapes.

Here are a few things you can do to get ready for spring!

- Research! Choose bee-friendly plants to include in your landscape. Search Minnesota native pollinator plants with a variety of bloom times to stretch through the growing season.
- Pinterest the perfect patio! Search for pictures of patios that you would like to see in your landscape. There are many options, so spend some time daydreaming online.
- Reserve your spot! Landscaping companies are usually booked in advance. Schedule a consultation to get the process started!



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Minnehaha Falls Landscaping creates outdoor environments that grow beauty, and support health and wellness. From this foundation grows our garden division, Giving Tree Gardens and our advocacy branch, Bee Safe Minneapolis.

# St. Paul real estate market in the time of COVID-19

## Experts weigh in

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

While some people refer to the last 11 months as the 'Big Pause,' it has been anything but that for real estate broker and business owner Mike Smith. He said, "I've been busy for the last 15 years, but never anything like this. The only word I have for this housing market is 'crazy.'"

Smith owns Minneapolis-based Anderson Realty that also serves St. Paul. He said, "I thought 2020 was going to be a humungous year in the Twin Cities housing market before COVID-19 hit: people are leaving the coasts because of wildfires and hurricanes. This is a great place to live, and our population is growing by about 4,000 people every year."

"They come to the Twin Cities and don't think twice about spending \$300,000 for a nice bungalow. In Boston, San Diego, or Seattle, that same house would cost upwards of \$800,000. I helped at least a dozen parties move to the Twin Cities from both coasts last year."

## People are looking at their houses differently

When the reality of the pandemic set in, some homeowners started re-evaluating their homes and the way they lived in them. Sometimes, they found that the open floor plan they had loved before just didn't suit them anymore.

Smith said, "Let's face it, people are stuck at home. Many people work at home, teach their kids at home, and entertain themselves at home. Plenty of people started to feel the walls closing in around them. Those who can afford it may opt to move to a larger home, or at least one with more doors that close."

It all adds up to a time like no other, with factors not seen before driving people to buy and sell in a frenzy.

## Fast-moving, seller's market

That frenzy didn't abate, not even during the very real and painful weeks following George Floyd's murder. Smith said, "As business owners on Lake Street and University Avenue were preparing for the possibility of property damage, I was outside nailing plywood across my office windows. Tucked into my back



The mixed use construction project in the NW corner of Dale Street and University Avenue will bring 40 new deeply affordable units of rental housing to Frogtown. Located directly across the street from the Rondo Community Library, the building will be jointly owned and managed by Wellington Management and Neighborhood Development Center. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

## Selling a home during COVID-19

Realtors have been doing things differently during the pandemic. Buyers must be careful when viewing homes, wearing masks and using disinfectants. Sellers are not able to have showings overlap, so it takes more time to get everyone through a house. A typical time for a showing is 15-30 minutes these days. Prospective buyers must get in and out quickly before making a very big decision – about whether or not to make an offer. If their offer is accepted, buyers will have plenty of time to look over the home during the inspection period.

Sellers have their concerns, too. They often leave their fully prepared homes for the first three days of being on the market, when the largest number of prospective buyers will come through. On returning, they take obvious precautions such as wiping down surfaces and air out their home – just to be safe.



"I've never been busier than I was this past year, but I've also never been more fulfilled."  
~ Mike Smith of Anderson Realty

pocket, my cell phone never stopped ringing. People wanted to schedule showings all over Minneapolis and St. Paul, even during the week of curfew. I couldn't understand it. We had to press pause."

## Commercial real estate in challenging times

David Wellington is executive vice president of the local commercial real estate company Wellington Management, started by his father in 1984. They cur-

rently own and manage about 100 commercial properties across the metro area.

Wellington said, "There's a company mandate that we won't buy a property more than 45 minutes from our offices on Energy Park Drive in St. Paul. My dad and I want to be good stewards of the properties we own and manage. We aren't 'flippers'. Long-term ownership and management is core to our business model. It's not just about acquisitions and development for us."

The Wellington Management logo can be seen on top of a crane on Snelling just south of University Avenue right now. The project they're building there is a 160-unit, middle-income apartment complex. Called "The Pitch," it is directly across the street from Allianz Field Soccer Stadium.

Wellington said, "We see the middle income demographic as one that is underserved. For many people, market rate rents are too high to be affordable, but

they make too much money to qualify for low income housing."

Studio, one, and two-bedroom apartments at "The Pitch" will start leasing in May or June, with occupancy available in September. Bremer Bank will be returning to that site, with a new bank on the first floor and the return of their drive-thru. Bremer Bank is also the project financier, and a longtime community partner with Wellington Management.

Wellington Management has 35 employees, and the pandemic has greatly affected their day-to-day work – like it has everywhere. Wellington said, "We've been communicating with about half of our 100 real estate tenants regularly. We've tried to be flexible, and where we can be, generous. There continues to be a mighty shake-out in the business world."

"We've lost tenants, and we're going to continue to lose tenants. Businesses are going to keep going under, but we are see-

ing reinvestment and new investment. Most importantly, we are seeing hope and a growing ingenuity in new partnerships."

One example of an innovative partnership is Wellington Management's new, mixed-use project on the northwest corner of University Avenue and Dale Street. Their community partner on that project is Neighborhood Development Center (NDC), whose offices will be on the main floor. NDC's mission is to strengthen neighborhoods from within by fostering small business development.

In addition to its new headquarters, NDC will lease 7,000 square feet of first floor retail space to small business tenants, with an emphasis on serving minority entrepreneurs.

Currently under construction, the building will also offer 40 units of deeply affordable family housing. Included will be four long-term homeless units,

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# THE CIRCLE OF PEACE STORY

>> from 1

He and his wife, Sarah, again asked neighbors and families of gang members to come together for a conversation. And The Circle of Peace Movement (TCOPM) was born.

"There were community members I knew on a personal level at that first group," Balenger said. "We stood on a street corner and talked it out." The participants agreed to meet four

times, and they were able to find a meeting location at Unity Church-Unitarian on Holly Avenue.

"We started with a meal, meeting on Monday nights," Balenger continued.

The first group had about 18 people attend. A conversation ensued, with the use of a talking stick or talking stone. Whoever held the stone or stick had the floor to talk, and no one could interrupt.

After the first four weeks, everyone wanted to continue, and TCOPM will celebrate its 11th anniversary in March. Between 25 and 30 people usually attend the weekly gatherings, and over 100 attended the 300th meeting. The group has now met over 500 times.

TCOPM sets its mission as stopping violence and promoting racial healing.

Last March, the group became virtual because of the pandemic. "I was not for it," Balenger admitted, "but people said they wanted to meet through Zoom. It has been fantastic, and it was absolutely the right decision."

TCOPM is now international, with groups in Sweden, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Congo. Balenger said he has had conversations with people who are interested from New York, California and Georgia. The virtual meetings have also enabled people from other countries to join a Monday night gathering.



People find common ground when they come together over a meal and conversation, according to Russel Balenger, who leads The Circle of Peace gatherings in order to promote racial healing and stop violence. (Photo submitted)

"The meetings are open to anyone, and it's usually a mixed group," Balenger noted. "Each week is a little different." He said the group may include community leaders, business people and church leaders, someone who was recently incarcerated or has just gotten out of rehab. "One fellow mistakenly thought we were a narcotics anonymous group, but even when he found out we were not, he kept coming. He said it kept him off heroin."

### Common ground

"People find common ground," observed Balenger. "It's a safe space and courageous conversation. Some people's lives get busy, and they may be gone for a while and then come back." He said one of the attendees feels comfortable knowing that he can pass without commenting and does not need to speak until he feels ready to do so.

Regarding the policy of TCOPM to avoid discussing politics, Balenger said, "I think we're

more or less trying not to cut down somebody because of their politics. I think we're really at a time where we can be more creative as human beings. I've come to understand race is a social construct.

"How do we live our lives without bringing up race?" asked Balenger. "There's no such thing as race. There is racism, but not race. As creative human beings we should find ways of being descriptive of each other without saying the African American guy or the woman who looks Indian. If kids were describing someone, they would say the guy in the red jacket or the lady with the curly hair."

Balenger said people have to learn to let go of racism. "They said people would never stop smoking, but they did. They said they would never wear seat belts, but they do."

### Vital connections

Without the ability to pass the talking stick to one another virtually, Balenger said he calls

on people by name. As they join the meeting, he makes a list. "I kind of organize them, and I try to get the voice of a woman, then the voice of a man. There are also circles for men, for women and for youth." Balenger goes out in the community whenever he is called and holds a circle or trains others to be circle keepers. He has led circle groups at St. Thomas and Hamline, and he would go to the prisons before COVID-19 hit.

"As people talk from their hearts, they talk about experiences that connect them," Balenger stated.

Those connections are vital, according to Melvin Carter Jr., of Save our Sons, who considers himself a recovering policeman. "Russel and I had discussions about TCOPM from the beginning," Carter said. "He got the vision and went out and did it. I think I had some input in the original conceptualizing. It snowballed from neighborhood gatherings and now draws people

CIRCLE OF PEACE >> 11

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# THE CIRCLE OF PEACE STORY

>> from 10

from all walks of life."

Carter said young rookies and police officers attend. "Come to find out, we are all just people," he said. "The deputy chief is perhaps the best example of a police official coming, sharing of himself, telling his stories and listening. Because things have been so intense in recent years, I think where we listen with intent to one another, we find there is an overspreading where we agree in many cases." Carter said two common slogans are "Defund the police" and "Support the police."

"There are reasons for both, and I'm straddling both sides," he said. "To defund is not saying we don't need first responders, and it's not saying people should get away with murder. Listening to one another and seeking to understand helps. We come to understand why people believe what they believe, and why they do what they do. We need to overcome the us versus them mentality, and set the stage for promoting peace."

A devoted attendee and sup-



When they meet in person, attendees form a circle, putting everyone on an equal plane as they seek to understand and care for one another. (Photo submitted)

porter of TCOPM, Carter said he has shared the experience of what the meetings can do. "I know the city has used Russel's method of communication with roundtable discussions to negotiate terms on policing in St. Paul. That's a valuable tool that gives the St. Paul Police Department credibility and puts them miles and miles ahead of any police department in the world. And part of that is Russel's doing."

### It has widened her perspective

Ellen Green has been around TCOPM since its beginning, as a member of Unity Church-Unitarian. Before the pandemic, Green said she helped Sarah Balenger

cook and prepare a meal for the group every week. Green said some circles have started in other areas of the Metro, such as the Battle Creek School area and at city meetings, where she said that changes were being made in what happens when a complaint is made to the police. "Anyone could come and contribute, and it made the complaint process better," she said. Green said that when Totem Town was operating, the boys there would pile in a van and come to Unity Church for a Circle of Peace meeting. "After more trust was built up, city cops were assigned to come and be part of the circle, too."

Green commented that a

### What is TCOPM

The Circle of Peace Movement is a pathway to racial healing and peaceful communities. It works by creating a safe space where people come together on a regular basis to share a meal and engage in respectful conversation. Through circle, we come to understand and care for one another, and find hope and strength to transform our communities.

~ From Facebook

wide variety of people attend the Monday night meetings, including judges and social workers "Everyone is there by self-selection," she said. She said TCOPM has widened her perspective. "It's a chance to hear, and hear well, because only one person speaks at a time, and you don't feel the need to jump in."

When individuals come to a meeting, they are invited to come back three or four times, according to Green. "That's in case they come on an off night. And most do come back. The challenge is coming the first time," she said. "People of different races are sitting down for the first time, and it's scary because

it's different. Maybe no one will say hello to me. Maybe I'll say the wrong thing. For me, I think the real value is being with people I would not have been with otherwise, and being friends with them."

Green said that through a grant, Balenger was able to start a Walk in the Park. Youth can take a walk with a mentor, and other members of their family can join the walk. Hiking boots and appropriate clothing are available, if needed.

Unity Church, which has partnered with TCOPM in its mission, provides the meeting space and collections from its members. "Unity Church has been a wonderful partner, with wonderful people committed to work and social justice," said Balenger. "It has been a perfect fit. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, the co-ministers, and their whole congregation have been so supportive."

Balenger said that people usually hear about TCOPM by word of mouth. Reflecting on the meetings, he said "I" statements and not "You" statements are used. "Everyone is not always happy, and sometimes we shed a tear," he said. "But we agree to be respectful of each other, and everyone in the circle is equal."

Learn more at <https://tcopm.org> or email [russel@tcopm.org](mailto:russel@tcopm.org).

## Keep stretching your comfort zone into new learning zones

What is the hardest thing of all?  
That which seems the easiest  
For your eyes to see  
That which lies before your eyes.  
- Goethe



**Peace bubbles**  
By MELVIN GILES  
[peacebubbles@q.com](mailto:peacebubbles@q.com)

Hello, Monitor readers,

Spring freshness is in the air and COVID-19 vaccinations are becoming more available at an increasing rate to all communities and age groups. It feels refreshing that our society values are shifting back to common sense and to America's desire for the good of all people instead of valuing dollar sense and the good of the top 1-3%. Frankly, I am amazed that we all survived 2020. Oops, no, we all didn't survive! We loss thousands and thousands of loved ones.

Yes, I'm still working at being optimistic for 2021 and as I have stated in previous months, it is my family, my community colleagues and allies, and good friends who keeps me upbeat when I am feeling low or frustrated with the foolishness and obvious lies that are broadcast in the daily and social media news. For instance, I recently received

an email from three of the Urban Farm & Garden Alliance (UFGA) leadership team. The email was regarding insights and wisdom from our diverse cultural ancestors on norms, values, and behaviors of conduct. A team member sent a link, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/the-origins-of-inspire>, on Merriam-Webster definition of inspiration, in order to inspire us to keep the faith during our society's paradigm shift of our nation's desire of living-out the words We The People, particularly in light of the justice, we the people demand.

Albert Einstein, reminds us that we can't solve a problem at the same level of consciousness

that created the problem, which simple means we have to continue stretching our comfort zones into new learning zones. We also have to acknowledge and find ways to celebrate our new lessons and accomplishments of rising our level of consciousness of solving problems and possibility seeking. Paradigm shifts seems to happen at crossroads and brings up the normal questions of which way to go - left or right, back or forward. Often having map or instructions is helpful on deciding the way. However, some crossroads and paradigm shifts can be assisted by the insightfulness of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's Little Prince, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

With that said I would like to give a Shout-Out to TPT for their wonderful airing of fantastic Black History programs during February, which provided new learning zones and opened hearts for viewers to see rightly! I hope TPT honors Black History Month every month while they honor their monthly special

topics; this month I hope we all learn about ERA.

Enjoy the month of March. Keep finding the courage and support of others to stretch your comfort zones of outdated thinking and of our policies, particularly as it relates to our beautiful planet and to our humanity. This month as we highlight and honor women, let us also affirm that Black Lives Matters and to respect the call from the Red Lake and White Earth Nations to stop and shut down Pipeline 3 from destroying their land and their way of living. We are at crossroads and we can raise our consciousness to do the right thing and find practical and/or new solutions to move forward together.

I close with a quote from the

late Vernon Jordan; may he rest in peace.

"You are where you are today because you stand on somebody's shoulders. And wherever you are heading, you cannot get there by yourself. If you stand on the shoulders of others, you have a reciprocal responsibility to live your life so that others may stand on your shoulders. It's the quid pro quo of life. We exist temporarily through what we take, but we live forever through what we give."

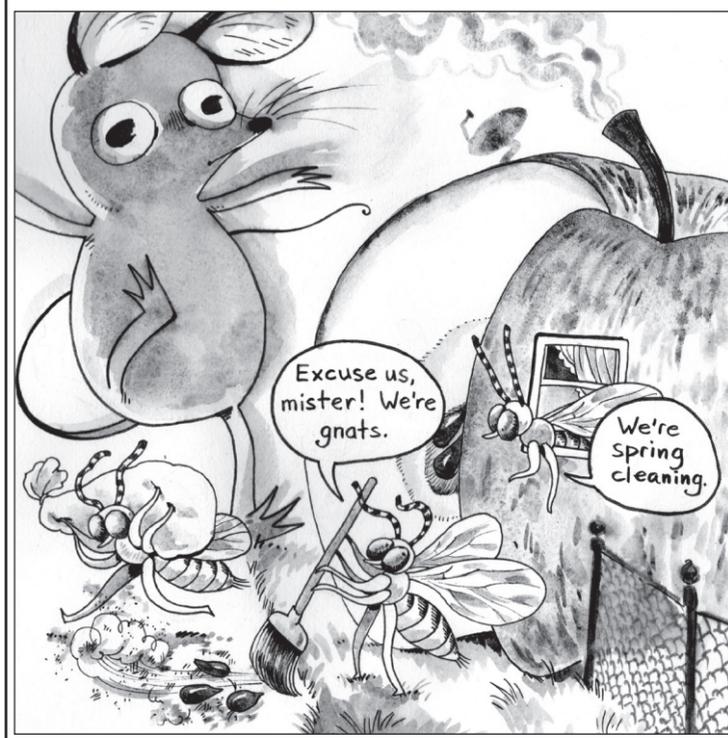
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## 'Stable Weight'

>> from 1

### It got easier and easier

Eating disorders in the U.S. are as prevalent as breast cancer, HIV, and schizophrenia combined. Like other illnesses, eating disorders have biological and genetic roots. As Whalen's self-acceptance grew, she started writing – and she started talking, too.

She said, "At first, I was surprised by other people's reactions. I expected judgement and shaming, but everyone I talked with had either struggled with an eating disorder themselves or knew someone who had. It had taken a really long time to crawl out of my shame; I thought others might get to a place of healing faster if I wrote and published this story."

With therapy progressing, Whalen started to feel better. In 2010, she decided to try a few riding lessons. She said, "I wasn't looking for equine therapy, I just thought it would be fun. I had gone to a week of horse camp as a kid, but I wasn't a 'horse-kid' by any stretch." She chose Seventh Farm Riding School in River Falls, Wis., and went for her first lesson.

### Laying the ground work

Whalen explained, "Seventh Farm is a special place. They work with retired race horses, de-programming what the horses have endured in their years on the race track. A lot of what the riding school trainer/owners, Tom and Liz McCadden, teach is horse psychology – with a focus on how horses communicate. They believe you can only be a good rider if you understand the whole animal. As a professor of communications, that really interested me."

Every student learns what the McCaddens call groundwork in lesson three. Students step into the arena with their horses, and learn how to get the horses to move in every direction without touching them. The horses have no gear on: no reins, bits, or bridles. Students also learn the steps of grooming their horses, which is an essential part of forming a bond.



Lisa Whalen

*"Lisa Whalen's book 'Stable Weight' illustrates the way horses mirror human emotions. They can help us overcome trauma, become more mindful, and live in the present moment."*

– Tom and Liz McCadden

Whalen said, "Horses will only do what you ask if you project confidence, and communicate effectively with your body language. As a girl, I was always trying to get out of everybody's way. With my horse, I had to learn to take up space. At the same time, I was just starting out as a teacher; I was learning to find and use my voice in new ways. Everything started to come together."

In her book, Whalen chose to name each chapter for one of the horses who became her teachers. She said, "Each chapter focuses on one horse, and what that horse taught me about my own well-being. My hope is that the narrative sparks insights for readers about their own well-being."

"For so many years, living in my body didn't feel good at all. When I started riding horses, living in my body felt good again – like it had when I was a child – before the pressures of being a woman in this society set in."

Lisa Whalen has a Ph.D. in education and an M.A. in creative writing from Hamline University. She teaches a plethora of literary arts at North Hennepin Community College, where she was selected Minnesota State College Faculty Association Educator of the Year in 2019. Her website address is <https://lisawhalen.wixsite.com/lisawhalen>.

## You want to retire?

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ing under the new structure for a time, while others leave right away. For those who want to move on to other things immediately, there is typically a longer training period before the transition is complete. The process typically takes 12-18 months, depending on readiness, speed of decision-making, and complexity of the sale.

"What employees are taking on is like a mortgage," explained Nicholson. After the debt is paid, then the worker owners receive the patronage, which is like a bonus. "It allows them to invest in the business," she said.

Nexus helps complete the sale and transition to the new business entity, and also sticks around to support the new worker owners and leadership through ongoing trainings over the next two years.

They charge fees throughout the process and some of the work is philanthropically funded.

Nexus is currently working with 15 companies who are considering a worker cooperative model. "I think this model is starting to get some legs," said

Nicholson. "I think in the next two to five years we will see more worker-owned cooperatives in the Twin Cities."

Schedule a free 30-minute phone consultation by emailing [cnicholson@nexuscp.org](mailto:cnicholson@nexuscp.org) or call (651) 289-7038.

### Happy Earth Cleaning becomes a worker's coop

Happy Earth Cleaning (1822 Como Ave. SE) has transitioned successfully to worker ownership.

Marion Dunbar started Happy Earth Cleaning in 2010 after she had been in management and customer service for 20 years. Initially, she was the one staff member and managed cleaning, management and client cultivation herself. In 2013, her husband Jesse joined the business. Today, Happy Earth Cleaning has 19 employees.

Happy Earth is "A People Company that Cleans." They use environmentally-friendly products, participate in community events, and offer full-time employment to their staff recognizing the intersectionality between a happy planet, happy community, and happy people.

In 2018, the Dunbars decided they wanted to move back to their hometown of Seattle, Wash.

They began thinking about a succession plan.

Potential buyers approached them, but they had concerns about selling the business to an outside buyer. They were worried their company would lose its "people first" culture, and that a new company would take their client list and lay off their workers.

So they started looking at employee ownership. They went through the nine-week Coop Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) offered through the city of Minneapolis that helped them understand coop development. Then they sent a larger group of employees through the program.

That group launched the process of selling their business to employees.

Thirty-two-year-old Tom Crouse of South Minneapolis is one of the worker owners.

"Transitioning your business to employee ownership looks remarkably similar to selling your business in a 'traditional' way," he said. "There is a little more work, in the form of training and development for employees, but retiring owners can receive a fair price for their business and leave their legacy in the hands of those they trust (their employees)."

## Real estate market

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with services provided by community partner Simpson Housing. The building will be jointly owned and managed by Wellington Management and NDC.

### From crisis to optimism

The last year has brought financial and emotional challenges not many could have imagined, but Wellington feels like there's an end in sight – at least as far as COVID-19 goes. He said, "As we worked with our tenants in the beginning, there was the big challenge of overcoming

the fear of the unknown. That's been converted into action steps we can legitimately take. With clearer communication from the new administration and growing vaccine availability, it feels like there's a light drawing us through the tunnel. A lot of people are ready to get some of their normal life back."

## Plan It

### Food collection March 12

March is Minnesota Foodshare Month. A collection for the Keystone Community Services' food shelf is noon-4 p.m. Friday, March 12 in the Hamline Church United Methodist parking lot. The church is at 1514 Englewood Ave. The parking lot can be entered from Minnehaha Avenue or Simpson Avenue. Look for signs telling how to access the lot and for the volunteers. Volunteers will use COVID-19 safety practices. For a list of the most need foods or for more information about the food shelf, go to <https://keystoneservices.org/donate/food-goods/>

### 'Redistricting: The Good, The Bad and the Dirty Work'

The League of Women Voters St. Paul is proud to present its March 30 program, "Redistricting: The Good, the Bad, and the Dirty Work." This virtual zoom webinar is focused on the redistricting process for Minnesota, based on the 2020 census data. Paul Huffman, the Census and Redistricting Coordinator for the League of Women Voters Minnesota, will be the featured expert. The program will be held as a Zoom webinar on Tuesday, March 30, from 7 p.m. - 8 p.m. and will also be available live on the League of Women Voters St. Paul's Facebook page. Watch the website for updated information. ([www.lwvstpa.org](http://www.lwvstpa.org))

### Garage sale coming May 7-8

The Friendly Frog Events announces its Frogtown Community Garage Sale to benefit seniors living in the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. Each year, neighbors pitch in to collect donated items to sell in the sale, with all proceeds going to fund social activities for neighborhood seniors. This year's sale will take place at 411 Blair Ave. on Friday, May 7, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday, May 8, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Donations will be accepted through May 1. To schedule a donation pick-up, or for more information, call Kim/Henry (651) 488-9671 or Lynn (651) 488-7390.

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# SCHEDULE CHANGES

While the youngest students in the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) returned to in-person learning during February, the majority of high school students continue with distance learning.

On Feb. 22, Como and all the other SPPS high schools began to provide on-site academic support for some ELL, special education, and credit-deficient students. Those sessions take place in the afternoons. Teachers continue to instruct online classes in the mornings.

A target date of April 14, coinciding with the start of the fourth quarter academic grading period, has been set for all willing and able students to be back in their classrooms on campus. That announcement from the district has provided hope and excitement, especially for Como's Class of 2021 who are seeking camaraderie and closure to their high school experience before they graduate in June.

## History Day regional qualifiers

History Day at Como fea-

tured the research and final products of 11th grade U.S. History students, and any students who desired to produce a history project in addition to their existing coursework. This year's theme was "Communication in History: The Key to Understanding." Students advancing to St. Paul regional competition include the following:

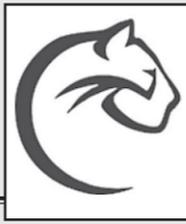
Group Documentary - Paw Wah, Gay Nee Thaw, Kabao Xiong for The Stonewall Riots

Individual Documentary - Chaa Kong Vang for Alexander Graham Bell and the Invention of the Telephone

Website - Kai Sackreiter, Soren Sackreiter, Alice Wagner-Hamstad, and Zach Bollman "For the Love of Learning: MECC and Communication Through Educational Technology"

Virtual Exhibit - Kazaaron Tallman for Montgomery Bus Boycott, Tuan Dinh for Civil Rights Act of 1964, Taylor Fairbanks for A Fight for the People's Land, Pang Xiong for Magna Carta, Shakyla Walker for Mal-

Como Park Senior High School



By ERIC ERICKSON  
Social studies teacher

colm X.

## Prestigious fellowship

Marie Wulff from Como's Class of 2017, now a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in electrical engineering, was selected as a recipient of the Brooke Owens Fellowship.

The fellowship includes a paid internship, mentorship, and a lifelong professional network for women seeking a career in aviation or space exploration. According to the Brooke Owens press release, over 800 talented and promising students applied from Ivy League universities, major research universities, liberal arts colleges, and major international universities.

After the competitive appli-



(Left to right) Alex Le, Nayblut Kasuh, Jesiah Mason and Sophia Moore display their certificates for achievement in the JROTC Leadership Academic Bowl. They advanced to the second round of national competition. (Photo by Sgt. Major James Kirkland)

cation process involving written and creative submissions, followed by multiple interviews, Wulff was selected as one of just 44 recipients. Her placement and work in aerospace will be at Plan- et Labs in San Francisco, California beginning this summer.

## Active JROTC Cadets

From cross-country skiing and polar plunges, to service projects and academic competitions, the Marine Corps JROTC has been keeping busy.

Like an extra-curricular

sports team, the cadets have been able to safely pursue activities following safety protocols and social distancing. The "P.T. Team" has done extensive physical training embracing activity in the outdoor elements.

The Junior Leadership Academic Bowl Team consisting of sophomores Alex Le, Sophia Moore, Jesiah Mason and junior Nayblut Kasuh are ranked in the top ten percent of over 250 JROTC programs across the country.

# Nine seats up on D. 10 council board

Here's your chance to have a bigger voice in the decisions that affect your neighborhood: Nine seats are up for election in April to the District 10 Como Community Council board. Most do not have an incumbent running, so you don't even have to worry about trying to throw someone out.



After the Como Community Council generated more than 40 suggestions from the neighborhood, and after much internal debate, the Czarneski family has picked a name for the larger-than-life red ant that resides in their front yard on Nebraska Ave. Find out which name they chose: Go to [www.district10comopark.org/ant.html](http://www.district10comopark.org/ant.html). (Photo submitted)

Any community member in District 10, age 16 or older, is eligible to run. The board is volunteers like you, elected by neighbors like you. Simple truth: We do better as a community when the board reflects the full strength of Como: renters, homeowners, local institutions, businesses, and neighbors of all kinds - regardless of color, age, ethnicity, income, gender, faith, or how deep your roots are in the neighborhood or in Saint Paul. To put it another way, we welcome a diversity of opinions, experiences, and backgrounds.

As spelled out in rules that guide the community council, board seats up for election this year are:

- Chair
- Secretary
- One representative each from the neighborhood's four sub-districts
- Three representatives from the neighborhood at-large

These positions serve two-year terms, through April 2023. To get on the ballot, apply now at [www.district10comopark.org/](http://www.district10comopark.org/)

candidate.html. That's where you can also learn more about the roles and opportunities of board members. The filing deadline is Sunday April 4. The election is April 20.

## Vote in the District 10 Elections

Request your ballot now to vote in the April board elections for the Como Community Council. Once again this year, District 10 community members can vote from home: You can vote online, or by returning a paper ballot through the mail. (Because of restrictions on public gatherings,

District 10 Como Community Council



By MICHAEL KUCHTA,  
Executive Director  
[district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org)

we still can't schedule in-person voting.)

To request a ballot: Fill out the registration form at [www.district10comopark.org/ballot.html](http://www.district10comopark.org/ballot.html). We'll send ballots beginning Friday, April 9.

• If you intend to vote online, we need your request by Tuesday, April 20 at 5 p.m.

• If you want a paper ballot, we need your request by Wednesday, April 14.

Who is eligible to vote: Renters, homeowners, and other residents of District 10 who are at least 16 years old can vote. So can representatives from business, nonprofits, or other organizations with a physical presence in District 10. If you have questions, email: [district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org).

## Free Food Fridays continue

The Como Community Council and Sanneh Foundation will continue distributing free food boxes every Friday through the end of April. The food is available to Ramsey County



Volunteers Joanne Swanson and Annie Huidekoper wrangle with some of the donations from Como residents.

residents dealing with financial hardships because of Covid-19.

Food will be distributed from 1:30-3:30 p.m. (or until supplies run out). The location is the north parking lot of Niem Phat Buddhist Temple, at Dale Street and Front Ave.

## Old media navigate a new era

As more people get their information (and misinformation) from social media sites, as daily, weekly and monthly local newspapers scale back or fold altogether, what's the future of local news?

The Como Community Council's Sunday Series features a panel discussion with Tesha Christensen from the *Monitor*, Scott Carlson from the *Park Bugle*, and Kelly Smith from the *Star Tribune*.

The online presentation is Sunday, May 2 from 1-2:30 p.m. It will include plenty of time for Q&A. To attend via phone or Zoom, email [district10@district10comopark.org](mailto:district10@district10comopark.org). We'll send you access information.

## Como kindness comes through for homeless neighbors

During the coldest weekend of the season, Como residents showed they don't take warmth for granted.

Responding to a call from the Como Community Council, individuals, families, church groups and more nearly filled a U-Haul with gloves, mittens, socks, blankets, quilts, hats, scarves, sweaters, coats, and other winter gear. It all went to the former Bethesda Hospital, where Ramsey County is operating a temporary homeless shelter for people previously living on the streets. Ward 5 Councilmember Amy Brendmoen picked up the tab for the truck (out of her own pocket, we should add).

Plus, the Community Council collected more than \$2,600 in donations from more than 50 local residents. Those funds will help Ramsey County's Housing Stability program provide additional supplies to meet the needs of neighbors who do not have a home they can call their own.

To make it all happen, more than 20 volunteers stood out in below-zero cold to collect contributions.

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# Alatus project sparks debate on definition of 'affordable housing', gentrification

By JANE McCLURE

Developer Alatus' Lexington Station mixed-use project is in the hands of the St. Paul City Council, with a public hearing and likely vote March 17 on its site plan. The Minneapolis-based developer is appealing an 8-7 Planning Commission vote in February to deny the site plan.

Lexington Station has become a flash point in debate over affordable housing, gentrification and neighborhood character. Opponents have argued that project doesn't meet city comprehensive and neighborhood plans, and claim that it would negatively impact the surrounding neighborhood. Supporters counter that the project is in an area already zoned for traditional neighborhoods 4 high density, and that there is no legal reason for the city to reject the site plan.

Area district councils have taken opposing views. The Union Park District Council (UPDC) land use committee Feb. 22 voted to recommend approval of the \$59 million project. Summit-University Planning Council (SUPC) Feb. 23 reaffirmed a 2019 position of opposition. SUPC and Frogtown Neighborhood Association are among the groups leading the charge against Lexington Station.

The six-story Lexington Station at 411-417 S. Lexington Parkway would have 288 residential units, 3,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space and 254 structured parking spaces. Its apartments include alcoves, studio, one and two-bedroom units, and four-bedroom

units. Fifty percent of apartments would be affordable to families at 60 percent of area median income.

"If your family income is \$35,800 we will have a space saved for you," said Chris Osmundson, director of development for Alatus. He met with the UPDC committee Feb. 22.

Osmundson said project planning was slowed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was reviewed at five UPDC meetings in 2019. Meetings were held at Wilder Foundation headquarters, adjacent to the development site. Wilder owns the development site and has been trying to sell it for several years.

Lexington Station would be located in Union Park's planning district, but would be adjacent to the planning districts for Summit-University, Frogtown and Hamline-Midway. District councils from those neighborhoods were invited to the meetings. But there was criticism in 2019 that meeting notices and neighborhood fliers were received just prior to meetings.

During the 2019 review period UPDC land use committee members made a number of recommendations on development plans, but never took a formal vote on the site plan itself. Land use committee members said Feb. 22 that the project is in their planning district and they need a say.

"The development is in the Union Park boundaries," said committee and district council member Scott Berger. "It's incum-



bent on us to take a position. I think we should be the first and foremost voice on this."

UPDC board and committee member Dan Elenbaas said he and his Lexington-Hamline neighbors who walk to Green Line light rail are eager to see development on the site. "Everyone I talk to is looking forward to having something there."

"If our expectations are sky-high, we will never get anything built here," said committee member Rob Vanasek.

UPDC is encouraging Alatus to consider offering some apartments at 30 percent of area median income and is asking city officials to reconsider assisting the development. Osmundson didn't reject the request but said Alatus met with city leaders earlier about public assistance. "That has not been fruitful," he said.

In 2019 Alatus turned down a \$1.25 million Metropolitan Council transit-oriented development grant in the face of community opposition.

For SUPC, the talk of apartments affordable at 60 percent AMI isn't enough. Board members said Feb. 23 that there hasn't been enough community involvement in the project plan-

ning process. They reiterated fears about gentrification and a development that won't serve the surrounding community.

"We had these concerns in 2019 and we have them now," said SUPC board member Jack Hennen.

UPDC land use committee members said they support the goal of affordable housing. But St. Paul currently doesn't have inclusionary zoning, which would require developments to have a percentage of affordable units. Developing inclusionary zoning regulations is a 2021 Planning Commission priority.

One sticking point in the debate is affordability and how that is measured. Regionally the area median income for a family of four has been stated at \$41,000 to \$85,000, depending on the source. Minnesota Housing Partnership has estimated the median for St. Paul for \$64,000. For the adjacent neighborhood of Frogtown, the data-gathering project Minnesota Compass has put that at less than \$40,000. Some commissioners expressed frustration in how income and affordability are measured.

Site plan foes said the demand for affordable housing is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan. The plan, prepared once every decade, outlines goals including issues including housing. Commissioner Adrian Perryman cited comprehensive plan language calling for "equity, sustainability and affordability." "I think the long-term effects of this development will negatively affect the community more

than any positive impact it might have," he said.

But other commissioners said there is no legal reason to deny the site plan. Planning Director Luis Pereira and Assistant City Attorney Peter Warner said they see no legal rationale under which the city can deny the site plan. Warner said that while the comprehensive plan contains goals, the city lacks controls such as an inclusionary zoning ordinance that would allow for goals to be put in place.

Inclusionary zoning ordinance require that a set share of new to be affordable by people of low to moderate incomes. Planning commissioners have called for development of such a zoning ordinance.

Having a site plan go before the city council is unusual in St. Paul and only happens on appeal. Site plans are typically reviewed and approved by city staff, but longstanding controversy over the Alatus project prompted city staff to send the site plan to the Planning Commission. The 365-page site plan application is highly technical.

City staff recommends approval of the site plan with several conditions. One is that the final landscaping plan win approval from the city forester. Sewer plans and technical details shall be approved by the Public Works Sewer Division. A traffic impact study shall be accepted, and the plans be approved by Public Works Traffic Engineering. The final utility plan shall be approved by St. Paul Regional Water Services.

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# SO, YOU WANT TO RETIRE...

By **TESHA M. CHRISTENSEN**  
Business owners who want to retire have two options. They can sell or just shut down.

Christina Nicholson of Nexus Community Partners (2314 University Ave. Suite 18) wants to let people know there is another exit strategy.

They can establish a worker cooperative.

Nexus works with business owners and employees to figure out if this step is right for them, and walks them through the process.

REI is a well-known business that is also a co-op. Locally, several grocery stores are set up as coops (including Seward Community Co-op and Mississippi Market) as is The Hub Bike Coop. As more workers want a say in their workplaces, Nicholson believes that this model will grow in popularity.

"Nexus supports strong, equitable and just communities in which all residents are engaged, are recognized as leaders and have pathways to opportunities," said Nicholson. "The key to building more engaged and powerful communities of color lies in the interconnectedness between authorship, leadership and ownership."

Nexus focuses on how a coop structure can help with wealth building in a community, in particular by creating BIPOC partnerships. A coop allows more people to be owners and then get a part of the profit that the company earns, she explained.

## What exactly is a worker cooperative?

Nicholson explained that worker cooperatives are owned and controlled by employees using a one-member, one-vote basis. This gives the workers the opportunity to have a say in how the company is managed. They earn a percentage of the profits, also called "patronage," in addition to their regular wages.

Members elect a board of directors, a majority of whom are employees.

Typically, the board of directors hires a general manager (or management team), which in turn runs the day-to-day operations.

## Is it a free for all?

A common myth about worker coops is that they are "a free for all." People are con-



Jesse and Marion Dunbar of Happy Earth Cleaning sold their businesses to their workers when they moved back to Seattle, Wash.

cerned that if everyone is managing themselves that nothing will get done. "That is not the case," said Nicholson.

A board of directors sets the direction of the company and operates according to a list of bylaws. "This sets a day-to-day structure, accountability and type of culture you want to build," she said. "That's part of what makes a successful business."

This is not a top-down structure. It is not a carrot-stick model. Staff are not treated as children who need to be controlled. "It's more of a servant

## Do you sell the business, shut it down or transition to a worker coop?

leadership model," remarked Nicholson. "It is a much more mutually accountable space. It can be much more empowering."

In a worker coop, owners earn 33% more than they would if they weren't part of a worker coop and retention is higher, according to Nicholson.

In an uncertain time like the past year, worker coops have shown they are more likely to keep jobs secure rather than lay people off. Worker coops are more likely to redistribute business funds to pay workers, reduce wages, or temporarily furlough wages rather than lay off workers.

"Worker coops are more resilient because it's a collaborative space from the inception," stated Nicholson. "When everyone is an owner, everyone has a vested interest in keeping the business going."

## How does the process work?

A worker coop is not an escape hatch for a failing business. But it can be a way to turn the business over to the experienced people on the ground.

Nexus works with businesses to first explore their ownership options. Then they assess the feasibility, which includes looking

at the last three to five years of cash flow.

Step three involves figuring out the structure of the deal and the new organization and leadership team. If the business has cash reserves, that may be paid out to the owner immediately or over a set number of years. A loan and other businesses funding may be lined up by the new owners. The price of the business is set. "Just because you want to sell your business doesn't mean there is a buyer on the other end," observed Nicholson. In fact, two-thirds of businesses listed for sale never sell, and only 15% are passed along to a family member. Acquisitions by larger firms or out-of-state buyers often lead to layoffs and restructuring.

The owner and the worker owners negotiate to get to a competitive and fair sales price. Part of the benefit for the owner is seeing their dream continue once they're gone and securing their legacy.

The businesses that fit in best with this model have a triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental concerns, said Nicholson.

Some owners continue work- **SO YOU WANT TO RETIRE >> 12**

### Meet one worker owner

Tom Crouse, 32, of South Minneapolis is a worker owner of Happy Earth Cleaning in St. Paul. He's been at Happy Earth since 2014.

"I was drawn to the supportive work environment, livable wages, and amazing people of Happy Earth. I have held nearly every role at Happy Earth in my seven years here, from cleaner to manager. I'm currently

the sales manager, in charge of introducing new customers to our eco-friendly service," he said.

"A worker co-op is just like any other company, except employees are welcome to buy into ownership, instead of profits benefitting only the private owners. Co-ops also have a board to guide big decisions, and employee-owners also have a say in big decisions. Otherwise, we manage

and operate our business just like we used to when we were an LLC.

"Any year we're profitable, I get to share those profits with my fellow member-owners, like a bonus, except we call it 'patronage.' I also get to vote in important company matters. So my work is both more lucrative and more democratic as an employee-owner. I also have more job stability, since it's harder to dissolve a

co-op (at least, the way we set it up).

"Happy Earth is more supportive than any place I've ever worked. I never planned to work at a cleaning company for seven years, but it's just such a great environment filled with outstanding people."

Crouse urges other people interested in this model to seek out free help from organizations like the Minne-

sota Center for Employee Ownership (MNCEO). "Their free consulting and resources can help you decide if employee-ownership is a good fit for your business, and they can help you get started with the transition," Crouse said. "Employee-ownership is the most important, least considered business succession plan of the 21st century. You owe it to your community to consider employee-ownership for your business."

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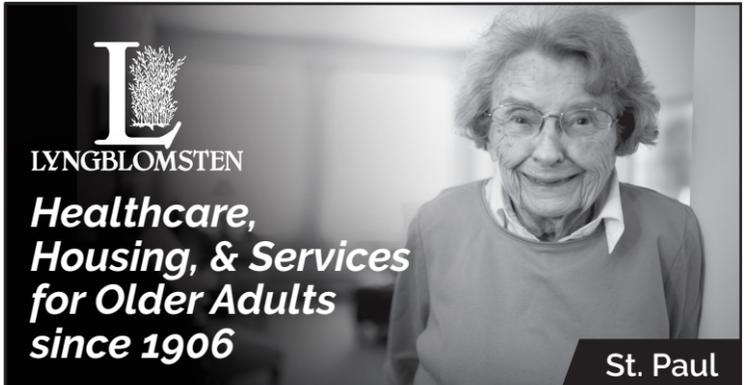


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