



Educator advocates for smudging policy

Como's Angelina Hernandez goes to Washington D.C.

By ERIC ERICKSON

"All Native American students should have the right to smudge," said Como Park High School teacher Angelina Hernandez. "We need to expand policies to protect the rights of Indigenous kids. Being denied the right to smudge is harmful. It's a basic right. This is what our kids need. At a very basic level, it will help schools be a place that is culturally competent for Indigenous students - they need to be able to smudge."



Angelina Hernandez spoke about the importance of smudging. (Photo submitted)

Hernandez was part of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) "Head to the Hill Week" gathering in the nation's capital during early March. The purpose was to inform members of Congress about the issues related to indigenous students and influence policies which impact them.

Hernandez leads the Braided Journeys program at Como Park High School which serves nearly 60 Native American students. Hernandez is a member of the Diné, (also referred to as the Navajo) who has a decade of experience in St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS), and a previous career providing nutrition education for the native community through the University of Minnesota.

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SHE HELPS STUDENTS TAKE RISKS, ACHIEVE GOALS



Minnesota Teacher of the Year candidate Sarah Ehlen of Prodeo Academy recognized for commitment to students.

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'You belong here'

Trans rights advocates pack state Capitol for Trans Day

By JILL BOOGREN

Minnesota's transgender community and supporters packed the State Capitol for Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31, sending a clear and unapologetic message that reverberated throughout the rotunda: "You belong here." The day came as an unprecedented number of bills targeting trans people have been introduced and enacted in states across the country this year and a week after the Minnesota House of Representatives passed the Trans Refuge Act.



Rep. Leigh Finke of St. Paul (Photo by Jill Boogren)

Kat Rohn, executive director of Out-Front Minnesota, said showing up is itself a powerful act. "Our visibility matters," she said. "Because when we're visible, when we show up in our communities as our whole, complex, messy, beautiful, amazing, authentic selves, we change the narrative that is being written about our lives."

Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan said, "Trans people belong in Minnesota. You are safe here. And we want you to live your fullest and happiest and healthiest and most beautiful life possible here."

Flanagan read a proclamation by Gov. Tim Walz designating March 31, 2023 as Transgender Day of Visibility. The proclamation celebrates trans, gender non-con-

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CHESS ON ICE?

By JAN WILMS

Curling has been described in many ways, according to Gretchen Pietruszewski, the manager of the Frogtown Curling Club at 743 Western Ave. N. in Saint Paul. "It's been called chess on ice or shuffleboard on ice, but it is just a game of skill on ice."

The sport began as early as the 16th century in Scotland, as a game to keep busy in winter, according to Pietruszewski. "The players throw rocks on the frozen rivers," she said.

In today's version of the game, a heavy stone made of granite is thrown

out on the ice. Players using brooms sweep ahead of the stone, making its path smoother as it heads toward a target. "You deliver the stone, your teammates sweep ahead of the stone and your captain directs where it should go," Pietruszewski explained.

She said each player has a role on the team. "There is the leader, the second, the third, the vice skip and the skip," she noted. "The skip is the captain, one of the stronger people on the team."

Curling reportedly was a part of the inaugural Winter Olympic Games held in Chamonix, France, in 1924, but that event was not considered official by the International Olympic Committee until 2006. Curling did become a medaled sport in the Winter Olympic Games in 1998.

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Frogtown club offers group clinics for those who want to try the growing sport

Amanda Vosberg, St. Paul Curling Club; Tracy Lindgren, Midway resident and member of the Midway Curling Club; and Matt Mittag, St. Paul Curling Club. (Photo by Terry Faust)



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Spring musical returns to Murray Middle School after four years

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SHE HELPS STUDENTS TAKE RISKS, ACHIEVE GOALS

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By SARAH GRAVES

Sarah Ehlen, a math and science teacher at Prodeo Academy, finds joy in building connections with her students and watching them grow as learners. The veteran teacher believes it's her job to offer every student in the classroom the most challenging school work while providing the skills and tools needed to master lessons.

This focus on excellence landed her a Minnesota Teacher of the Year nomination. Education Minnesota, the state's largest education union and public education advocacy organization, gives the annual award.

Her dedication to student success



Two of Sarah Ehlen's math and science students, along with Prodeo Middle School Academy Principal Sara Zinda, nominated her for Teacher of the Year. (Photo by Terry Faust)

and innovative teaching methods have made her a standout educator in St. Paul. Ehlen's nomination came from two of her students and Prodeo Middle Academy Principal Sara Zinda. Zinda states in her

nomination letter: "Ms. Ehlen's ability to create a fun and focused learning environment encourages students to take risks and achieve goals."

Middle school can be challenging, but she has built trust and community. Students connect and complete work, laugh, and have fun. Working in small groups, answering math problems on the board, and participating in call-and-response activities leads to students that are engaged and respectful throughout the lesson.

Her work has paid off this year. Stu-

dents in her class are seeing big academic growth. Ehlen's students made 163% and 147% of their projected math growth between the fall and winter testing.

When asked why she teaches, Ehlen referred to her teaching philosophy. "My teaching philosophy is rigor, consistency, and humanity," she said. She believes students are capable of tackling challenging material and developing life skills. Ehlen emphasized that all students are entitled to a high-quality education.

"It's my job to put rigorous materials in front of them and ensure they have the resources and skills to achieve," she added. "Consistency is key to providing a safe and predictable learning environment. At the same time, humanity reminds me that everyone in the school is unique and bound to make mistakes."

The winner of the award will be announced in May. Ehlen has worked at Prodeo Academy for seven years. The public charter opened its door in the old St. Bernard's church school building in 2018, and the next school year will serve pre-k through 6th-grade students.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATOR

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Hernandez is passionate about her current work and rightfully proud about the improving graduation rates for Braided Journeys' students at Como with 100% on track for this academic year. Known as "Miss Angie" by students and staff, she has built a community where kids from multiple Indigenous nations meet and gain strength from their shared experiences.

One traditional cultural practice that brings calm and confidence to Indigenous students is smudging. Smudging involves burning sacred herbs such as sage or cedar to purify or bless people, lifting away negative energy and offering participants a

chance to center or ground themselves.

The ritual is standard practice in Miss Angie's classroom at Como, but was only adopted as school board policy for SPPS last fall. Inconsistent policies regarding smudging across the state and country, or lack of policy, and frequent denial of the ritual are all reasons for the NIEA adding the issue to their lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill.

And that's why the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE Local 28) in coordination with the state teacher's union asked Angie Hernandez to advocate at the federal level during the NIEA event in Washington.

To be clear, the SPPS policy regarding smudging is a communal activity in

an approved space. At Como, it's Hernandez' Braided Journeys classroom. But for schools without an Indigenous program or supervising teacher, students may try to smudge in a bathroom which can cause confusion and misunderstanding.

After two days of collaboration and training with other NIEA members, Hernandez took her talking points to Capitol Hill for meetings with Congresswoman Betty McCollum and U.S. Senators Tina Smith and Amy Klobuchar.

Hernandez was grateful for the opportunity to speak directly with the policymakers. She reported that our congressional members were interested, engaged and asked questions to learn more and be better prepared to potentially support

legislation.

"We talked through the barriers to why smudging is something that schools haven't necessarily welcomed, and how we can educate that it (smudging) being a problem isn't the case," Hernandez said.

"I love that St. Paul Public Schools has our policy and I actually gave it to them (members of Congress.) A lot of work went into our policy with legal language, air quality control tests, and specifics that the school board could stand behind."

Asked about the greatest takeaway from her work in Washington, Miss Angie's answer mirrored what she wants for all her students. "I felt very heard and seen."

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CHESS ON ICE? >> From 1

Pietruszewski said she is from northern Minnesota, and took curling as part of gym classes. "When I came here, it was hard to find a club. There was only one, and it was always full. But then this club opened up 11 years ago, and I heard about it and jumped right in. Now there are six clubs. The Saint Paul Club has over 1,200 members, and we have over 650. The clubs in Chaska and Blaine have about the same number as we do, and the clubs in St. Croix and Richfield are a little smaller."

The curling clubs hold bonspiels, or tournaments on a frequent basis. Different leagues complete. "You pay a fee, play throughout the day, and you are in it until you lose three games," Pietruszewski said. She said most rinks are indoors, because it gets too cold in Minnesota to play outside during the winter. However, some breweries are setting up rinks in their parking lots. "Curling is really growing, especially in the Twin Cities," she said.

COVID-19 did affect the Frogtown Curling Club, and its doors were shut for a while. Then the club re-opened with restrictions. "It was not very fun," Pietruszewski said, "but we're back in action now, with everyone vaccinated."

The club is open through the week and offers group clinics to people who want to try curling. "We offer them the basics, but by the time you leave you will want to come back and learn more," she said.



The sport is something the whole family can enjoy, and Hamline-Midway resident Tracy Lindgren can attest to that. She was curling at a recent bonspiel wearing her grandfather John's curling sweater with a trophy patch on it. Her grandfather was on the winning team that was awarded the Lemont Winter trophy in Virginia, Minn., where he lived.

Lindgren, who now is a member of the St. Paul Curling Club, said, "When I was growing up on the Iron Range and in high school, I played on a curling league with my grandma, Lorna." Her father and brother play the sport, as well.

She said curling offers an opportunity



Tracy Lindgren (aft left) wears a sweater belonging to her grandfather, a curler on an award-winning team from Virginia, Minn. back in 1957. People who donate to the club like Cathy and Bill Dessert are honored with inscriptions on the club's stones. (Photo by Terry Faust)

to meet nice people and have fun. "I like the sociability of it," Lindgren said.

"It also offers you the opportunity for self-competition," she added. "You want to see if you can make that shot."

Pietruszewski said what she likes about curling is that it is a sport you can engage in all your life. "I didn't start playing until I was in my early 40s," she said, "and I hope to continue well into my 80s. There are ways to continue playing with no barriers, really."

She said curling has senior teams, junior teams, deaf teams and wheelchair teams.

Pietruszewski has managed the Frog-

THE GAME OF CURLING

Curling is a sport in which players slide stones on a sheet of ice toward a target area which is segmented into four concentric circles. It is related to bowls, boules, and shuffleboard. Two teams, each with four players, take turns sliding heavy, polished granite stones, also called rocks, across the ice curling sheet toward the house, a circular target marked on the ice. Each team has eight stones, with each player throwing two. The purpose is to accumulate the highest score for a game; points are scored for the stones resting closest to the center of the house at the conclusion of each end, which is completed when both teams have thrown all of their stones once. A game usually consists of eight or 10 ends.

The player can induce a curved path, described as curl, by causing the stone to slowly rotate as it slides. The path of the rock may be further influenced by two sweepers with brooms or brushes, who accompany it as it slides down the sheet and sweep the ice in front of the stone. "Sweeping a rock" decreases the friction, which makes the stone travel a straighter path (with less curl) and a longer distance. A great deal of strategy and teamwork go into choosing the ideal path and placement of a stone for each situation, and the skills of the curlers determine the degree to which the stone will achieve the desired result.

From Wikipedia

town Curling Club for the past 10 years. "It's a great job for me, because it's seasonal, and I have a landscaping business so it works out well," she said.

Comment on changes to parking lot rules at April 28 hearing

By JANE McCLURE

Anyone who has ever struggled to cross a busy parking lot to get to Green Line light rail or an A Line bus may appreciate proposed changes to how future lots are designed in St. Paul. Changes in how new parking lots are designed is the focus of a public hearing before the St. Paul Planning Commission at 8:30 a.m. Friday, April 28 at City Hall.

The hearing is in tandem with a hearing on master plan amendments for a proposed University of St. Thomas baseball-softball complex in Highland neighborhood on the former Ford Motor Company site. Plans there call for a 330-space parking lot.

The proposed changes for lots within proximity of a transit stop or station may interest longtime Midway area residents who were involved in light rail-related land use planning. With development such as

Midway Target and Midway Marketplace, there was debate as to how buildings were placed far from university and the planned rail line. While Midway Marketplace has a walkway along Albert Street, getting to and from Hamline station means that Midway Target shoppers just use the Hamline or Syndicate Street sidewalks.

Parking lot design regulations are nothing new in St. Paul, with requirements for landscaping around lots for screening, plantings and trees within a lot. Measures must be taken to provide space for stormwater runoff, manage heat reflected from lots, and help shield lots and headlights from view.

But the current landscaping requirements are only for lots adjoining a public street or sidewalk. The St. Thomas proposed lot doesn't meet the requirements. It would be on a property line, and not along a public street or sidewalk. While that lot's initial plans call for landscaping,

it isn't required today. The project prompted another look at parking regulations.

The changes would ensure that all parking lots have quality landscaping, said city planner Spencer Miller Johnson. He said the current regulations are more applicable to larger, suburban-style parking lots and need to be amended to fit smaller-scale urban lots.

The city's adoption of traditional neighborhood zoning years ago promotes new developments to be built up to the street, with parking at the rear. That has exempted many newer lots from being landscaped. The proposed changes would remove that exemption.

Another impetus for change is how walkways in larger parking lots are handled, with a goal of walkability and better access to transit. The current requirement is that parking lots larger than 125,000 square feet are required to provide internal walkways in addition to landscaping

requirements. The key change would be that parking lot of 80,000 or more square feet would have to have walkways if they are within one-quarter mile of a light rail, streetcar or bus rapid transit line. This would affect future development along the proposed Riverview Corridor in the West End and Highland neighborhoods, B Line rapid bus along Selby Avenue, and other future rapid bus lines.

Walkways in parking lots must be a minimum width of five feet and should connect primary buildings on the site with access to parking areas, the public sidewalk system on adjacent streets, and transit stations if any are nearby. With the exception of walkway/driveway crossings, walkways should be separated from vehicle parking or maneuvering areas by grade, different paving material, markings or landscaping. Internal sidewalks must meet accessibility standards and other design and construction standards adopted by the city.

View the study at <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-and-economic-development/planning/planning-com>

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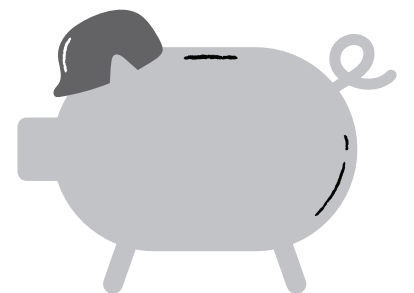
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GROWING FUTURES THROUGH EARLY LEARNING

PLANTING SEEDS

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



On March 22, 2023, hundreds gathered at the Minnesota Capitol for Advocacy for Children's Day. For the past 20 years, children, parents, early childhood educators, advocates, and elected officials have gathered in the rotunda to set a policy agenda that prioritizes the needs of children. This year's priorities were addressing the needs of over 35,000 Minnesota children who do not have access to affordable, quality early education and supporting families in a holistic, sustainable manner.

Minnesota public officials who supported and participated in the Advocacy for Children's Day included St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, Senator Steve Cwudzinski, Representative Lisa Demuth, Representative Heather Keeler, Senator Bobby Joe Champion, Senator John Hoffman, Councilmember Rebecca Noecker, Representative María Isa Pérez-Vega, and Representative Dave Pinto.

During Advocacy for Children's Day, I shared about the work of Planting People Growing Justice in supporting early learning. Our organization is committed to growing futures. One book at a time and one child at a time. This is personal and important to me. As a civil rights attorney, many of my clients learned how to read in prison. This is unacceptable but somehow, we created a Rule of 4:

- One in four American children has



Hundreds, including Dr. Artika Tyner (second from right) gathered on March 22 at the Minnesota Capitol for Advocacy for Children's Day. This year's priorities were addressing the needs of over 35,000 children who do not have access to affordable, quality early childhood education and supporting families in a holistic, sustainable manner. (Photo submitted)

not learned how to read. If you are not reading at grade level by fourth grade, you are four times more likely to drop out of school. There is also a connection to future incarceration. Students who drop out are three and a half times more likely to be arrested during their lifetime.

INVESTING IN EARLY LEARNING

There is an opportunity for change. This change begins with early learning. At Planting People Growing Justice, we are supporting our children and families on their learning journey.

How do we do this?

- 1) We help children to discover joy in reading by promoting early literacy and

diversity in books. We are creating mirrors (for diverse children to see a positive representation of themselves on the pages of books) and windows (for all children to build bridges across cultures).

- 2) We support parents in their roles as their child's first educator. We know 0-3 is a critical stage for learning. The brain is like sponge that is absorbing learning. According to the Itasca Project, "80 percent of a child's brain foundation is formed within the first 1,000 days of life."

- 3) We are helping parents to create make learning a part of the daily home routine. We are encouraging parents to read to their children at least 20 minutes per day, five days a week.

LEAD ISSUES

Greater Twin Cities United Way 2023 Policy & Advocacy Agenda includes:

- Increase investments to stabilize the early child care and education workforce and expand access to culturally responsive, trauma-sensitive care.
- Advance policies that remove systemic barriers and mitigate the impacts of the "benefits cliff."
- Provide holistic services to prevent homelessness and build pathways to stable housing for those exiting the foster system and transitioning out of incarceration.

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According to researchers Nagy and Herman, in just one year, parents will expose their child to 1.8 million words.

4) We are creating access to quality early learning in new and creative ways. One such example is the R.A.W. Library created by the African American Babies Coalition. We built an interactive learning library that focuses on reading, arithmetic, and writing.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can advocate for funding for early learning from the state. This is an investment in a brighter Minnesota as we focus on growing futures.

Through this funding, we can create new pipelines for the future that eliminates racial inequities and economic disparities while working to end mass incarceration.

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.

We're asking for corridor relief

BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY

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



For those of us who were in the Midway in 2020, we won't ever forget the damage and destruction of buildings following the murder of George Floyd. And I certainly won't forget the outpouring of support that instantly occurred as neighbors offered support in whatever way they could - bringing a broom to University Avenue the next morning or donating \$10 to help the impacted businesses.

While many of those buildings were able to get back to normal soon - the windows got replaced, the doors fixed - we can still see many parcels without new buildings. The same can be said for other

important commercial corridors in Minneapolis that saw damage. The business community, nonprofits, and residents all stepped up to help those in need in 2020. Now its time for the state of Minnesota to step in.

A coalition representing important corridors in Saint Paul and Minneapolis are working to get funding for our small businesses. The impact of the civil unrest three years ago resulted in more than \$500 million in damage as more than 1,500 business and nonprofits were fully or partially destroyed. A proposal at the Minnesota Legislature would provide funding redevelopment and building projects within specific cultural business districts, including University Avenue.

Funding could go toward:

- Supporting redevelopment, including commercial and nonprofit property acquisition, financing, rent subsidies, construction and other related expenses
- Funds redistributed to eligible businesses and nonprofits in the form of loans, forgivable loans, and grants to support business improvement projects, including

but not limited to physical renovations of rented or owned commercial space

- Providing technical assistance to businesses and entrepreneurs to successfully apply for and utilize early-in, flexible redevelopment funding
- Utilizing community review committees when awarding grants and loans, in cooperation with experienced nonprofit and local community development agencies
- Helping entrepreneurs close their project funding gaps, by leveraging additional financing from the private and public sources.

The coalition has been out meeting with legislators and testifying at hearings in the House and Senate. Reaction has been good, and we remain hopeful we can get meaningful support for our communities. If you like the idea of businesses along University Avenue getting support, as well as other properties a few blocks off University, I ask you to reach out to your legislators. At the time of this writing, versions of this legislation were in HF 3028 and SF 3035.

Personally, I view this legislation as two parts: the immediate need to support the small business owners who faced significant property damage during civil unrest; and setting up important corridors for

long-term success. Unlike some proposals at the Legislature, this is a one-time request which can significantly help our important commercial corridors for decades to come. Hopefully as the Legislative Session ends in May, we can celebrate support which will help rebuild a stronger Midway.

DIRECTORY OUT

Look for the 2023 Midway Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Directory with your April Monitor or at a local business. You can also find it online at www.MonitorSaintPaul.com. You'll want to keep the book handy. It will help you shop local, and includes important phone numbers, email addresses and business listings.



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Owner & Editor:

Tesha M. Christensen, 612-235-4464
Tesha@MonitorSaintPaul.com

Advertising & Marketing:

Denis Woulfe, 651-917-4183
Denis@MonitorSaintPaul.com
Sandra Mikulsky, 612-260-7967
sandra.tmcpub@gmail.com

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MSPIFF 42 BEGINS

By JAN WILLMS

Whether a long-time film society member or new to the scene, film buffs all over the Twin Cities and beyond are getting ready for the 42nd Minneapolis Saint Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) running April 13-27 at the Main Cinema, 115 SE Main St. in Minneapolis. Films are also being shown at the Capri in North Minneapolis, the Landmark Center in Saint Paul and in Rochester. Full passes to the festival are available for \$400 to film society members, \$500 to the public and \$75 for students.

MSPIFF will also be taking over Pracna next door during the festival and have beer, wine and other drinks available, as well as food.

The opening night film, "Dreamin' Wild" is very mournful, haunting and quite beautiful, according to MSP Film Society Executive Director Susan Smoluchowski. "It's based on a true story about the Emerson Brothers, who were creating music in the '70s in their basement. Their music just never got the kind of attention they wanted, and they came to terms with that."

However, their music was picked up online 40 years later, and a cult following developed. "They were overlooked and undervalued and went on with their lives," Smoluchowski said. "The movie looks at what happens when their music resurfaces all these years later." Pohlad has produced numerous Oscar-winning films over the years and has recently returned to directing. He will be present on opening night to discuss the film.

The closing night film at MSPIFF is also music-related. "It's Only Life, After All" directed by Alexandria Bombach tells the story of the Indigo Girls. "The documentary reveals how they stayed true to who they were as artists and people," Smoluchowski said. They are also great activists and worked closely with Winona LaDuke. Smoluchowski said the director will be present closing night, and if LaDuke's schedule allows it, so will she.

Smoluchowski highlighted several other films that will be shown during the festival. Jimmy Chen and Chai Vasarhelyi have directed "Wild Life," a film about Patagonia, the company, and about the extraordinary generosity of the founders of that company. "They took an exceptional interest in the environment and did what they could to save parts of our world that were ruined by development," Smoluchowski said.

Another documentary, "Being Mary Tyler Moore," features Moore's famous hat and the house in Minneapolis she lived in. "It's just a very moving documentary about her," Smoluchowski said. She also pointed to a film called "Food and Country," directed by Laura Gabbert and focusing on how the food industry was affected by the pandemic. New York Times food writer Ruth Reichlis is featured, as she reaches out to food producers across political divides to explore how they have tried to survive independently during the

This year's festival begins and ends with music; Pohlad film slated for April 13 and Indigo Girls set for April 27



"It's Only Life After All" tells the story of Amy Ray and Emily Saliers of Indigo Girls – the iconic folk rock duo. View it on the closing night of the film festival, on April 27.

pandemic and beyond.

Smoluchowski also recommended "20 Days in Mariupol," a film depicting journalists from the Associated Press during the earliest days of the Ukraine-Russian war and the ferocious bombing of the city of Mariupol. "It shows the horrors of the attack and how the citizens rallied to survive these attacks," she said.

"Il Boemo" is a period drama about long-forgotten Czech-born composer Josef Myslivecek who lived during the 1700s. "He was a mentor to Mozart," Smoluchowski said. "The film is a social romp, very appealing to our audiences."

A story of the unlikely lifelong friendship between two men is told in the Italian film "Eight Mountains." Another Italian film, "L'Immensita," stars Penelope Cruz and is a coming-of-age feature. "It's about a family who goes to the seaside every summer, and their daughter who is questioning her gender," Smoluchowski said.

A film from Pakistan that is also notable, according to Smoluchowski, is "Joyland," a film that was shown at Cannes and describes a typical family from Lahore who become involved with transgender performers. And finally, she described the "Gods of Mexico" as a film that has no dialogue, only spectacular photography.

This year's MSPIFF will present a small number of films online during the Best of Fest, which runs some of the most popular films immediately following the festival. "At this point in time, most distributors want their films to be seen on the big screen," Smoluchowski explained. "It's more difficult to negotiate online screening, and we are glad of that. We want to encourage people to come back and be together in the theater."

It has been a year since the MSP Film Society took over use of all five theaters at the Main location, and Smoluchowski said it is both exciting and a little challenging, as people test re-entry to public events after the pandemic.

Avid cinephiles have appreciated that the Main is a part of their community. One film society member said he had moved to the area so that he could be close enough to walk to the theater.

"We have been showing a range of films," Smoluchowski said.

See a full schedule of the films being shown at the festival at www.mspfilm.org.

View '40 Below'

By JAN WILLMS

Why do people do this?

Documentary filmmaker Marius Anderson tries to answer this question about the reasons people choose to expose themselves to bitter Minnesota wind and temperatures in the annual Arrowhead 135 winter ultra race that begins in International Falls, one of the coldest spots in the United States.

The participants can race by foot, on bicycle or on skis to cover the 135 miles of trail that covers the northern Minnesota landscape.

"We filmed this in 2019, during a Polar Vortex, so it was even colder," Anderson said. (www.40belowmovie.com)

"Filming this was very tough for a crew," he said. Anderson researched to find filming equipment that would work in the frigid temperatures. He said the film crew paralleled the athletes. "Some racers do this with no sleep, especially if it is very cold. If you stop, you could become hypothermic, and it could be hours before someone comes by."

He and his crew got by with very little sleep. "I rented a small cabin at Checkpoint Two, and we slept two to three hours. Everything was a kind of blur. You forget everything around you," Anderson explained.

Anderson followed Bill Bradley, a competitor from California who was making his eighth try, and Leah Gruhn. She and her husband, both scientists, participated by bicycle. Bradley raced by foot.

On camera, Bradley talks about some of the trials he has endured in his life. He lost his business and his wife, and he eventually started running marathons. As tough and grueling as they were, he con-

'40 BELOW' >> 7



'40 Below' Filmmaker Marius Anderson resides in Duluth and his father-in-law does the Arrowhead 135.

HAMLIN HEADLINES

Hamline University Commencement

Saturday, May 13, 2023

10 a.m. – Undergraduate ceremony
1 p.m. – Undergraduates ceremony
3:30 p.m. – Graduate ceremony

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ALTER HOME TEAM **RG REALTY GROUP**



Rep. Leigh Finke signs autographs for Minnetonka teens River (center) and Rue Larson on Transgender Day of Visibility. (*Note: River's last name has been withheld at request.) (Photo by Jill Boogren)

YOU BELONG HERE >> From 1

forming, and non-binary Minnesotans while recognizing that trans people are disproportionately affected by hate crimes, violence and discrimination.

Rep. Leigh Finke (DFL-Saint Paul) knows all too well the political realities. Her bill passed in the House after a long, grueling night with a 68-62 majority – enough to win, but not enough to curtail the insults, slurs and damaging rhetoric that have become part of the public discourse. She spoke about the “shocking rate” and “terrifying number” of states where trans rights are being decimated. So much so, it prompted independent reporter Erin Reed (@ErinInTheMorning) to create a “risk map” that color codes in deep red the worst states for trans rights. These laws do far more than ban books and drag shows. In many states it is now illegal for teenagers and young adults to seek gender affirming care, and at least two states – South Dakota and Kentucky – direct health care providers to detransition youth.

“I can hardly utter those two words ‘forced detransition’ without succumbing to emotion,” said Finke. “They represent to me the final compromise that is being asked of our community: Will you choose the closet or the coffin? That’s the bargain of forced detransition.”

Governor Walz signed an executive order in March protecting the right of Minnesota’s LGBTQIA+ community members to receive gender affirming health care services. It also protects against extradition orders from other states where this care is no longer legal, making Minnesota a trans refuge state. To become permanent, however, the Trans Refuge Act needs to be signed into law. Finke said she is optimistic for the bill’s passage in the Senate.

“What we are fighting for is simple,” said Flanagan. “It is life affirming care. It is life saving care, and everyone deserves it.”

Pediatrician Dr. Katy Miller spoke of the positive outcomes of providing gender affirming care. “In my job, every single day I have the incredible honor of seeing trans youth thrive,” said Miller.

Miller mentioned a young patient she called “Mary,” who wanted to start estrogen therapy. Mary was at first shy and visibly uncomfortable – with her body and her life. She had been hospitalized for suicidal thoughts, which prompted her parents to bring her to the clinic for help. At her first follow-up visit after starting estrogen, Mary came in “absolutely beaming, face full of smiles.”

Miller said, “Over the course of the past three years, I have watched her grow into a confident and flourishing young adult. She is no longer the shy anxious girl who was trying to take up as little space as possible. She just exudes joy and light.”

Miller pointed out that gender af-

firming care is endorsed by every major medical society in the United States. The American Academy of Pediatrics, Endocrine Society, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association are among those organizations, according to the LGBTQIA+ media advocacy organization GLAAD.

SHARING STORIES AND HOPE

Buoyed by the crowd, speakers shared deeply personal stories about their own transitions and offered messages of hope to others – especially to the youth in the room. For these speakers, visibility was everything. Most had had no experience with transgender and non-binary people as they were coming of age, no understanding of nor language to express it. They described sometimes long and painful journeys toward their own self discovery.

Looking upward at the crowd gathered on three levels of the rotunda, Rep. Alicia Kozlowski (DFL-Duluth) spoke of meeting for the first time – at 28 years old – Sharice Davids, an openly lesbian Native American congressperson from Kansas.

“That was a moment that catalyzed me to finally say out loud, ‘I’m gay, gay, gay.’ And everyone was like, ‘We know, we know, we know,’” said Kozlowski, drawing laughter from the crowd. “It took another five years to finally come home to myself fully as a two-spirit, nonbinary person.”

Mars Kamenski introduced himself as a Minneapolis resident, an immigrant from Bulgaria, an ancient soul who feels everything way too deeply, a gym rat “sans toxic masculinity,” a healer, writer, creator and dreamer – and someone who spent the first 29 years of their life living as a woman who now identifies as non-binary and trans masculine. Coming out as queer at 15 years of age in the “White, cisgender, heteronormative suburb of Rosemount” was damaging to Kamenski. He was bullied, assaulted and not accepted by people in his life. He repressed any introspection regarding his gender because it felt inaccessible and scary. In 2020, he began thinking critically about his gender, realizing that there was a great disconnect between who he wanted to be and who he presently was.

“I came to the epiphany that at the end of the day, the longest relationship that I’m ever going to have is going to be with myself. This was the wake-up call that I needed to step into my power and reclaim my life,” said Kamenski. “Starting testosterone has been one of the most healing experiences of my life. Witnessing the physical changes daily as I go through puberty all over again at 31 has been a wild experience to say the least.”

Kamenski addressed the youth in the room. “I want you to know how absolutely sacred you are. You are more than the

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‘40 BELOW’ >> 7

sidered them nothing compared to what he had gone through. So he has participated in extreme competitions all around the world, including races in the desert with temperatures of 135 degrees Fahrenheit. But he has not been able to finish the Arrowhead 135.

Overall, about a third of the competitors finish the race.

Throughout making the documentary, Anderson said he returned over and over to that question of why people do this. “And I found it is different for everyone,” he stated. “Some come back year

Minnesota documentary filmmaker Dawn Mikkelson has managed to capture both the strength and the vulnerability of the roller derby skaters whose story she tells in her film “Minnesota Mean.” The documentary feature will have its world premiere during the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF). Mikkelson follows the team through its wins and losses as it prepares for championships in the rough and tumble sport. Jim Tittle (at left) did most of the camera work for “Minnesota Mean.” He died before the film was complete.

after year, and treat it as a family reunion. Someone like Bill has a very different reason. And the reasons are all interesting.”

One racer’s answer as to why he does it was simple. “It separates you from being normal,” he said.

Anderson said he loves to watch documentaries, as well as make them. “It is very difficult oftentimes because people might act differently. My approach is to have a small film crew, sometimes just myself. There were so many moments when people forgot about me being there on this film, and that was great,” said Anderson. “But he struggles with the Arrowhead 135.”

▶ FULL STORY @ MONITORSAINTPAUL.COM



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Mark your calendar to make a green difference

By PATRICIA OHMANS
FrogTown Green

Sick of snow? Me, too. It's frustrating to be stuck inside yet again in what feels like an endless series of "final" winter storms. But these last slushy days give us time to get out the spring calendar and sort through the many ways we can work together to make our neighborhoods greener and healthier.

Want to make a green difference once spring gets here? Take your pick of the possibilities, depending on your preference and availability. More information about all these activities can also be found on the FrogTown Green website, www.frogtowngreen.com, or at the links listed below.

HATE ALL THAT LITTER REVEALED BY MELTING SNOW?

That's an easy one. St Paul's annual City-Wide Parks and Neighborhood Clean-up happens again this Earth Day, Saturday, April 22, from 9 to 11:30 a.m. FrogTown Green is hosting two sites this year: our traditional site at FrogTown Park & Farm, and a new site at Valley Park, on the east side of the neighborhood. The clean-up process couldn't be simpler: show up, grab a bag and some gloves, and rid our streets and greenspaces of a winter's worth of litter. It's a great event for families, church groups and clubs.

LOVE NATIVE PLANTS AND POLLINATORS?

You're in luck. FrogTown Green sponsors a weekly volunteer session at Monarch City, our half-mile of pollinator-friendly gardens on the north side of West Minnehaha Park and Rec Center. These native gardens mostly take care of themselves, but they do need some weeding and mulching, as well as replanting



Volunteers clean up FrogTown Park & Farm during a previous year event. This year's event will be on Saturday, April 22 from 9 to 11:30 a.m. (Photo submitted)

in bare spots. And they are beautiful! You don't need any experience to drop in to work with our Monarch City volunteer crew on Thursday mornings, from 9-11 a.m., starting May 15.

REALLY LOVE NATIVE PLANTS AND POLLINATORS?

If you would like a deeper immersion in the work of growing native plants, consider joining the Seedling Corps! This multi-neighborhood group of volunteers nurtures pollinator plants and bare root trees for The Bee Line (yet another big pollinator project, this one along Pierce Butler Route). The plants, containers, soil, and any other needed materials are provided. You provide the space and a bit of daily tending, like watering, scouting, and repotting. This is an easy way to get involved in the local movement to restore native plants and pollinators and make a significant impact on our local environment. Details on what's involved and how to join at www.hamlinemidway.org/bee-line

WORRIED ABOUT ALL THOSE ASH TREES THAT HAVE COME DOWN LATELY?

Emerald ash borer continues to take a grim toll on our boulevard trees. While the city's forestry department works to restore the streetside tree canopy, residents can also help. Join a community

tree planting group in FrogTown, Hamline-Midway or Summit-U and give free trees to your neighbors. These are small groups of dedicated resident volunteers who have an ingenious system for "growing shade."

The oldest of these groups, FrogTown Green's "Tree Frogs," will be nurturing over 100 fruit and shade trees for fall giveaways. The Tree Frogs have been active since 2009 and have planted more than 500 free trees. To join them or to sign up for a free tree, call FrogTown Green at 651-757-5970.

You can support the Hamline Midway urban tree canopy by helping to modify that neighborhood's tree nursery gravel bed on Saturday, April 29. Volunteers will shovel gravel out of the gravel bed used to grow bare root trees for the HMEC Free Trees Project, so some modifications to the structure can be done. Gravel will then be put back into the bed. Email trees@hamlinemidway.org to register or ask questions.

Volunteers with the Canopy Connectors, a group that serves the Summit-University community, are also growing trees for fall giveaway in their nursery gravel bed, at Unity Church-Unitarian. Connect with the Canopy Connectors at unityunitarian.org/canopy-connectors

LOOKING TO PULL REALLY BIG WEEDS?

Sign up to bust some buckthorn. The FrogTown Park Stewards are partnering with Great River Greening on Saturday April 15, from 12:30 to 3 p.m. Use a variety of tactics to clear away buckthorn, a shrub that has taken over the park's wilder spaces, crowding out other more beneficial plants. This work will ready the space for native plantings later in the season. No previous knowledge or experience is necessary, tools and training provided. To register, contact Jessica at jdummond@greatrivergreening.org

READY TO JOIN A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

Join Our Village gardeners. FrogTown Green has a half dozen spaces open at Our Village, a 40-bed community garden at Pierce Butler Route and Milton Street, a block north of FrogTown Park & Farm. The gardeners are a multinational mix, reflecting FrogTown's recent immigrants as well as old-timers. Garden beds are 4 x 10, with mulch, water, and some tools provided. Call FrogTown Green if you are itching to grow food in community.

FrogTown Green is a volunteer-powered initiative to build green beauty in the FrogTown neighborhood. We plant trees, cultivate gardens and work toward a healthier environment. If you'd like to know more, our website is frogtowngreen.com and our phone is 651-757-5970.

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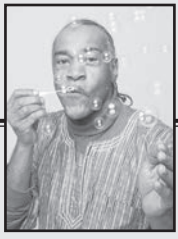
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PEACE BUBBLES

BY MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com



"I've seen enough things to know that if you just keep on going, if you turn the corner, the sun will be shining." Al Sharpton, Jr.

"Arise and shine; go touch a life; Go and chase your destiny. Arise and shine; with the power of one; It's your time." Sherri Orr

Hello Monitor readers,

I send good thoughts, condolences, and a collective embrace to everyone that has been feeling sorrow, frustration, and/or who are personally grieving a loss.

Natural disaster losses are heartbreaking and everyday losses of beloved human beings are painful and unfortunately, expected; however, the loss of our children, young adults, and elders due to senseless and at times, preventable acts of violence and shootings are unbearable! Please send prayers and good thoughts to our planet and to all our relatives.

REFLECTIONS FROM A PEACEMAKER

Continuing last month's conversation on "poverty" or "hopelessness" is artist and peacemaker, Jane Powell's reflections and insights:

Words such as "poverty" and/or "hopelessness" are too general. By that I mean, what do each of us imagine when we hear "poverty" or "hopelessness"? I believe the

SEND PRAYERS TO PLANET, RELATIVES

words do not express the complexity of facets, especially when it comes to people of color.

What impacts come from historical trauma passed down from slavery and Jim Crow laws and, specific to Rondo, the dividing of a thriving community by a major highway – which had in fact, initially not been routed through Rondo? Where were/are sources of pollution situated? Noxious odors and toxins affect the livability of a community. In the Twin Cities, these sites mainly are situated by communities of color, which were "force" formed by redlining.

The color of one's skin stands out affecting offers of equitable employment, housing and services. Increasingly I am reading articles concerning the long-term disparities in the health care treatment of Black and Brown bodies by our medical institutions. I am glad these are being printed; however, the lack of care continues and creates distress and distrust. Consider the criminal justice system and note the significantly greater percent of Black and Brown versus White bodies who are incarcerated for similar offenses, with harsher sentences and wrongful convictions. As these individuals are fathers, brothers, uncles, and also, mothers, sisters and aunts, their removal additionally creates cracks in their community. There is a greater percent of Black and Brown versus White bodies who are stopped by police for traffic and other issues. How many White families have "the talk" with their kids about the color of their skin and navigating and staying alive in America's White-focused

legal, economic and social system?

There is more to this deep and complex issue and, as White allies, we can inform each other and work to change our local and national legal, economic and cultural systems.

LET'S TALK ABOUT MINI FORESTS

And, to assist with thinking spring and greener, UMN research student, Anna Turner provides earth-friendly information:

When you think of a "mini-forest" in St. Paul, what comes to mind? A city street lined with the same elm tree, perfectly spaced out block after block? A pot filled with manicured bonsai trees sitting on the stoop of your neighbor's front porch? Or do you envision a dense and diverse forest, much like one which once grew wild all over Minnesota, tucked within your community? If the latter appears in your mind, you're already envisioning the possibilities of what a tennis court-sized space in the middle of St. Paul can grow to be. A community-based project located in Rondo, Frogtown, Como, and Hamline/Midway is aiming to turn that vision of an urban mini-forest into a planted reality.

As Molly Coddling, local environmentalist, spoke on in a previous Monitor column, "Community forests in Midway neighborhoods contribute to environmental justice," urban trees serve a multitude of economic, environmental, and social benefits. This urban forestry project is focused on decreasing disparities in urban tree canopy across the Twin Cities, addressing racist planning such as redlining,

and cultivating community-based climate action. The mini-forest project prioritizes community collaboration in its selection of potential planting locations in St. Paul neighborhoods. The project will gain community input, via a survey, on site selection and interest in community involvement. The information gained from the survey, as well as from the stories shared and conversations had between community members and organizations, will be used in the advancement of the engagement process. The mini-forest survey can be found on the informational website here: <https://rondo-frogtown-mini-forests-project.weebly.com/survey.html>

There is so much promise within a mini-forest. From closing gaps in tree canopy disparities to growing green sanctuaries in which generations can reap the numerous benefits. Maybe the most notable of these mini-forest potentials is its ability to foster an approachable community-based climate and justice action. When you are walking to your community garden to collect your fall harvest or riding the bus on your daily commute, look around and notice all the concrete or barren corners of your neighborhood that hold potential to a greener future.

Keep the positive vibrations flowing; mourn when needed and stay optimistic!

May Peace Be In the Rondo, Frogtown, Hamline/Midway, Como, and Surrounding Communities...

May Peace Be In Our Homes & Communities...

May Peace Prevail On Earth (MPPOE)!

PLAN IT

AUDITION FOR 'THE MUSIC MAN' AT COMO

Auditions for "The Music Man" will be held at the Roseville Area Middle School on April 24 and 25 from 5:30-9:30 p.m. nightly, with callbacks on April 26. Details and an online audition application at: www.RosetownPlayhouse.org. Rosetown Playhouse presents Meredith Willson's "The Music Man" on the outdoor stage at the historic Lake Como Pavilion, July 13-23.

HAMLIN CHURCH SPRING MARKET APRIL 23

The Hamline Church Spring Market is 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 23 at Hamline Church United Methodist, 1514 Englewood Ave. Come buy handmade gift items, or treats for yourself. There will be baked goods and jam. A used book sale and craft supply makers market are also offered. There will also be an ecofair on the church greenway, which features door prizes and a demonstration of how to make a sleeping mat out of plastic bags.

Some of Minnesota's most beautiful and unique church windows will be in the spotlight at 10 a.m. Sunday, April 30 as Hamline Church United Methodist celebrates the refurbishment of its lovely stained glass windows.

'MATILDA, JR.' AT MURRAY MIDDLE SCHOOL



After four years without a performance, the spring Musical Theater was back at Murray Middle School. The production of Matilda, Jr. was a huge success, according to organizers. Over 50 students were involved in performing - singing, dancing, operating sound and lights, as well as a stage crew group that created sets and props and handled transitions during the performances. Theater advisors Todd Rogers, Maddie Helmen, and Erin Dooley, crew advisor Megan Steinhoff, and tech lead Carrie Bittner give a huge "shout out" to all students and much appreciation to family volunteers and all who came out to support the program by attending one of the performances. (Photo submitted)

HAMLIN MIDWAY ELDERS APRIL PROGRAMS

April classes include: Arthritis-Friendly Exercise:

- Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30-2:30 p.m., April 4 - May 25 (in-person & Zoom)
- Knit/Crochet Group: Mondays, 1-3 p.m., ongoing (in-person & Zoom)
- Chair Yoga: Thursdays, 10:30-11:30 a.m., April 6 - May 25 (in-person & Zoom)
- Jody's Documentary Film Series: Last Wednesday of each month, 1 p.m.
- Solo Seniors Resource Group: last Monday of each month, 10-11:30 a.m.
- Defensive Driving Refresher Course: Wednesday, April 19, 1-5 p.m.

Classes are welcoming and informal, and people may join anytime. There is no fee for classes; donations are always welcome. To register, call or email. More at Hamline Midway Elders, 651-209-6542, info@hmelders.org, www.hmelders.org

MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE MAY 20

Ramsey County Master Gardeners will host their annual plant sale on May 20, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Church of the Holy Childhood, 1435 Midway Pkwy. Funds raised support Master Gardener community and youth education programs in Ramsey County. More at www.Ramsey-MasterGardeners.org/plantsale.

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DISTRICT 10 COMO COMMUNITY COUNCIL

BY SHEVEK MCKEE
Executive director
district10@
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D10 Como Park usually co-hosts the Como Park portion of the city's Regional Parks Cleanup Day.

When: Saturday, April 22, 2023 from 9-11:30 a.m.

What: Individuals and groups of all ages come together to pick up litter that has recently become exposed due to the melting snow.

How: Participating is easy! Simply

drop by the Como pavilion around 9 a.m. on April 22 to check in and pick up bags and gloves. Borrowed equipment should be returned by 11:30 a.m.

Where (Como Park): Look for our table near the Como Lake Pavilion to sign-in, pick-up some supplies, and debate which part of Como Park is your favorite with one of our helpful volunteer board members.

More info on the D10 Website: District10ComoPark.org/Cleanup

PICK UP & PARTY AT ORCHARD REC

The Como Community Council will be hosting the 2nd Annual Pick Up & Party event at Orchard Rec Center (875 W. Orchard Ave.). Whether you come with your neighbors or come to meet your neighbors, we would love to see you there!

• 2 p.m. Neighborhood Clean Up – We'll kick off the event with a neighborhood clean up from Front to Como and Dale to the railroad tracks. Check in at the Rec Center for your supplies and the location to start your pick up.

• 3:30 p.m. Community Party – After the clean up, we'll meet up back at the rec center for a grill out, kids crafts (including build-your-own bird houses), yard games, community organizations, and more.

Everyone is invited to this free event.

We're also planning our annual Ice Cream Social at the Como Streetcar Station in July, and a Harvest Festival in the Tilden Park area in October. Get involved in planning the event in your sub-district, or ANY of the sub-districts, at our Neighborhood Relations Committee meetings.

COMO COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE

D10 Como Community Council is once again coordinating a community sale weekend from Thursday, May 18 to

Sunday, May 21. If you would like to be included in our map (embedded on our website), please fill out the Como Community Sale form with your information before May 11.

We will be promoting this effort in our Weekly Newsletter, Facebook, and flyer-ing some local community spaces, directing people to find the map. Sign up and/or view the sale map on our website: District10ComoPark.org/GarageSale.

D10 COMMUNITY MEETINGS SCHEDULE

- Land Use Committee, April 18, 6pm
 - D10 Board, April 18, 7:15pm
 - Environment Committee May 3, 6pm
 - Neighborhood Relations Committee, May 3, 7:15pm
 - Land Use Committee, May 16, 6pm
 - D10 Board, May 16, 7:15pm
- All D10 board and committee meetings are open to the public.

Como AP Government students visit D.C.

COMO PARK SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

BY ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher



Fifteen seniors studying AP Government and AP Economics recently spent a week in Washington D.C. as part of the national Close Up program.

Highlights included study visits to national monuments and memorials including Jefferson, FDR, Martin Luther King, Jr., Lincoln, World War II, Vietnam and Korea. There were also study visits at museums of the Smithsonian, the Holocaust Museum, Black Lives Matter Plaza, the White House, Arlington National Cemetery, and unique Washington neighborhoods.

On their Capitol Hill Day, Como students observed an Energy and Commerce sub-committee hearing on data privacy and social media before an hour-long meeting with Congresswoman Betty McCollum in her office. The discussion had a powerful impact on the students who responded to their representative's ques-

tions about education, public safety, and the environment while also listening to the Congresswoman describe the work of Congress and its current climate.

After a tour of the U.S. Capitol building itself, students had meetings on the Senate side of the hill with both Senator Tina Smith and Senator Amy Klobuchar. Capitol Hill Day also included visits to the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and the House of Representatives chamber.

Throughout the week, Como students were engaged in policy discussions and simulations with peers from across the nation and beyond in workshop groups. A total of 90 students represented the states of California, New York, Rhode Island, Ohio, Michigan, as well as Puerto Rico and France.

The week of experiential learning helps create informed and engaged citizens, equipped with skills to make a difference in their community and our world. Students participated in several fundraising efforts but reaching Washington D.C. is still only possible because of extremely generous donations and scholarships provided by supporters in the Como community.

SPRING MUSICAL



Como AP Government students with Congresswoman Betty McCollum in her Washington D.C. office. (Photo courtesy of congressional staff)

Como's Theater Department performed four energetic shows of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling B-E-E" from March 17-21. Audiences enjoyed Friday's opening night, followed by a Saturday matinee and Saturday evening performance, concluding with a Tuesday afternoon show for students and staff during the school day.

Producer and music director Siri Keller, with director Suzy Myhre and choreographer Maija Kelly said it was an honor to work with such a dedicated cast and crew.

Keller shared that they wanted students to explore new skills without judgement. "We wanted to push these new artists forward into characters, songs, set

and lighting designs that forced them to think inwardly as much as they did outwardly."

Cast members included Roman Rivers, Genevieve DeGaetano, Emerson Spencer, Liam Donegan, Ellen Chinema, Xee Lee, Cece Hawks, Koda Karan, Par'iz Battee, July Paw, Jonathan Newman, Corry George Summers, Duazong Xiong, Lillian Mae, Lucia Rosewell, and Ywa Hay Paw.

The crew consisted of Kaya Solheid, Freddy Gray, Vi Eicher, Maggie Fuller, Bella Becarra, Bean Bougie, Linnea Common, Charlie Dahl, Lila Kopp, Charlie McCabe, Lisa Truong, Clara Dunne, Ana Como, Millie Huth, and Lily Pettiford.



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Should banquet hall along University have parking lot?

Planning commission debates Blaize proposal and whether parking lot fits along lightrail line

By JANE McCLURE

A longtime Frogtown commercial building can become a restaurant and banquet hall, with St. Paul Planning Commission approval of a needed conditional use permit March 17. But the project has jump-started debate over off-street parking needs, and whether or not allowing a 50-space parking lot along a transit corridor is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan and recent city action to eliminate parking minimums.

Blaize restaurant and banquet facility is slated to open at 315 University Ave. The Planning Commission's decision to approve the conditional use permit is final. It wasn't appealed to the city council within a 10-day period. Banquet and rental halls operate under such permits, which set hours of operation and other requirements.

The commission rejected a proposed to bring the project back for a site plan review public hearing, 4-9.

The Planning Commission Zoning Committee, which recommended permit approval on a 3-1 vote earlier in March, and the full commission, debated the parking issues at length over two meetings. The city's comprehensive plan and a

recently approved change to the parking standard discourage the construction of off-street parking. Some commissioners upheld those studies as a reason to look carefully at new parking requests. They also raised issues of neighborhood character.

But other commissioners said businesses are being hurt by a lack of off-street parking, especially along University and in the Little Mekong area where Blaize will open its doors.

Owner Chong Soua Vang purchased the property in 2016. Vang also owns 308-310 Sherburne Ave. and 496 Farrington Ave. Those properties in 2018 were rezoned from residential to traditional neighborhoods uses, to facilitate development of accessory parking for 315 University.

Real estate developer Thomas Herr is working with Vang. He told the Zoning committee that Vang has worked on redeveloping the site since 2016. The building itself had many issues including environmental cleanup.

"He went through hell," Herr said of Vang and his work. Work also hit delays due to the pandemic.

There is a great need in the community for rental space, said Herr, with book-

ings often many months if not a few years out. Vang envisioned a need for event parking so he purchased two older fourplexes by his business to make way for parking.

The building at 315 University is currently vacant. Built in 1922 as an auto repair garage, its initial zoning classification was light industrial. The building had many different occupants over the years, including stores and restaurant uses. It was rezoned in 1975 for business use and then zoned for traditional neighborhoods use in 2011 in what was a larger rezoning study along the Green Line light rail.

Previous owners had to deal with property code issues over the years. The structure is currently considered a Category Two vacant building, meaning it needs work before it can be reused. Vang is working to renovate the building and replace older equipment from a recent grocery/deli use. His plan is to build a Thai and Lao restaurant and banquet space.

Blaize will be modeled after the East Side's Destiny Café 2, which Vang also owns. Patrons can have lunch and dinner at the restaurant, and rent the banquet hall. Cultural events such as weddings, family gatherings, community meetings, and graduation ceremonies may be held

in the banquet hall section. Events would be held Friday, Saturdays and Sunday nights.

Vang wishes to build a parking lot behind the building. That's why the adjacent properties were purchased and rezoned.

City planner Tony Johnson noted that the parking lot can be built by right, as an accessory use to the University Avenue building. He said the issue before the Zoning Committee and Planning Commission is that of the permit for the hall, not the parking use.

But Planning Commission Chairman Luis Rangel Morales noted that much has changed in terms of city policy between 2018 and now. He questioned if there is a demand for 50 parking spots for a business on Green Line light rail.

"This seems counterintuitive to the goals of our parking study," he said. Rangel Morales also noted that city leaders are trying to move St. Paulites away from dependency on motor vehicles.

But Commissioner Jake Reilly noted that without off-street parking, the parking needs of the banquet facility would spill over into the adjacent residential neighborhood. Reilly also said the goals of the comprehensive plan and parking study should be balanced against what property owners see as a need. While the goals of promoting transit use and walking should be encouraged, Reilly said, "We're never going to not have cars."

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laws they put forth trying to strip us of our rights. You are more than the news stories that they use to villainize us. You are more than the hate that people endorse to make themselves feel better about the things that they don't understand," he said. "You are powerful, you are beautifully unique, you are valid beyond measure, and you are worthy of everything that you want out of this life. No amount of darkness will overshadow your light."

Danh Huynh, age 17, was raised in a conservative home where being queer was taboo. Huynh identified as queer from a very young age and had to endure being the only out queer person in school.

"Social media, reading and art really educated me and gave me inspiration to tap further into my queerness and femininity," said Huynh, who wanted to let people of all ages in the LGBTQIA+ community know it is okay to be themselves.

"Normalizing being transgender is the first step we as a society need to take to improve not just the lives of trans people but the safety of our communities and neighborhoods as well," said Huynh. "The validity, rights and care of trans people shouldn't be a discussion... if you're transgender and feel as if you aren't enough, know that you are cared for, you are loved, and I care for you very much."

Davin Sokup talked about his journey back to his hometown of Northfield as a trans man and becoming a city council member there. He doesn't subscribe to the idea that trans people existing doesn't impact anyone else's life.

"Now that I'm back there as my full self giving back to my community in a way that feels right to me, I can see that my existence does affect those around me - and I want it to," he said.

Performer and city of Minneapolis employee Andre Reed chose to speak out of a responsibility to show other Black



Trans rights advocates pack three levels of the Capitol rotunda on March 31, 2023 for Transgender Day of Visibility. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

trans people they can have productive careers and a family if they want to (Reed's partner and one-year-old baby were at the event).

"The young, Black trans queer in me wants to encourage the young, Black trans queer in you to know that you can do and be whatever you want to be," said Reed.

Luna Hernandez described herself as a proud Mexican woman of the trans experience and spoke of meeting an "angel" in her friend who took 68 years to finally become "Miss" Gloria. The two bonded over wigs and hair styling while enrolled in a treatment program. Hernandez attended as her authentic self, her first time presenting anywhere as such. After her 30 days were up, she couldn't go back to her world as her true self and hid away. But then she remembered Miss Gloria saying, "Luna, now is the time. Do not live in regret."



(Left to right) Meg Bexell, Eden Urban, Ace Austin, Jack Bexell, Savannah Berg, Elizabeth Dimock, Katie Dimock and Samantha Pollack attend the march for trans rights outside the Minnesota Capitol on March 31, 2023. (Photo by Jill Boogren)



"I want you to know how absolutely sacred you are," Mars Kamenski said to the youth present during the rally. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

"I chose to live life authentically today because I don't know any other way and because this is who I am," she said.



Youth march for trans rights outside the Capitol on March 31. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

"Now is the time."

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