



International Institute of Minnesota receives stop-work order

Unprecedented order affects refugees already here who were promised help; Institute launches Side by Side program and holds fundraiser

By **Margie O'Loughlin**

On Inauguration Day, incoming President Donald Trump signed an executive order that cancelled all refugee arrivals

to the United States for at least 90 days. According to Micaela Schuneman, Senior Director of Immigration and Refugee Services at the International Institute of Minnesota, that action was expected.

What was not expected was the order from the U.S. State Department written four days later, on Friday, Jan. 24, 2025.

All U.S. resettlement agencies, including the International Institute of Minnesota, received an unprecedented Stop-Work Order on that day. They were told they must suspend all efforts to support or assist recently arrived refugees immediately;

not those trying to come into the country, but those already here.

Schuneman said, "This meant that refugees who arrived in Minnesota within the last 90 days – who had completed

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In late 2024, staff and volunteers from the International Institute of Minnesota were part of a reunification at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport for the Muhammad and Mariam Ibrahim family. (Photo by Alexander Zoltai)



'A peace of my mind

Photography project seeks to bridge divides and build community by asking open-ended questions

By **Margie O'Loughlin**

Photographer and storyteller John Noltner has settled into his new work space at 550 Vandalia Street, suite #170, in Hamline-Midway's Creative Enterprise Zone. He shares the multi-use facilities with Sahan Journal, Saint Paul Neighborhood Association, Listen UP Youth Radio, and the Roots Moravian Church, and he's delighted to have a home for his growing multi-media project "A Peace of my Mind."

Noltner said, "I've worked as a photographer and storyteller for more than three decades, and this is my first-ever brick and mortar." He continued, "What I can do here is create a space that encourages careful self-reflection, and the opportunity to hear voices from different experiences."

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lands in St. Paul



Artist John Noltner said, "We try to transcend the politics in the room and embrace our common, shared humanity. Stories have a way of illuminating truth, in a way that facts and statistics cannot."

United Village: what's done, what's ahead

Community meeting held

By **Jane McClure**

Since the Allianz Field Major League Soccer stadium opens its doors in 2019, much has happened to the former Midway Center "superblock." Much is yet to come.

Planning for redevelopment began almost a decade ago, with St. Paul City Council approval of the 34.4-acre site's master plan in 2016. Initial plans called for a very different-looking development, with high-rise retail-office buildings along Snelling Avenue and a "great lawn" extending all the way from the stadium to University

Avenue. Office space alone would have accounted for about one million square feet of development.

A lot happened over time to delay and reshape those plans. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the development environment, especially for retail and office uses. What remained of Midway Center after stadium construction was destroyed by fire during the 2020 civil unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder. High interest rates, construction costs and the city's rent control regulations also came into play.

The stadium was joined last year by PK's Playground on Pascal Street, and the

UNITED VILLAGE UPDATE » 3

Rethinking I-94 debate renewed

Cost of refilling trench estimated at \$2.4-\$3.2 billion

By **Jane McClure**

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) continues to work on draft recommendations for the Rethinking I-94 project. After a long and contentious virtual meeting in January 2025 to discuss recommendations on the future of several options, project leaders are starting a series of community meetings.

The first "coffee in the community" meeting will be noon-2 p.m. Wednesday March 26 at Golden Thyme Café, 934

Selby Ave. Similar meetings throughout the area are planned in the future, with a "coffee in the community" gathering each month. Those will lead to an upcoming public comment period. Project staff will be attending community events and hosting public meetings during the summer and fall.

Rethinking I-94 is a long-term process to engage community members who live, work, commute and play along the 7.5-mile segment of I-94 between Hwy 55/Hiwatha Avenue in Minneapolis and Marion Street in St. Paul. Rethinking I-94 is meant to address identified transpor-

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Midway Chamber celebrates leadership award recipients

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GOOD NEIGHBORS Elders Climate Action recognizes three people

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their vetting, been approved for resettlement, and received work authorization – could no longer receive the services they were told they could depend on to get started.”

She continued, “As part of resettlement efforts funded by the federal government, agencies like ours help new Americans with basic needs for their first 90 days. The federal government has broken a longstanding promise. The assistance takes the form of dollars and services to help pay rent, buy groceries, enroll kids in school, find jobs, and make connections to medical care.”

HOW DOES ALL THIS WORK?

The federal government has disbursed funds to resettlement agencies across the country to help new arrivals since President Carter signed the Refugee Act in 1980. This has been part of an agreed-upon plan for achieving self-sufficiency for new arrivals, but has come to be viewed in increasingly partisan ways over time.

According to Schuneman, “From Institute estimates based on the number of clients we had, we thought we would need \$300,000 to make up the short fall of federal funds. Since Inauguration Day, we’ve received about \$100,000 from community and foundation donations. We’re committed to trying to honor the promise made by the U.S. government to help the refugees already here.”

STAND WITH REFUGEES

Schuneman said, “Much of the work of the Institute is reuniting families who

“

We think Side by Side could be a great fit for church groups and other households of faith, neighborhood or friend groups. We have quite a few new families looking to be matched in St. Paul and Roseville.”

Micaela Schuneman



In late 2024, staff and volunteers from the International Institute of Minnesota were part of a reunification at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport for the Muhamad and Mariam Ibrahim family. (Photo by Alexander Zoltai)

Micaela Schuneman (at left), Senior Director of Immigration and Refugee Services, said, “The Trump administration’s pause in the refugee resettlement program was expected. The refusal to honor the federal government’s commitment, and breaking a promise to refugees who are already here in our community, was not.”

There are many ways to stand with refugees in this uncertain time, which can be found on the Institute website’s volunteer page.

One newly created volunteer program is called Side by Side. This co-sponsorship model combines the Institute’s long-time expertise as a resettlement agency with the warmth of community support.

In this program, groups of 5-8 people can apply to become co-sponsors of a refugee family. Groups commit to six months

WHAT DO THEY DO?

The International Institute of Minnesota helps new Americans achieve their full potential as they begin new lives. The Institute’s services include refugee resettlement, citizenship and immigration support, English classes, college preparation, and workforce and leadership development. Founded in 1919, the Institute has been a pillar of support for new Americans more than 100 years. It is one of four resettlement agencies in the state of Minnesota.

of walking “side by side” with their matched family: teaching essential skills as they transition to life in America, and encouraging them as they work toward self-sufficiency. Side by Side co-sponsorship groups receive training and support from the Institute’s staff members along the way.

Schuneman said, “We think Side by Side could be a great fit for church groups and other households of faith, neighborhood or friend groups. We have quite a few new families looking to be matched in St. Paul and Roseville.”

ANNUAL FUNDRAISER COMING UP

The Institute’s annual fundraiser called “New Americans New Beginnings” will be held on Wednesday, May 7 from 5-8:30 p.m. The Depot in Downtown Minneapolis is the host site, at 225 3rd Avenue South in the Minneapolis Renaissance Hotel. Tickets and table sponsorship forms can be found on the website at www.iimn.org under the tab “How to Help.”

One-time or ongoing contributions can also be made to the International Institute through their website.

Schuneman pointed out that despite the pause in federal funding for new Americans, there’s still a lot of good work going on. She said, “There have been no interruptions in classroom activities or work force training. We’re in a difficult moment right now, but clients and students keep showing up every day.”

“If they can, we can too. We are all resilient.”



11 AWARDS FOR TMC PUBLICATIONS

At the 158th annual Minnesota Newspaper Association Convention, TMC Publications earned 11 awards. Accepting them in person were (left to right) Tesha M. Christensen, Jan Willms and Terbut Ochothow. Our woman-owned, family-run newspaper group includes the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger, Midway Como Frogtown Monitor and the Southwest Connector.

- Business Profile, 2nd place: Tesha M. Christensen for “South Lyndale Liquor triples size”
- Columnist, 2nd place: Eric Ortiz
- Human Interest Story - Personality, 3rd place: Jan Willms for “The Sign Painter”

- Social Issues Story, 3rd place: Jan Willms for

“Helping youth succeed”

- Photography News Photo, 1st place: Tesha M. Christensen for Slice Pizza ribbon cutting
- Photography News Photo, 2nd place: Terbut Ochothow for “African Fest”
- Photography Portrait and Personality, 2nd place: Terbut Ochothow for “Brewery owner”
- Typography and Design, 1st Place: Southwest Connector
- Advertising Excellence, 2nd place: Southwest Connector
- Use of Photography as a Whole, 3rd place: Southwest Connector
- Use of Information Graphics and Graphic Illustrations, 3rd place: Intersection of ideas on I-94

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A PIECE OF MY MIND

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FROM THERE TO HERE

The guiding principle behind A Peace of my Mind is to bridge divides and build community through storytelling and art. That's a tall order for a small non-profit in a bitterly divided world. Who is John Noltner and how did he prepare for this particular kind of work?

Born in Beaver Dam, Wis., Noltner was hired as a staff photographer for a daily newspaper right out of college. He went on to become a product photographer in a studio, where he learned a lot about lighting and technical shooting before he started freelancing for magazines, nonprofits and corporate clients. His images have appeared in National Geographic Traveler, Smithsonian, Forbes, Health, Midwest Living, New York Daily News, and more.

Noltner said, "When I look back, I can see that by 2008 my frustration over our national narrative was really growing. I felt that so much attention was being given to what divides us as a nation. I was ready to start using my skill set to talk about what unites us."

He continued, "The Great Recession hit that year, and the economy handed me some free-time. I had a chance to start

thinking about what might come next. A Peace of My Mind was born, and what began as a small personal project grew into something much bigger."

He began the work in earnest as an artist, educator, and facilitator. Then in the fall of 2020, Noltner and his wife Karen sold their home in Minneapolis and hit the road. For the next 900 days, they crisscrossed the country and collected stories while living in their van. By the time they returned to Minnesota, they had logged more than 93,000 miles.

Noltner said, "This journey was born out of a difficult season and the desire to remember the beauty and wisdom that is all around us. We set out to find stories of hope, healing, and transformation. Our goal was to meet people who were affected by and engaged with the issues of the day. We wanted to learn more about the complexities of the world, to mourn our deep wounds as a country, and to celebrate our spirit of resilience."

WHAT DOES PEACE MEAN TO YOU?

Noltner has made an art out of listening, and learning to suspend his expectations of what other people will say. In the process of collecting stories, he begins with asking an open-ended question. The answers that are shared, and the photographs that are inspired by the conversations that follow, are compelling enough to have won him a 2024 Minnesota Book Award for his book called, "Lessons on the

Road to Peace."

Noltner said, "One of our goals with this storytelling work has always been to amplify hope, healing, and connection – and to bring people together to support one another. Sure there are people I disagree with, but I can't change who they are and I wouldn't want to try. It's human nature to jump into the most contentious issues right away, without building foundational relationships first – so we work on building those relationships."

John Noltner

An example of how Noltner works is a five-day retreat he led in Colorado with veterans through Project Sanctuary, an organization that helps military families to heal from trauma, PTSD, or suicide of a relative. He said, "When I meet a group of a couple dozen people willing to participate in a project, the first thing I need to do is establish trust."

"Trust can be hard-earned, especially when someone is coming from outside their experience. I'm not a vet, but I do have a track record of collecting stories

and making images. I always bring some books along or a small portfolio, and over time, we're able to get there."

"The vets were asked an open-ended question, 'What do you want people to know?' I think we have found ways to create healing with the visual storytelling that we do. The story telling process allows people to feel seen, heard, and valued."

CREATIVE CHANGE MAKERS

Several times a year, A Peace of My Mind hosts a speaker in their Creative Change Makers series. The next speaker will be Rose McGee, founder of Sweet Potato Comfort Pie: a community-building organization that uses food traditions, the arts, and other forms of culture-sharing to spark human connection, healing and change. Rose will speak on April 17 at 7 p.m. at 550 Vandalia Street, #170. There is no cost to attend; reservations are recommended and can be made on the event page at <https://apeaceofmymind.org>.

"A Peace of my Mind is my project, but I have a tendency to say WE when I'm talking about it," observed Noltner. "The WE encompasses every person who has shared their story over the last 17 years. The WE also includes my family and friends, our donor base, the people who come to our gatherings, and the organizations who invite us in."

"I'm curious about most things and most people. This kind of listening is how I explore the world."

UNITED VILLAGE UPDATE

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loon statue at the southeast corner of University and Snelling avenues. The longtime McDonald's restaurant was closed in late 2024 and torn down earlier this year.

SO, WHAT'S AHEAD?

Dr. Bill McGuire, Loons co-owner, is leading the development efforts. He outlined this year's plans at an annual community update Feb. 20, 2025 at Allianz Field.

Passersby will see cranes and dirt flying in March or April. The first buildings to go up will be the two restaurants in a restaurant plaza. The plaza will be in south of the former McDonald's location, and south of the future hotel.

McGuire gave a few details. He has operators for the restaurant, one of which would be more of a casual diner style and the other leaning toward finer dining. McGuire described the latter as a place with "Chianti wines in wicker baskets." One restaurant is named PIKO; the other name hasn't been announced.

The four-story office building will be southeast of the loon plaza and a planned one-acre park along University. The office building's first floor will be occupied by what McGuire called an "exciting" new bakery/coffee roastery and restaurant. The upper three floors are office space, with about half spoken for.

The hotel and its attached parking ramp along University will be the largest and most prominent development. An operator has been signed. The first floor of the parking ramp will have a 4,000-square-foot community room space, looking over a small plaza area south of the hotel.



Bill McGuire

McGuire concerned about negative perceptions of Midway

By Jane McClure

Development at United Village is moving ahead despite a variety of obstacles that have hampered efforts. Negative public perceptions also need to change. Those were pointed messages Dr. Bill McGuire delivered Feb. 20, 2025, during an annual update on United Village development. More than 80 people attended the update, held in the stadium's brewpub.

Ward One Council Member Anika Bowie, other elected officials and leaders from city department, and the St. Paul Port Authority were among those who heard McGuire's frustration with processes and perceptions that he believes impede development. The event was hosted by Bowie, the Hamline Midway Coalition, Union Park District Council and the Midway Chamber of Commerce.

McGuire was frank in saying that public processes to get developments approved and negative perceptions of the Midway community are deterrents to development, and a turnoff for potential investors who could be supporting new additions to United Village and elsewhere in the University-Snelling area. He pointed out that United Village is about a year behind where the development should be.

"One of our problems is that everything takes too long," McGuire said.

He cited the private investment of \$240 million in Allianz Field, as well as public and private investments of almost \$250 million. All but about \$22 million is private funding, which McGuire called "literally unheard of."

"A lot is perception," McGuire said,

SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Details of the second phase of development are taking shape. One idea unveiled Feb. 20 is for a 3,500 to 4,000-square-foot music and entertainment venue near University and Pascal.

Other ideas include housing, possibly housing for neighborhood elders wishing

taking aim at area news media. He noted that "vagrancy comes up in every discussion." Investors become interested and then are scared off when "they wake up to yet another crap story about how bad the neighborhood is."

Area cleanliness is another factor. He called on community members to help keep the area clean.

He also urged community members to support nearby Cub Foods, which is struggling with crime and negative perceptions. He said community members need to support community businesses.

"The last thing the community needs is to have that store close," he said. "It will be a black eye on the community (if it closes)."

Efforts are underway to fill vacant spaces at the Midway Marketplace shopping center east of United Village, he said, but more needs to be done to improve community image and bring in development.

Other issues include what he called "aggressive taxation" and policies including rent control. Those have put off developers.

Another issue is parking. While the city and community leaders want developments built without off-street parking, McGuire notes that investors and prospective United Village occupants want and need spaces for vehicles.

And while people can suggest ramp or underground parking, those costs can hit \$35,000 to \$37,000 per stall in a ramp and up to \$70,000 underground.

Yet another issue he pushed back on is the city's policy penchant for mixed-use development, with retail or commercial uses on the first floor and parking above. "Do you really need first-floor retail on ev-

erything?" he said. That space could have other uses, including parking.

Discussions of the former CVS at Snelling and University and transit is another red flag raised, especially the issues on Green Line light rail. While safety on Green Line light rail was raised, one issue hovering over the meeting was the rampant drug use, theft and loitering that occurs around the troubled Kimball Court housing development. McGuire said the site needs to be redeveloped for a for-profit entity, not a social services center.

One idea raised at recent community meetings would be to have a building like the Rondo Outreach Library at University and Dale, with public services on the first floor and apartments above. It's idea McGuire opposes. He pointed out that CVS is paying about \$550,000 annually to continue leasing an empty store.

Community members pushed back on some of McGuire's comments at the meeting and in social media posts afterward, noting that the stadium doesn't pay property taxes.

One big sticking point is the lack of public restroom facilities for the new playground. Open-air drug use, loitering and liability are among reasons no public restrooms are in place. Part of the meeting discussion centered on cleaning up feces at United Village and at surrounding properties.

Rev. Kirsten Fryer of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in the Midway pleaded for restrooms, saying that while her young child loves the new playground, the lack of restrooms makes family use difficult. "Please consider bathrooms," she said. "Please, please, please."

Other businesses that won't be built are a grocery store and a liquor store, as both already exist in the Midway. During his presentation, McGuire made a pitch to support Cub and other neighborhood businesses.

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guest column

BY CHUCK PETERS
chuck@ambit.community



A NEWS ERA

limitations as it relates to news:

Do they adhere to fundamental journalistic standards? No.

Do they implement robust user verification to ensure accountability? No.

Do they compensate journalists? Again, no.

Do their algorithms even prioritize news content? For Meta's Threads, the answer is a resounding no.

These platforms are fundamentally no different from X. Their distinction lies primarily in not being owned by Musk, but this alone doesn't make them better suited for journalistic or community engagement. Twitter, BlueSky, Threads, et al are destructive disinformation machines masquerading as "social" networks amplifying division, loneliness and eroding the fabric of informed civic discourse.

Let's be clear: these platforms were never designed to serve as reliable news sources. Continuing to treat them as such risks further damaging the already fragile state of journalism. We risk seeing an increase in news deserts, the decline of credible news outlets and an overall gutting of America's media ecosystem.

The crisis in journalism is real, and it's urgent.

In Minnesota, for instance, the media landscape has been shrinking at an alarming rate. Since 2005, we've lost 34% of our local newspapers and 64% of our local journalists. Newsrooms are being forced to do more with fewer resources. Consider The Pioneer Press: when Alden Global Capital acquired the paper in 2006, its newsroom employed around 200 people. By late 2023, that number had dwindled to just 29, according to a report from Racket.

This decline in local journalism is fueled by the rise of social media platforms where over half of Americans now get at least some of their news. Among adults under 30, trust in information from social media (52%) is almost on par with trust in national news organizations (56%), according to a Pew Research study from October 2024.

But as I've emphasized: these platforms weren't built to be trusted sources of news, nor will they be.

Rather than trying to retrofit platforms like BlueSky or Threads to serve as news hubs, it's time we rethink the entire model. What would a platform designed specifically for local news look like?

At a minimum, such a platform would need the following features:

- **User Verification:** Accounts should be verified to ensure accountability and trust.

- **Reserved Posting Rights:** Only credible community leaders—such as local businesses and journalists—should have the ability to build an audience, preventing the platform from devolving into petty disputes.

- **Chronological Feeds:** Algorithms distorting perceptions and amplifying ideologies should be replaced with straightforward chronological feeds to ensure timely information.

- **Compensation for Journalists:** Just as Big Tech platforms compensate content creators, journalists should be fairly compensated for their reporting.

Creating such a platform from scratch is undoubtedly a challenge, but it's also necessary. In the Twin Cities, one such initiative already exists: Ambit Media Company.

Launched in October 2024, Ambit is a tech startup designed to support local journalism and strengthen community ties. Despite being new, Ambit has been met with enthusiasm. In its first official

month, the platform hosted nearly 1,000 visitors, 65% of whom were returning users—evidence of real, authentic community.

Ambit users utilize the site to discover and support over 130 verified local businesses. Tools like the Pop-Up Map highlight neighborhood vendors, such as Mogi Bagel, recently named Best Bagel in Star Tribune's Best of Minnesota competition. Other features, like the Grand Opening Registry and Events Calendar, connect residents with new establishments and local events.

At its core, Ambit's mission is to support local journalism by compensating news organizations based on user input. This innovative model empowers journalists while encouraging user-focused reporting. I'm honored to share that the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger, Midway Como Frogtown Monitor and Southwest Connector, along with eight other local news organizations, have partnered with Ambit Media Company on our mission.

As Ambit continues to grow, it poses an opportunity to revitalize local news—not only by directly compensating newsrooms, but also indirectly pressuring Big Tech to compete for journalists and their followers.

Let's seize this opportunity to support a positive, more informed, connected future and put this era of toxic social media behind us.

The groundwork for a better alternative is already in place. The question now is: will you use it?

Prior to starting Ambit Media Company, Chuck Peters was a manager in Deloitte's Data & Digital Trust practice advising the Big Tech industry through the dynamic internet regulatory landscape to create safer digital experiences for users. Learn more about Ambit at www.Ambit.community.

Storytelling as a form of literacy: A guide for caregivers of young children

FIRST EDUCATOR

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



Stories have always been a powerful way to preserve history, teach morals, and convey social norms. They allow us to connect with others, creating bonds through shared experiences and emotions. Personal stories can build bridges and share valuable information. Meaningful experiences create vivid memories, and retelling these events helps individuals express how their lives have been affected. Our stories help us understand each other and ourselves better. By exploring and expressing our own stories, we gain clarity on who we are and how we relate to others.

This month's column highlights an interview with early childhood advocate Jamie Bonczyk, Senior Program Officer for 80x3: Resilient From the Start at Greater



Twin Cities United Way. Jamie discusses essential strategies for using storytelling to promote literacy and strengthen relationship building.

Q: What are the benefits of teaching children about personal narratives?

A: Incorporating personal narratives into daily life can be incredibly beneficial for young children. Some key benefits and strategies for using personal narratives at home are:

- **Fostering Emotional Expression:** Personal narratives help children articulate

their feelings and experiences. By telling their own stories, children learn to express their emotions in a healthy and constructive way. This can be particularly helpful in managing difficult emotions and building emotional resilience.

- **Promoting Language Development:** Storytelling enhances vocabulary and storytelling skills. As children narrate their experiences, they practice using new words and complex sentence structures, which boosts their language development. This practice also helps them become more confident communicators.

- **Nurturing Social Skills:** Sharing personal stories encourages empathy and understanding among peers. When children listen to each other's stories, they learn to appreciate different perspectives and develop a sense of empathy. This can strengthen their social bonds and improve their ability to work collaboratively.

Q: What strategies can be used to incorporate personal narratives with children?

You can start with using prompts to inspire children to tell their own stories. Simple questions like "What was the best part of your day?" or "Can you tell me

about a time when you felt really happy?" can spark a child's imagination and encourage them to share their experiences. These prompts can be tailored to suit the child's age and interests.

Visual aids are also helpful. Incorporate drawings or photos to help children narrate their experiences. Visual aids can make storytelling more engaging and accessible for young children. Encourage them to draw pictures of their stories or use family photos as prompts for their narratives. This can help them organize their thoughts and make their stories more vivid.

You can model storytelling. Share your own stories with your children. By modeling storytelling, you demonstrate how to structure a narrative and express emotions. This can inspire children to share their own stories and help them understand the value of personal narratives.

A CALL TO ACTION

A "first educator" refers to the fundamental primary role that parents and caregivers play in a person's early development

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The Monitor is for profit and for a purpose—and we don't sacrifice one for the other. We

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

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BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY

BY CHAD KULAS,
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On Feb. 8, 2025, the Midway Chamber held its annual celebration. Its our biggest event of the year, and one new twist in 2025 was holding it at Allianz Field. The venue was a big hit, as we started on the Field Club level before moving upstairs for dinner.

The night is always filled with fun, joy, games, live and silent auctions, and recognizing members with awards. As I do every year, I will now write about this year's finalists and winners.

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: CAN CAN WONDERLAND

As with so many older buildings in the Midway, 755 Prior Ave was converted from an old manufacturing space to new uses. While there are still items getting made there, the building also provides entertainment opportunities such as Blackstack Brewing. But the one that started it all was Can Can Wonderland. Led by Rob Clapp's vision, he converted the space into a mini golf course that doubles as art exhibits, found a home for many old arcade games, and created a fun place to check out live music and more onstage. Clapp didn't stop there, either, as he has also found creative uses for other older buildings in Saint Paul. Runners up: The Hive Socially Responsible Realtors, TST Creative Catering

LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: IDEAL PRINTERS

Ideal Printers has been in operation since 1979, and for years has been run by the original founders' two daughters, Joan Siewert-Cardona and Lana Siewert-Olson, and their husbands. True to a locally-owned businesses' roots, the company was founded when Howard Siewert was annoyed at his employer's habit of favoring larger clients over the needs of the smaller businesses. So Howard set out to give clients a more "ideal" experience. Ideal has also been a major supporter of

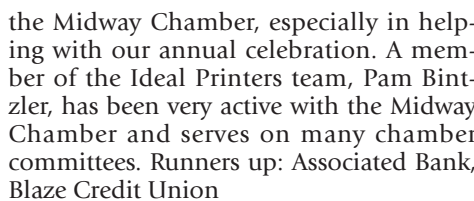
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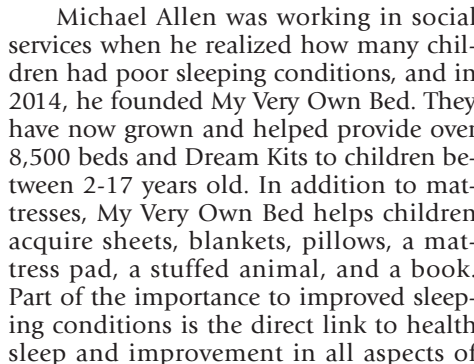
Rookie of the Year: Amy Brendmoen accepts the award on behalf of Mighty Consulting.



Small Business of the Year: Robb Clapp and Can Can Wonderland



Large Business of the Year: Pam Bintzler accepts the award on behalf of Ideal Printers.



Large Business of the Year: Pam Bintzler accepts the award on behalf of Ideal Printers.

NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR: MY VERY OWN BED

Michael Allen was working in social services when he realized how many children had poor sleeping conditions, and in 2014, he founded My Very Own Bed. They have now grown and helped provide over 8,500 beds and Dream Kits to children between 2-17 years old. In addition to mattresses, My Very Own Bed helps children acquire sheets, blankets, pillows, a mattress pad, a stuffed animal, and a book. Part of the importance to improved sleeping conditions is the direct link to health sleep and improvement in all aspects of

the Midway Chamber, especially in helping with our annual celebration. A member of the Ideal Printers team, Pam Bintzler, has been very active with the Midway Chamber and serves on many chamber committees. Runners up: Associated Bank, Blaze Credit Union

preserve history or teach morals. It is a powerful tool for connecting with others and fostering personal growth. Encourage your children to share their stories and watch as they grow into confident, empathetic, and articulate individuals.

Through her organization, Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute, Dr. Artika Tyner offers resources to foster literacy and education.



Small Business of the Year: Robb Clapp and Can Can Wonderland



Large Business of the Year: Pam Bintzler accepts the award on behalf of Ideal Printers.

a child's life. Runners up: HandsOn Twin Cities, Our Lady of Peace

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: MIGHTY CONSULTING

When the Midway Chamber was looking for help in creating a strategic plan in 2023, they hired Mighty Consulting. Led by Melissa Martinez-Sones, the process was organized and fun for participants, with board members and staff feeling like the work made a difference. For Melissa, it was fun to work on a project so close to



Volunteer of the Year: Tessa M. Christensen (left) of the Midway Como Frogtown Monitor with last year's recipient, Jessie Higgins of the Neighborhood Development Center.

home as she's been a Midway resident ever since she went to school at Hamline University. And the Midway Chamber isn't the only local client for Mighty Consulting, as they have worked with several nonprofits in and near the Midway. Runnersup: Cady Business Technologies, Jersey Mike's

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: TESSA CHRISTENSEN

Yes, that's right! The owner and editor of the Monitor is also our Volunteer of the Year. Tessa does a lot for the Midway Chamber, including taking photographs at many events and promoting our work and programming through the newspaper. She is also our Ambassador Committee Chair and sits on the board of directors and our communications committee. Her dedication to the Midway Chamber is also a sign of her dedication to the Midway community in general, and has helped her become an expert on what's happening around the neighborhood. Runners up: Justin Borrell, Jeff Hart

The Midway Chamber and our business community wouldn't be where we are without the support of so many dedicated individuals and organizations who help build a stronger Midway.

First Black man elected to Minnesota county board

Minnesota history was made on Tuesday evening, when Garrison McMurtrey was elected to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. With his victory, McMurtrey became the first Black man to be elected to a county board in the history of the state of Minnesota. District 3 includes Saint Anthony Park, Union Park, Como Park, Midway, Frogtown, North End, Payne Phalen neighborhoods in Saint Paul, and all of the City of Falcon Heights.

The role became vacant following the resignation of Board Chair Trista Martinson last August.

McMurtrey earned 88% of the vote. Also on the ballot was Joshua David Bau.

"I'm so excited about this opportunity to serve my community on the Ramsey County Board," McMurtrey said. "Although I didn't enter this race to be a 'first,' it's not lost on me that my perspective and lived experience has been missing from the county government for too long.



I'm eager to get started and work towards centering economic justice in our work at the county," McMurtrey said. "We have a lot of work ahead of us, especially as we look at what is happening on the national level. It will be our local governments on the front lines of defense against this administration, and I'm ready to fight alongside my community to ensure we get the resources we need."

McMurtrey brings more than a decade of experience in high level public service roles, including Regional Field Director for President Barack Obama's 2012 campaign, Outreach Director for U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, and currently as the District Director for U.S. Congresswoman Angie Craig. McMurtrey resides in the Como Park neighborhood with his wife, State Senator Clare Oumou Verbeten, and their Goldendoodle Honey. Learn more about Garrison McMurtrey at ElectGarrison.com

STORYTELLING >> from 4

and education. They instill essential life skills, morals, and behaviors.

By incorporating personal narratives into daily life, first educators can help children develop important literacy skills, emotional intelligence, and social understanding. Storytelling is not just a way to

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Homeowners experiment with paint colors, say local painters

By **Lulu Jaeckel**

Whale gray, dry sage and french press are some of the popular names of interior paint colors right now at Benjamin Moore, a paint company.

Sid Triantafilou, a local painter and owner of Greco Linden Hills Painting, said earth tones such as brown, tan and red have also gained popularity.

"I'm glad that something other than gray has come to be," Triantafilou said. "People are experimenting and that's been nice."

Triantafilou went to school to become a carpenter but joined a painting and design program when an opening became available.

He was the top of his class and won first place in the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America award for his painting skills.

One of his most recent projects features earth tone colors. His client requested that their living room and dining room be painted to match the colors in their fireplace.

Greg Chileen, owner of Chileen Painting, said bold colors are becoming popular.

"Colors like gold and bright, bright colors that feel more welcoming and bring out warmth, are becoming popular," Chileen said. "Especially in kitchens and bathrooms."

His most memorable project he worked on was restoring the Lake Harriet band shell.

John Roberts, the owner of John Roberts Painting, has worked as a painter and carpenter for over 40 years. His first painting job was in 1979 in Virginia, Minn. where his mentor, Orlando Secola, helped him paint a bakery.

"Orlando taught me the business," Roberts said. "Fifty percent of this job is promotion. He would walk down the street and everyone knew him."

Roberts graduated from a two-year carpentry program at Eveleth Area Vocational Technical Institute in 1985.

He enjoys his work because it's not a 9 to 5 job.

"There's some people that want to be free you know," Roberts said. "They don't want to have to punch a clock. I work for myself and I get the job done but I don't have to punch a clock."

A lot of times, people already know



Sid Triantafilou of Greco Linden Hills Painting paints houses in residential neighborhoods, including East Isles, near Lake of the Isles. (Photo by Lulu Jaeckel)

what color they want for the interior and exterior of their house, Roberts said. It's usually an off-white, tan, yellow or gray.

"A lot of people who are looking to sell their house will go for a more basic color too rather than bold colors," Roberts said.

He also said ceilings are usually painted off-white and accent colors look the best in small rooms.

Tim Schaub, the owner of T Schaub Painting LLC, said choosing colors for a home is very subjective.

"Color trends change every year," Schaub said. "But light gray has always been a popular color for the interior."

Steve Polta, the owner of Steve's Painting, and Schaub both love their jobs because they transform people's houses.

"I love beautifying older homes and restoring them," Polta said.



All of these local painters use water-based paints with low volatile organic compounds.

Volatile organic compounds include chemicals that have short and long-term health effects, according to the EPA. VOCs are emitted as gases from products like paints and cleaning supplies.

"We use the best paint and we don't cut any corners," Triantafilou said.

Lulu Jaeckel is a University of Minnesota student majoring in journalism.

REASONS TO HIRE A PAINTER

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

Cut down on the job time

A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

Pay attention to details

Professional painters are likely to do a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.

Reduce your workload

Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings, and apply painter's tape.

Painters already have equipment

Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays, and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

Lasting results

Professional painters understand which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space. Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.



Greg Chileen, owner of Chileen Painting, said bold colors are becoming popular. "Colors like gold and bright, bright colors that feel more welcoming and bring out warmth, are becoming popular," Chileen said. "Especially in kitchens and bathrooms." (Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Graphics)

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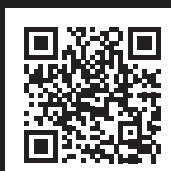
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'Good Ancestors' recognized by Elders Climate Action

By **Vincent Kallstrom**

The Twin Cities chapter of Elders Climate Action honored three local activists with its annual Good Ancestor award, recognizing their legacies of community-centered climate action.

Elders Climate Action is a national organization founded in 2014 to mobilize elders to address climate change for the well-being of future generations. The Twin Cities chapter was started in 2020 by Kathryn Ringham who resides in the East Harriet neighborhood in Minneapolis and Pat Samples of Brooklyn Center. The group holds monthly meetings with climate speakers, advocates for climate legislation, gives presentations at schools and libraries, and works to inform people about climate action.

For the last two years, Elders Climate Action has presented individuals who demonstrate a lifelong commitment to climate action and community building with the Good Ancestor award. The group holds their only in-person meeting in September, known as Grandparents' Month, to give out the awards. Last fall, they gave the award to three elders with impactful legacies working toward a more sustainable future in their communities in a ceremony on Sept. 26, 2025.

Ringham, the leader of the Twin Cities chapter, said the award is a way "to identify people who need recognition and acknowledgement for their work, not only in climate, but more of a lifelong pattern of thinking beyond themselves."

Craig Neal, co-founder of the Center for Purposeful Leadership and a member of Elders Climate Action, was nominated for the Good Ancestor award by Paul Thompson, the chair of the Twin Cities chapter's legislative team.

Thompson said he nominated Neal to highlight his commitment to bringing people together.

"He's really been a champion to get urban agriculture on a real local basis," Thompson said. "It's really quite remarkable."

Neal operates a community sponsored garden in his Linden Hills neighborhood, where he and his wife Patricia grow food and flowers for 13 families totalling 53 people. Each family collects weekly



Craig Neal, Paul Thompson and Melvin Giles honored

harvests of produce May through October. Families purchase shares to help pay for supplies and volunteer to help grow the flowers and produce.

Neal says that this model can help reduce the environmental footprint of food production.

"Everybody has to walk to get their share every week, so they're not driving," Neal said. "We're not driving from a farm out of the city. Everything that leaves our garden comes back to us, except what's eaten. So everything's reused."

PAUL THOMPSON

Thompson, who lives in Edina, was nominated for the Good Ancestor award in a consensus decision by members of

LIVING 50+ GOOD NEIGHBOR

Elders Climate Action, particularly his legislative team, to recognize his lifelong commitment to environmental work.

Thompson was a Minneapolis public schools teacher for 25 years and a former board member at Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Environmental Action. He's a founder and co-director at Cool Planet.

The goal of Cool Planet is to bring communities together and encourage them to advocate for the environment in their community, according to Thompson.

"We want people to get outside, be healthy, take care of themselves, but meet your neighbors and plan activities that bring people together," Thompson said. "We ski, we bike, we play frisbee, but we also attend city council meetings."

As the chair of Elder Climate Action's seven-member legislative team, Thompson encourages citizens to get involved with the legislative process. The team looks at the thousands of bills introduced in the legislature and looks for areas where Democrats and Republicans can work together on solutions.

In his position at Citizens' Climate Lobby, Thompson encourages legislators to consider lifting Minnesota's 30-year-old moratorium on nuclear energy.

"So we're trying to at least open the conversation to say we should be considering nuclear as part of a solution," Thompson said. "It does take time to build a nuclear plant, and if we don't start soon, it's going to be too late."

MELVIN GILES

Barb Rose, a member of Elders Climate Action from St. Paul, nominated Melvin Giles for the award because of his commitment to intergenerational work on climate solutions.

"I think what he does today is laying the seeds for future generations," Rose said. "The good ancestor award is really just a way to really honor and acknowledge how important it is to not only lean on what we can learn and use from past generations, but also what we need to pass forward so that there are others that can see us as ancestors."

Giles worked with Hannah Lewis, the author of "Mini-Forest Revolution," and Nate Galloway, the garden coordinator at Pilgrim Baptist Church, to plant a forest of native trees to create more canopy and provide cleaner air for the Rondo and Frogtown communities. Fifth graders from nearby Maxfield Elementary helped plant more than 400 trees last May.

Giles said he hopes projects like this can create healthier and safer communities.

"In Rondo, because we are planting these trees, in Frogtown because we are planting these trees, in Hamline-Midway because we are planting these mini forests, these communities will be healthier," Giles said. "We are looking towards the future. Within two to three years these forests can take care of themselves. Along the way it's an opportunity for neighbors to meet neighbors. The best security people can have is to know their neighbors."

Vincent Kallstrom is a second-year University of Minnesota student majoring in journalism. He is currently an on-air DJ at Radio K on Wednesday nights from nine to eleven.

LIVING 50+ GOOD NEIGHBOR

Know someone aged 50+ that contributes to the Midway/Como/Frogtown community and inspires those around them? We want to hear about them!

Send your nomination to tesha@tmcpub.com. Please include your contact information, their name, age, and contact information, and a paragraph about what they do that you find amazing about them. We can't wait to amplify the stories of our good neighbors aged 50+.

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COMO PARK SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

BY ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher



Have you ever walked across a frozen lake and gone ice fishing? For most Como Park students, the answer to that question about a classic Minnesota winter activity is "no."

However, a survey taken after Feb. 21, 2025, would reveal an increase of those answering "yes."

Thanks to the organization and advocacy of Spanish teacher Leah Deiman, 170 Como students went ice fishing on the local lake during 80-minute periods of their school day. Of the participating students, 145 said it was their first time.

Students walked from campus across Victoria Street and onto the lake where tents with heaters were set up by community partners. Those partners included the Saint Paul Police Activities League, Elpis, Ardent Outdoor Group, Baztec Fishing and Outdoors nonprofits.

Creating unique experiences for students and promoting positive activities that make memories are common values in education. This adventure was an innovative, low-cost way to support those

Como Lake ice fishing adventure



Como students trekked across Como Lake for an ice fishing expedition on Feb. 21, 2025. There were 170 students participating, with 145 ice fishing for the first time in their lives. (Photo by Peter Kvamme)

goals. But beyond that, Deiman noted additional purposes.

"We teach about ice safety, how to ice fish, fish species identification, and how our actions affect the watershed," Deiman said. "Also, we continue to develop our relationship with the lake, build community, and enjoy winter."

"Kids were really excited to go out on the ice. They wanted to stay out all day.

Hopefully now that they know how fun it is, they will be able to make it more a part of their regular lives."

And to answer the question everyone wanted to know upon the students' return to school – YES! A couple of small fish were caught!

STATE MEET FOR NORDIC SKIER

Como junior Henry Simmons quali-

fied for his second Minnesota State Nordic Ski Meet of his career when he finished as the fourth individual across the line in the Section 4 Meet at Battle Creek Regional Park.

The state meet is held up north at Giant's Ridge in Biwabik. There were 112 boys who raced in state, as individual qualifiers or as representatives of their full teams that qualified. Out of all those competitors, Simmons placed 27th overall.

Coach Lawrence Simmons reported that was the highest state finish for a Como skier since Emma Lee finished 36th in 2008. "State was a great couple of days with incredible racing and a great atmosphere," Simmons said. "Giants Ridge is by far the hardest ski course of the season."

STATE MEET FOR FEMALE WRESTLER

Como junior Makiya May made history by becoming Como's first female wrestler to qualify for the Minnesota State Girls Wrestling Meet. May won the individual section championship for her weight class at the girls' sectional tournament held at Redwood Valley High School.

The state meet was held at the Xcel Energy Center on March 1. May won her quarterfinal match by pin, then upset the top seed in the semifinals before falling in the championship match. Look for a feature story on May and her second-place state finish in next month's Monitor.

PEACE BUBBLES

BY MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com



"Humility is the fruit of inner security and wise maturity." Cornel West

"God is in the details." Ludwig Miles Van Der Rohe

Hello Monitor readers,

Happy spring. This is one month I don't feel stuck about what to write in my column. Instead, I feel full as a rising hot air balloon about to burst with too much energy that I want to express. However, I'm continuing to learn and practice staying cool, calm, and collective at expressing and connecting truth to power. I've been very fortunate to have wise, strong, and powerful mentors, elders, and family members in my life who have raised and taught me well. Many of my family members now reside in our Ancestral Kingdoms, although, I'm blessed that many of them still walk on a great and beautiful Mother Earth.

I'm just as grateful that I have younger wise folks and family members who are accepting being elders in the making! Indeed, their energy brightens what at times seems like dark days. For instance, just when I was about to fall under the notion that we were moving into a Season of Dark Times, I was inspired to remember

We, the People, are writing the next story

that we are naturally moving into the Season of Light! And, immediately, my body, mind, emotions, and energy seemed to receive an influx of calmness and peace (a feeling that's all is well and that all will be well) thinking of the upcoming growing season and being able to touch the earth's soil again.

It didn't take long for me to go buy some potting soil just to relax, rub, and play with my hands in the soil. And, yes, within moments of enjoying the texture and magic of the soil I was back at and in my optimistic and happy place/space; and it felt wonderful and delightful.

In my optimistic and happy place/space I can breathe out and overcome my worries, anxieties, and fears. I can see through the fog of lies and intentional selfish greed of profits over people, which, unfortunately, has been the historical nature of business people/men, however, our government isn't meant to be operated like a business. With that said, I want to share again the fable of Truth and Lie, a fable that I first heard from a Black preacher years ago.

STORY OF TRUTH AND LIE

This is a shorten version of the Story of Truth and Lie, as shared by <https://medium.com/@ParkerSimpson/the-story-of-truth-lie-1476bda2d45e>

One day a man named Truth and a man named Lie stood by a river just outside of town. They were twin brothers. Lie challenged Truth to a race, claiming

he could swim across the river faster than Truth. Lie laid out the rules to the challenge stating that they both must remove all their clothes and at the count of three, dive in to the freezing cold water swim to the other side and back. Lie counted to three, but when Truth jumped in, Lie did not.

As Truth swam across the river, Lie put on Truth's clothes and walked back in to town dressed as Truth. He proudly paraded around town pretending to be Truth. Truth made it back to shore, but his clothes were gone and he was left naked with only Lie's clothes to wear. Refusing to dress himself as Lie, Truth walked back to town naked.

People stared and glared as naked Truth walked through town. He tried to explain what happened and that he was in fact Truth, but because he was naked and uncomfortable to look at, people mocked and shunned him – refusing to believe he was really Truth. The people in town chose to believe Lie because he was dressed appropriately and easier to look at. From that day until this, people have come to believe a lie rather than believe a naked truth.

The moral of this story, and how it applies to modern day society, is that we often either consciously or subconsciously reject certain truths in our personal lives or in the world around us for the sake of our peace of mind. These truths may be in our personal lives: financial issues, relationship issues, struggles with our faith,

addiction problems; they are all areas where we often turn our back to the cold hard truth, even if it's at our own peril.

We've also seen this in public society, as well. Our country is brutally divided among ideological lines on every front. People can be presented with irrefutable yet inconvenient truths regarding societal issues including terrorism, global warming, race relations, cultural differences, and countless other issues, but they shun those truths and decide instead to believe the well-dressed lie, especially if it benefits their agenda or idealistic narrative.

The story of Truth and Lie swimming in the river may answer why we do this to ourselves, but what it doesn't answer is when and if we will ever learn from it.

Finally, it was wonderful for me to see and hear former Vice President Kamala Harris share inspiring words: "While we have no illusions about what we are up against in this chapter of our American story, this chapter will be written not simply by whoever occupies the Oval Office – nor by the wealthiest among us. The American story will be written by you, written by us – by we the people."

Stay optimistic; I know it's hard, however, together we can overcome again! Yes, we can! Yes, we must for the next generations and for ourselves. Stay steadfast and keep talking, playing, creating, working, and dreaming with each other. Rise to the occasion. This is our time. Believe!! Be well and do your self-care.

May Peace Be In the Rondo, Frogtown, Hamline/Midway, Como, and Surrounding Communities... May Peace Be In Our Homes and Communities... May Peace Prevail On Earth (MPPOE).

HAMLIN TO HAMLIN COLLABORATION



Ms. Amanda's PreK class joined volunteers at the Midway Project's food distribution in February and what a great day it was! The kids made welcome signs, greeted neighbors, helped hand out food, and made and distributed special smiley face stickers.

The Hamline-to-Hamline Collaboration's volunteer mentor program, Hand in Hand, is up and running strong in the new year. Once a student organization at Hamline University, Hand in Hand is

Hand-in-Hand with students

a volunteer mentor program that pairs Hamline Elementary students with Hamline University students, faculty, and staff for lunchtime games and conversation. For 30 minutes every week, mentors and their buddies discuss everything from their favorite movies and preferred snacks to what it's like to be a college student.

Ally, a psychology and education co-major, has been a mentor since spring 2024. Here's how she describes her experience mentoring two second graders, "Having lunch with my second grade buddies is something I always look forward to. It's the coolest thing to see how much they've both changed since last year, and I can't imagine what they'll be like next year as

third graders. When we started, they barely spoke to me and now they tell stories, ask questions, joke, and laugh. They have such bright personalities, and I feel really lucky to be able to spend time with them and learn about them and how they see the world."

Mike Reynolds, an English professor and a Hamline Midway neighbor, has been a mentor for several years. "We had a fantastic conversation a couple of weeks ago about monsters (tied to stuff I'm teaching at Hamline U), where they tried to make up the scariest version of a monster they could. I have been having lunch with my current mentee and some rotating group of his friends for two full years now, and I look forward to hearing about what games they are playing and what happened in class that morning. I

have had deep conversations about what they like (and are most frustrated) about the neighborhood, and I have had silly conversations about pet names. Both are equally valuable to me."

The Hand in Hand Program is supported by the Hamline-to-Hamline Coordinator at Hamline Elementary, Alex Troy. "Hand in hand mentoring is one of the most rewarding programs I have ever been a part of. It is often the highlight of my day to watch students, faculty, and staff from Hamline University build meaningful connections with Hamline Elementary students. The joy that mentors and mentees get from spending time together, even for just 30 minutes per week, is visible through smiles and laughter that fill the room."

FROGTOWN
GREENBY PATRICIA OHMANS
info@frogtowngreen.com

Is there anyone in the United States who has not been affected, indirectly or directly, by the changes enacted by our new President and his unelected sidekick? Farmers, consumers, doctors, researchers, students, immigrants – so many lives have been upended, careers aborted, and missions thwarted as the president tears up federal policies and programs, without considering the consequences.

We here at Frogtown Green are no exception.

Granted, we do not provide life-saving malaria bed nets to children in Africa, or pay vital stipends to newly arrived refugees to America, or carry out groundbreaking medical research, like some of the organizations already eviscerated by firings and budget cuts. We don't have the lifesaving impact of FEMA, (the federal disaster management agency) which Trump has threatened to "get rid of." Nor are we employees of the Environmental Protection Agency, where over 1,000 workers are now threatened with termination.

But we do pride ourselves on our mission, which is to make Frogtown the greenest and healthiest neighborhood in St Paul.

In service of that mission, over the past decade we've planted more than 1,000 trees in Frogtown residents' yards and public spaces. We were thrilled beyond measure in mid-2024, when we received a substantial tree-planting grant from U.S. Department of Agriculture. This meant that we could hire a couple of people to oversee our volunteer-driven tree planting operation. It meant we could order an unprecedented 300 trees for planting in 2025. We were planning on reaching our second 1,000 trees by 2027 – in two years, not 10!

Instead, we are now drastically shrinking our plans to plant trees for our neighbors. We are cancelling orders we made long ago to local nurseries. And we are

President comes for Frogtown trees



Last year, volunteers with Frogtown Green planted their 1,000th tree in the neighborhood. This year? Prepare for a lot fewer trees to be planted, because of federal funding cuts. (Photo by Gail Mollner)

scrambling to make sure that our one full-time contractor – a Frogtown resident for over two decades – will not have to look for work elsewhere, in order to pay his mortgage. Why? Because that USDA grant has been "paused," in the government's parlance, while programs are examined for their "wokeness" and employees are asked to sign loyalty pledges.

Is planting trees in Frogtown following a "woke agenda"? Not unless you think it's "woke" to observe that Frogtown – one of the poorest and most racially mixed neighborhoods in St Paul – has markedly less tree canopy than other neighborhoods. Are we slavishly following a "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion doctrine"? Not unless you think it's doctrinaire to pride ourselves on serving and including everyone in our multiracial, vibrant, and unforgettable community, without favor or preference. Do we believe climate change is real? Well, yes. And so do 97% of the world's active climate scientists.

NEIGHBOR NIGHTS

Do you have a plan in case of a household emergency? Are you familiar with our city's plans for climate resilience? Would you like to learn about green energy alternatives? Join Frogtown residents and friends to learn about these and other topics, at Neighbor Night, a monthly community get-together, featuring a delicious home-cooked meal, interactive fun and a short presentation. It's all free! 5:30-7:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month. April's Neighbor Night is on Thursday, April 3, at Frogtown Community Center, 230 Como Avenue in St Paul.

It's funny. At the same time as we are being forced by the feds to cut way back on tree planting in our neighborhood, the St. Paul City Council is contemplating a new tree ordinance. The ordinance would require any tree that the city cuts down to be replaced, on a one-to-one basis. That's a great idea, and one that we here in Frogtown support wholeheartedly! We only hope the money will be there to make it a reality.

If you're concerned about the impact of federal funding cuts on environmental actions large and small, please contribute generously to your favorite organization (or even the city's forestry department.) Frogtown Green is participating in a multi-group fundraiser on Earth Day in April; please be on the lookout for our "One Minnesota, One Earth" campaign, if you would like to help us out.

We could all use help these days. Frogtown's need for more trees is not going away, no matter how vociferously climate change is denied at the White House. It will be up to us in St Paul – including us in Frogtown – to try to mitigate its impact, one tree planting at a time.

Patricia Ohmans is a public health professional and founder and co-director of Frogtown Green, a neighborhood environmental sustainability initiative. To find out more, browse www.frogtowngreen.com or call 651-757-5970.

CALL FOR PAPERS: NEW BOOK ON 50 YEARS OF THE
Hmong EXPERIENCE IN MINNESOTA

The Hmong Studies Journal in partnership with the Hmong Cultural Center of Minnesota has been awarded a grant of \$24,750 from the Minnesota Historical Society to publish a book collection of scholarly articles on 50 years of the Hmong experience in Minnesota. The articles will also be included in a special future issue of the Hmong Studies Journal.

Dr. Mark Pfeifer, co-editor of the Hmong Studies Journal stated: "We are very excited to have this grant support from the Minnesota State Historical Society and the Minnesota State Legislature

for this book project and special issue of the journal that will help commemorate 50 years of Hmong residing in and contributing to life in Minnesota. We believe this may be the first scholarly book collection to be solely dedicated to the range of Hmong experiences in Minnesota, which is now home to at least 95,000 Hmong Minnesotans and has played a crucial role in the Hmong American experience. As such, this also will be an important publication in the Hmong Studies scholarly literature."

Hmong Cultural Center Executive Director Txongpao Lee said, "Hmong have contributed so much to Minnesota over

the past 50 years. This grant-supported book project will help us better document and share the Hmong experience in Minnesota. The project ties in very well with our unique storefront museum which teaches visitors about Hmong history, culture and Hmong milestones and contributions and Minnesota."

Authors are invited to submit 1 page proposals for article submission for this special publication to markpfeifer@hmongcc.org by the deadline of May 30, 2025. All articles must focus on an important facet of the Hmong experience in Minnesota.

EVENTS

HABITAT CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity will celebrate its 40th anniversary at the "Hard Hat & Black Tie Gala" beginning at 6:00 p.m. Saturday, April 26, at The Depot, 225 3rd Ave. S., Minneapolis. Hosted by Comedian and Twin Cities Personality Miss Shannan Paul, the event includes a social hour, silent auction, dinner, live auction, and an After Party featuring the Free & Easy Band. Tickets, tables, sponsorship, and more information can be found at: www.tchabitat.org/gala

CHANGING TIMES BOOK CLUB MEETS MARCH 22

Nora Murphy will join the Changing Times Book Group to discuss her memoir *White Birch*, Red Hawthorn Saturday, March 22, 3:00-4:30 p.m. at Zvago Housing Co-op, 2265 Luther Place, St. Paul. In 12 essays, each dedicated to a tree significant to Minnesota, Murphy tells the story of a maple grove that was home to the Dakota, Ojibwe, and Ho-Chunk people long before her own ancestors arrived. A fifth-generation Irish-Minnesotan, Murphy has partnered with Native communities over many years, starting as a grant writer in 1995 at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. She now consults on education projects with the Lower Sioux Indian Community in southwestern Minnesota.

"Unlearning racism and white supremacy is an ongoing focus in my writing," she says. "So, too, is reconnecting and reclaiming my Irish heritage and the healing energies of Indigenous Ireland. But none of us can do the work needed to heal this world alone. Collaboration is essential."

Changing Times Book Group is co-hosted by the St. Paul Public Library and Transition Town - All St. Anthony Park. More info here (TransitionASAP.org/changing-times-book-group) or on the Facebook event. Questions? Email Communications@TransitionASAP.org.

NEW MUSIC SERIES ON MARCH 20

On Thursday, March 20, Twin Cities-based nonprofit RenegadeEnsemble will present the second installment of Vanguard New Music Series, a set of concerts focused on highlighting the depth and breadth of the new music scene in Minnesota. The 7 p.m. concert at Zion Community Commons (1697 Lafond Avenue) will feature the chamber ensemble Zeitgeist, longtime stalwarts of the Twin Cities new music environment – performing their annual Sound Ground composer showcase, featuring a program of newly-created works by composers May Klug, Leyna Marika Papach, and Sarah M. Greer with special guest composer JC Sanford. The Vanguard New Music Series began in 2022 with a mission to promote and perform works by living composers in Minnesota. More at renegadeensemble.org/performances.

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Home

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~Amy Mrozek, The Odd Couple Team



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I-94 DEBATE >> from 1

tation needs while ensuring community members and stakeholders have a meaningful voice in the process.

In January the project's policy advisory committee reviewed initial staff recommendations as to what options to keep and which to drop. What generated much debate is a proposal to fill in the freeway trench and rebuild I-94 as an at-grade boulevard. While proponents see the at-grade option as restoring property for community use, reducing air pollution and spreading traffic impacts elsewhere, foes point out that it would cost an estimated \$2.4 billion to \$3.2 billion, compared to \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion to reconfigure the freeway within its existing footprint.

"In early spring 2025, we will finish evaluating the alternatives and document the results. We will share the recommen-

dations and supporting documents, including an Alternatives Evaluation Memo and matrix summarizing the evaluation results, with the public," MnDOT said in a Feb. 25 statement.

Work on a scoping document/draft scoping decision is anticipated to start in the spring and continue into fall, with another public comment period in late fall. A resulting document will recommend alternatives for further study in the Tier 1 EIS or environmental impact statement. A final scoping decision document will take shape during winter 2025 until spring 2026. It will include a record of the comments received during the public comment period and responses to the comments. After the final scoping decision document is complete, MnDOT will move into the Tier 1 EIS phase of the project.

Learn more at <https://talk.dot.state.mn.us/rethinking-i94>

Longtime Frogtown bar to be razed

By Jane McClure

It's closing time for a Frogtown building that has housed numerous bars since 1916. The building at 981 University Ave., the northwest corner of University and Chatsworth, will be torn down to make way for a new multi-tenant commercial structure. The occupants are expected to include a laundromat.

The St. Paul Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) Feb. 18, 2025 approved a needed variance to redevelop the site. The underlying zoning is traditional neighborhoods, which brings floor area ratio requirements. St. Paul uses floor area ratio requirements to promote added density.

BZA members voted for the variance, noting the challenges of getting increased density along University and weighing what the city's comprehensive plan and the property's underlying zoning. "It's obviously difficult when we want to see increased density," said BZA Member Jerome Benner. Other board members agreed.

But Benner said he was influenced by the small size of the development site, as well as its location near the edge of a designated station area.

The .34-acre site is just inside of the Lexington Parkway Green Line light rail station area, which brings additional requirements to promote density as sites are redeveloped.

A minimum floor area ratio of .5 is required with a 7,909 square foot building. A building size of 6,124 square feet is proposed. A variance of .39 is proposed for a variance of .11.

The existing building has off-street parking of its own. It's adjacent off-street parking that belongs to a larger commercial building to the west. The new building would have 14 off-street spaces. The applicants cited the need for off-street parking for the laundromat.

David Eide of the BZA staff cited challenges in redeveloping the site, including the long, narrow configuration of the property.

Kelly Sather is the project architect. Remi Iselewa of I-SunRay Properties LLC is the property owner. Both addressed the BZA about the project. They spoke of the challenges of the site, and of trying to design a building that is compatible with the structure to the west.

BZA members praised the intent of



keeping the development as mixed use. They also support the idea of removing a curb cut along University, and having access be at the rear of the building.

BZA Member Brian Martinson asked why the project is a one-story building, as two-story building would help meet the floor area ratio requirement. Iselewa explained that question has come up with another project she is involved in.

Adding a second story adds costs with the need for stairs and an elevator, Iselewa said. Another issue is the way that laundromat business would vent several dryers.

If this latest proposal becomes reality, it would truly mark the end of an era in Frogtown. The building at 981 University was erected in 1916. At some point it was expanded at the rear of the property. It was renovated in 2016. It long served as a neighborhood bar.

Longtime Frogtowners might remember it as Herges. It was Johnny Baby's before closing in early 2020.

Eide also noted that various proposals to redevelop and reuse the site have been reviewed over the years by city staff but have never moved forward.

The property was sold in 2020 to Sundt Commercial Realty, after Johnny Baby's had closed. The company announced its intention to convert the building for commercial use.

While Johnny Baby's and its predecessors were popular spots, there was also a history of violence. In 2014, a bouncer was given a St. Paul Police Department Medal of Valor for preventing a man with a gun from shooting inside the crowded bar.

Fatal shootings were also reported over the years, most recently on New Year's Day 2020.

In 2021, the planning commission approved a conditional use permit to transform the site into office space. The permit would have allowed a higher building height. The longtime building would have been renovated and expanded under that proposal.

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