Charlie Mosbrook’s open-mic nights showcase Heights talent

Jim Hanks

If you happen to go past Phoenix Coffee on Coventry on a Monday night, chances are the place will be packed with people listening to great music emanating from the shop. The reason? Monday night is open-mic night at Phoenix. Musicians and singers can come into the coffee shop to perform up to three songs for the gathered crowd. The same event takes place on Wednesday nights at the Phoenix Coffee on Lee Road.

Cleveland singer-songwriter Charlie Mosbrook, honored as the city’s best singer-songwriter in 2011 by Scene Magazine, organizes these great musical evenings. Son of Joe Mosbrook, a former reporter on Channel 5 in Cleveland and author of a book about the history of jazz in Cleveland, Charlie is a Cleveland Heights native who grew up on Coleridge Road and attended Fairfax Elementary, Roxboro Middle School, and Heights High.

Mosbrook’s interest in music began in the 1980s, when he was 16 years old. He started singing and playing bass and eventually moved on to guitar. In 1987, he began playing at Tommy’s restaurant on Coventry. He remembers the first night: “Harvey Pekar was sitting there, and he was just glaring at me,” Mosbrook said.

Two years later, he started doing open-mic nights at the Arabica Coffee House, located where the Phoenix Coffee now stands. “It became a good vehicle for launching groups,” Mosbrook said. “We would have about 500 people there some nights. To me, the open-mic events sort of give everything meaning. You watch people come, and they sort of find their feet. You watch their progress. You see someone who at first has no visible, audible talent, and then you see it all come together.”

The proclamation that Mayor Susan Infeld presented to her at the meeting stated that “Hawn has demonstrated an important aspect of life to these children by showing them the importance of volunteerism to society. We are honored that Kay has chosen to live in our city and raised her daughter here, and are thankful that her love for her hometown has benefited the youth of University Heights.”

At the meeting, Mayor Infeld proclaimed John Pucella Employee of the Year. “Every year the employees vote among themselves, and this year we had our first tie,” she said.

Pucella began his career with the city in 1991 as a laborer and worked his way up to foreman. He currently serves as the assistant service director and has twice served as interim service director.

The Instrumental Music Department at Cleveland Heights High School will begin its mid-winter concert series on Wednesday, Jan. 30, with a second concert on Friday, Feb. 1 at 7:30 p.m. in the school’s Dina Rees Evans Performing Arts Center.

On Wednesday evening, the concert orchestra, symphonic and concert bands, and percussion ensemble will perform. The Friday concert features Shoshana Klein and Carolyn Holt, two of the music department’s most gifted senior musicians.

Klein played clarinet for two years before switching to the oboe, which she has studied for more than six years. She has played in various orchestras and bands throughout her high school career, and has auditioned for music groups outside of school. She is now in her third year with the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, and her second year with the Contemporary Youth Orchestra.

She participated in the Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra. In 2011, she was named the city’s best oboist by Scene Magazine.
Resolve to write a story for the Observer in 2013

Deanna Bremer Fisher

As we start our sixth year of publishing the Heights Observer (the first issue published on April 10, 2008), I’m amazed at how much this little paper—a community-building project of FutureHeights—has grown. I see people picking it up at a local restaurant or bank. I see people reading it. Some even tell me that it is the only publication they read.

Why? I ask. The news isn’t particularly timely. It comes out only once a month. But, somehow, it encapsulates more of what our community truly is than any other news source. I think that its authenticity, the fact that it truly is of the community and for the community, is what makes it a good read. Everyday people—few journalists among them—write stories and cover community news for us each month. This month, I am happy to report that we have several first-time writers: check out the article about Cain Park neighborhood resident Harvey Zvi Ofer on page 6; the parenting article by Charnice Holmes on page 9; and the article about the Communion of Saints robotics team by Amy Fischer on page 10.

And we’re thrilled to have the Observer join the group of illustrious publications that Jim Henke has written for, with his page-long profile of a local musician.

The Heights Observer is your newspaper, and we welcome your contributions. In fact, we depend on them, whether you choose to write a news article about the impact of new legislation on our community, a feature story about a fascinating person who lives here, or an opinion about a city council decision.

When we step back and analyze what is printed in each issue of the Observer we often see gaps. We wish our small staff—a part-time editor and a part-time writer—my other full-time job is running the Heights Observer, city editor@heightsobserver.org—had more resources at their disposal. It could cover more community issues and events, but we are already stretched too thin. On our 2013 wish list is more coverage of the following:

• Analysis and news reports. • City programs and the decisions of our city council, school and library boards; • Programs offered by our religious congregations; • Sports—everything from high school football to recreational basketball leagues; • Community groups—from neighborhood organizations to block parties, scout troops and book discussion groups,

but not much more. So won’t you join us? Become a part of the change that you want to see. Write a story for the Observer. If you would like to discuss an idea first, give me a call at 216-320-1423 or e-mail me at city.editor@heightsobserver.org. Or just submit your story to the Member Center: go to www.heightsobserver.org, select Become an Observer from the left-hand column, create an account, select Submit New Story, copy and paste the text of your story, and hit Submit.

Don’t worry that your story is not good enough. Reviewer guidelines published online, of course, but don’t worry that your story is not perfect. Although we still don’t consider ourselves professionals, we’ve been doing this for a few years now, and we can polish up your story and help it look great!

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.
To the Editor:

Though it offers a different kind of activity from the bustling eateries, taverns and shops just down the street, Coventry Village Library—a branch of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library system—is very much a part of the Coventry Village neighborhood. In fact, with its distinguished English Medieval Vernacular (according to the library website) architectural style, and its noncommercial land use, the library helps ease the transition from Coventry’s mercantile strip to the residential areas down Washington Boulevard.

The library website indicates the Coventry branch was built in 1926 and, from then until 1968, served as the CH-UH Library’s main branch. From 1974 to 1980 the building was owned by the Fairmount Center for Creative and Performing Arts. It was declared a Cleveland Heights Landmark in 1980, and shortly after that it was repurchased by the library board.

On a recent Saturday around 11 a.m., nearly all of the public I encountered was playing with magnetic alphabet letters in the children’s area—and by the time I left around noon, a younger boy had joined them in playing harmlessly and animatedly with the letters. A late-middle-aged man told me that the time I left around noon, a younger boy had joined them in playing harmlessly and animatedly with the letters. A late-middle-aged man told me that the transition from Coventry’s mercantile strip to the residential areas down Washington Boulevard.

The right start lasts a lifetime

New city manager: this job description takes us in the wrong direction

Fran Mentch

Cleveland Heights has hired a consulting group to conduct the search for a new city manager. Mayor Ed Kelley has been quoted as saying that search could cost between $60,000–$125,000. I hope everyone who is interested in this expensive process will read the job description being used to guide the search. It is available at the Novak Consulting Group website.

Three things stand out: a bachelor’s degree is required, a hiring range is $130,000–$150,000, and the person must live in Cleveland Heights.

A bachelor’s degree is required for qualification and a master’s degree is only a preferred qualification. This wording, required vs. preferred, will be used to justify the hiring decision. In today’s world and in our area, a renowned educational center, is a bachelor’s degree an acceptable qualification?

How many people do you know who earn a salary of $130,000–$150,000 with a bachelor’s degree? Anyone? How many people do you know who earn this salary, no matter what their education? How many people do you know who earn this salary, no matter what their education? Are a bachelor’s degree a barrier too low for this job and this level of compensation?

Residency in the City of Cleveland Heights is required. You are probably thinking “Oh, the person has to MOVE to Cleveland Heights.” That’s what I thought when I first read it. But it does not say that. Please read it for yourself and come to your own conclusion.

Why was this job description written in this way? Call me a conspiracy theorist if you must, but clearly this job description was written to justify hiring Susanna O’Neil. She is a longtime city employee and currently the acting city manager. Furthermore, she is on record saying she wants this position.

For decades O’Neil has been the head of community services, which includes community relations and the operation of parks and recreation facilities, tourism and urban planning. Whatever your opinion of her performance, her performance does not appear to justify promotion to city manager.

She pushed hard to demolish Denison Pool without community discussion or data to substantiate this decision. Denison Pool served the section of the city with an estimated concentration of African-American children and poor children living in single-family households. She did nothing to help preserve Oakwood as a Metropark and she made no effort to engage the community in a discussion about this green space.

Despite adequate funding and many years of experience, O’Neil demonstrates limited ability to leverage Cain Park as a community amenity. Hiring a city manager gives us an opportunity for new ideas. If the Cleveland Heights City Council conducts an expensive job search—using a Cincinnati search firm—and then hires Susanna O’Neil, we will spend another example of our mediocre government at work.

We deserve better.

Fran Mentch is a 23-year resident of Cleveland Heights and a civic activist.
University Heights City Council

Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 19, 2012
All council members were present.

Merger of fire departments
On Tuesday, Dec. 4, there will be a town hall meeting to discuss the consultant’s report regarding the merger of the University Heights and Shaker Heights fire departments. The full report is posted on the city’s website and council will be seeking responses from residents.

Transportation for seniors
The use of STC (Senior Transportation Connection) to provide transportation for senior citizens will continue on a month-to-month basis while council looks into providing a broader range of services.

Safety department clock synchronization
Council authorized the purchase of a GPS Clock Synchronization system for the police department from Independence Communications, which included installation, for $11,699. A recent investigation revealed that the clocks in the fire department were not synchronized with those in the police department, so 911 calls weren’t synchronized with the cars. It is standard for cities to have this function and the cost was budgeted for this year.

Estate tax revenue
An ordinance was presented on first reading to transfer from the general fund to the capital improvement fund all estate tax revenue in excess of the budgeted estate tax revenue. This will be the last year for cities to receive estate tax revenues (except for minor funds from estates still in process).

Housing court costs
An ordinance to permit the assessment of court costs for legal proceedings to enforce the housing code was presented on first reading. If a housing case initiated by the city cannot be brought to the judge because the named individual cannot be located or fails to appear, the Shaker Heights Municipal Court will pass along the cost to the City of University Heights. This ordinance would allow the city to then apply those fees to the property’s taxes for collection.

Inspection fees
An ordinance to change inspection fees was presented on first reading. The city currently has a lower cost than surrounding communities for point-of-sale inspections, which are very time consuming for the building department.

2012 income tax receipts
Larry Haeir, finance director, reported that the city is on target for income tax receipts in 2012, with an increase of 1.5 percent. One percent of this increase is due to the increase in the city’s income tax rate.

LWV observer: Wendy Devore.

UH Town Hall meeting Jan. 10 to explore fire services consolidation
Kim Sergio Inglis
A second Town Hall meeting to discuss the possible consolidation of fire services between University Heights and Shaker Heights will be held on Thursday, Jan. 10, at 7 p.m., at University Heights City Hall.

University Heights Mayor Susan Infeld announced the upcoming meeting in her December newsletter, and wrote, “The possible consolidation of our city’s fire services with those of Shaker Heights has been studied by a consultant over the past year. Earlier this month, on Dec. 4, the topic of consolidating fire services between the two cities was discussed at a Town Hall meeting at city hall.”

That earlier Town Hall meeting was not well attended. “Only five residents came,” said Infeld, “and two spoke and gave their feedback on the proposed consolidation. Council and I thought it would be a good idea to have a second meeting, to encourage residents to come and share their views.”

Mayor Infeld also invites residents to contact her and members of University Heights City Council, by phone or e-mail, to share their thoughts on the proposal. Contact information for the mayor and council members can be found on the city’s website, www.universityheights.org, and residents can view a copy of the consultant’s report there as well.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer. She lives in the Shaker Farm Historic District in Cleveland Heights.
through Mister Brisket’s Salamis to the Troops campaign. Hank Kornblut, owner of Mister Brisket on Taylor Road in Cleveland Heights, started the program in 2009 when a special request from a customer got him thinking.

Customer Max Chandler, a veteran of Vietnam and Desert Storm, walked in to Mister Brisket and asked Kornblut if he could ship some beef to his son, Cormac, who was serving in Afghanistan. At first, Kornblut told him it wasn’t possible. “Because beef is perishable, it would have to be kept frozen; I just didn’t see how we could do it,” he recalled. “Then, I thought about it again. Salami is cured, already cooked, and will keep for a long time.”

Kornblut researched proper packaging and shipping and then decided to ask his other customers if they would like to participate. “My goal the first year was to ship about 100 salamis,” said Kornblut. “By mid-December, we had shipped more than 400.” In the last three years, Mister Brisket has shipped more than 4,000 salamis to members of the United States armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Customers purchase the salamis, which are sent either to service members specified by those customers or to those on a list compiled by Mister Brisket, suggested by members of the community. “Anyone who knows someone in the armed services can add that person’s name to our list,” said Kornblut. “It’s been a popular way for our customers to show their admiration and support for the troops, even if they don’t know anyone currently serving personally.”

Each salami is $20. Kornblut packages Vienna all-beef salamis with a card and personal message, if the donor desires, along with a bottle of Cleveland’s favorite Stadium Mustard. “It’s important for us to send the best quality,” said Kornblut. “That is what Mister Brisket is known for, and our troops deserve nothing less.”

Mister Brisket has received several thank-you letters from soldiers in the field, many of which are posted at www.misterbrisket.com/other-services/send-salamis-to-the-troops/salamis-to-the-troops/. Kornblut also created a video to explain the program to potential donors. In the video, Kornblut describes the response from a first-grade class at Noble Elementary School in Cleveland Heights.

One year, each student in Cathy Sherman’s class created a handmade card, which was included in the package with the salamis.

“We became involved with the project through one of my parents at Noble, Jane Williams,” said Shramo, who now teaches first grade at Roxboro Elementary School. “We wrote letters to the troops thanking them for their efforts, and the parents donated money to buy the salamis to go with the cards. I talked with my students about why we were sending the cards, and why people were overseas during the holidays. It was fun, and we heard back from several of the soldiers.”

Mister Brisket will continue to ship salamis into February and is seeking the names of recipients for this year’s program. To submit a name or donate a salami, visit www.misterbrisket.com or call 216-932-8620.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

One of the groups that emerged from Mosbrook’s Arabica open-mic events was Odd Girl Out, which featured Anne E. DeChant. DeChant has gone on to a career with some national success as a singer, songwriter and guitarist. While hosting the open-mic nights, Mosbrook has been pursuing his own professional solo career, which began in 1988 at the old Bank Street Café downtown.

At one point, he took a break from performing to study recording technology at Lakeland Community College. Around 2004, however, Mosbrook was becoming frustrated with his music career. “It was a period when I just burned out,” he said. “I was getting harder and harder to find places where you could play and get paid. The coffee houses and book stores just wanted musicians to play for free.”

In an attempt to quit smoking, Mosbrook started running. Working up to 20-30 miles a week, he decided to train for Ironman triathlons. In 2007, he competed in his first Ironman competition, which consists of a consecutive 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike race and a 26.2-mile run.

He successfully competed in another triathlon, but in 2009, he injured his spinal cord. He underwent surgery at the Cleveland Clinic and physical therapy at the MetroHealth Medical Center. As a result of the injury, Mosbrook, who still has to walk with a cane, turned his focus back to his music. The first song he wrote was appropriately called, “Back on My Feet Again.” He has since written more than 20 songs about his recovery. In 2011, he released a CD called “Little by Little.” As the liner notes state, the music on the album celebrates Charlie Mosbrook’s unwavering determination to overcome adversity.

That same year, he released another CD, “Coverage: The Songs of Charlie Mosbrook.” On that album, several local artists cover some of Mosbrook’s best-known songs.

Mosbrook is currently working on a new CD. In addition to that, he hosts programs about Woody Guthrie at libraries throughout the region, and on the first Monday of every month, he offers a song-writing workshop at the Coventry Village Library, though it’s still the open-mic nights that he enjoys the most.

If you stop by the one at the Phoenix on Coventry, you’ll see a wide range of musicians, from folks in their 60s and 70s to college students, and, on one recent night, a girl who was just 12 years old. If you haven’t been to one of these events, you should be sure to check it out.

Jame’s Henkes lives in Cleveland Heights. He is a former editor and writer for Rolling Stone, and he has written several books, including biographies of John Lennon, Bob Marley and Jim Morrison.
Foreclosed properties are hot topic at neighborhood meeting

Harvey Zvi Ofer

The intensity stirred by the issue of foreclosed properties, bank walk-aways, vacant, poorly maintained and otherwise troubled properties in our neighborhoods was evident at the Neighbor 2 Neighbor meeting held on Nov. 27. The date coincided with the first anniversary of the Grant Deming Forest Hill Historic District, which, in sponsoring the event, invited the participation of the Cain Park Neighborhood Association.

Both of these newly formed neighborhood groups have been responsive to problem properties on our streets.

A discussion on the topic of Housing and Neighborhood Stability was led by Zach Germaniuk. Will Dugar, host of the Neighborhood Stability was led by Zach Germaniuk, Will Dugar, host of the meeting, described Germaniuk as having “confronted some of the worst remnants of the housing crisis, which formed the basis for his paper, Stalled Foreclosures and the Need for Positive Action.”

Germaniuk’s experience with property problems in his hometown of Warren, Ohio, with the Detroit-Shoreway Community Development Corporation, and his education at Cleveland Marshall College of Law give him a unique perspective and a passion for the subject.

Germaniuk described the problems neighborhoods are experiencing as fallout from the recession of 2008 that began with the bursting of the housing bubble. Deregulation, combined with the government’s policy of pushing home ownership through Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, encouraged “funny practices” in the real estate and banking sectors with minimum safeguards.

When the bubble burst, all the flaws in the real estate/finance system that allowed overvalued homes to be purchased by under-qualified buyers were stressed to the point of collapse.

Homeowners were unable to keep up payments, and many saw the value of their homes drop beneath the balance of their mortgages. Banks, too, were forced to build up an inventory of foreclosed homes, found that they could not fetch, at sheriff’s sales, the amount needed to cover the remaining balances on the loans that they were holding.

The rising number of foreclosed and abandoned properties began to challenge neighborhood stability, as these vacant homes became a burden to remaining and viable property owners.

Germaniuk suggested neighborhood strategies to proactively deal with the issue, to prevent wider and deeper damage to the community.

He explained the seven situations indicative of troubled real estate—exterior maintenance issues, demolished homes and vacant lots, landlord-tenant relations, probate status, foreclosure, property tax overview and tax lien certificates. Each must be overcome when trying to remedy any given property.

Germaniuk emphasized that neighborhoods should not expect quick results. Each piece of real estate must be viewed on a case-by-case basis. Communities need to identify and leverage local resources, and coordinate action to achieve success.

It is necessary to develop a neighborhood plan. This should begin by establishing a goal to guide the process, and following through to see that the plan is carried out.

Germaniuk stressed that “the initiative needs to come from the grassroots level, and not be imposed externally.” From a legal and ownership sense, neighborhood groups are not directly involved in any given property in the way that “vectors of influence” are, such as city government, private developers, landlords, speculators, various public and private institutions, and lien-holding banks. They are, however, the ones most affected.

Concerned residents and neighborhood groups should be proactive and join together to remedy each situation. In doing so, they may “serve as a bridge to major players and to other concerned parties. Individuals with knowledge and technical expertise brainstorm and experiment with different approaches to form an appropriate level of organization.”

In order to create a plan, facts are needed. These are generally a matter of public record and can be gathered by personal interview or by direct observation.

In describing tactics and strategies, Germaniuk suggested that local resources, such as local government, courts and universities, should be tapped. Noting that much can be accomplished by grassroots volunteer groups, he added that there are various methods and modes of organization available to private citizens seeking to counter the harmful effects of troubled properties—by utilizing neighborhood resources effectively and by focusing on preventative measures, which may not necessarily be a top priority of public officials.

Anyone interested in becoming involved with the issue of troubled properties in the Heights should contact either the Grant Deming Forest Hills Historic District (Sarah Wean at swclevets@yahoo.com) or the Cain Park Neighborhood Association (Peter Titas at petertitas@yahoo.com).

Harvey Zvi Ofer, a lifelong resident of Cleveland Heights, is a member of the Cain Park Neighborhood Association, an architect and owner of HZO Architects.

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I was in Washington on the weekend after my first visit to the Martin Luther King Memorial. It was vibratting with renewed determination and I wasn't surprised to find myself almost honor the ideas and accomplishments of Dr. King. Public spaces, especially those that are a part of Washington DC, serve as a reminder of the ethics and values that had a profound impact on American history. There, tucked in close to the Tidal Basin, across from the Jefferson Memorial, glorious tributes to the best of American history. The Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, all of which are etched in stone, remind us of the achievements of one of the greatest leaders of our time.

My visit to the Martin Luther King Memorial renewed my appreciation for the brilliance of this wise leader. I try to honor his legacy by keeping the common good in the forefront of my actions. This is the core idea that helped me, an inexperienced young idealist in the 1960s, know that I had a place in the struggle to contribute to a more just society. It clarified that I did not need to be in the identifiable oppressed class to be a legitimate participant in making change. Activism in support of justice, fairness and equality is not an act of charity—whatever your relative power—because everyone benefits when life is just, and everyone suffers when it is not. This understanding drew me to cherish the concept of the common good and helped me jump in with both feet.

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The one-mile walk from my hotel to the memorial took me past the FDR Memorial, stands a huge statue of Dr. King surrounded by a grand, granite inscription wall where excerpts from 14 of Dr. King’s speeches are etched in stone. These speeches are a testament to his unwavering commitment to civil rights and social justice. The best communicators—musicians, authors, preachers, artists, teachers—use their respective languages to evoke the essence of what matters. Those 14 quotes demonstrate ever so clearly this man’s earned place in history, based on both his actions and his incomparable capacity to capture, in a few words, essential ideas, deep moral values, and direction for realizing the best of the human condition.

I reviewed each quote several times and recognized one that contributed to my own growth as an activist: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” This is the core idea that helped me, an inexperienced young idealist in the 1960s, know that I had a place in the struggle to contribute to a more just society. It clarified that I did not need to be in the identifiable oppressed class to be a legitimate participant in making change. Activism in support of justice, fairness and equality is not an act of charity—whatever your relative power—because everyone benefits when life is just, and everyone suffers when it is not. This understanding drew me to cherish the concept of the common good and helped me jump in with both feet.

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He previously won the award in 2008.

Mayor Infeld’s proclamation stated that “Pucella is well-regarded by his fellow employees in the city and is known to go the extra mile while performing his job, thus bringing accolades from residents and reflecting honorably on his fellow employees and the city.”

Mayor Infeld also awarded certificates of recognition to other city employees, based on feedback she had received about them from community members.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

**Chili Cook-Off raises $1,700 for CH youth recreation fund**

Deanna Bremer Fisher

The Cleveland Heights Division of Parks and Recreation and the Recreation Advisory Board hosted its first-ever Chili Cook-Off on Nov 3 at the Cleveland Heights Community Center. Eight local restaurants participated: Cedar Lee Pub, Inn on Coventry, Tommy’s restaurant, New Heights Grill, O’Rielly’s Pub, Rockefeller’s, Zagara’s Marketplace and Barle Soup & Sandwich. Whole Foods, Starbucks and On the Rise provided artisan breads and pastries.

Entries were judged by a panel of community members, including Joel Borwick, former owner of Seitz-Agin Hardware and president of the Heights Youth Center’s board of directors.

O’Rielly’s Pub won the award for Most Authentic Chili, New Heights Grill was voted Spiciest, Zagara’s Marketplace was deemed Most Creative, and Barle Soup & Sandwich won the People’s Choice award.

The event raised $1,700 for the Heights Youth Recreation Fund, which provides scholarships and reduced rates for Cleveland Heights youths to participate in the city’s recreation programs and leagues.

“I am so proud of the support from the community, considering a lot of residents were still without power thanks to Hurricane Sandy,” said Alissa Branford, chair of the cook-off. “This is sure to be an event that only gets bigger each year.”

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.
Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 19, 2012
Cheryl L. Stephens was absent.

County health services
Council renewed an agreement with the Cuyahoga County General Health District for public health services for 2013 at the same cost as 2012: $177,105 for mandated services and $79,000 for additional nonmandated services.

Certificate of occupancy fees
Council increased the certificate of occupancy fee for the first unit in any residential rental property from $100 to $150 per year, and increased the fee from $1,000 to $1,150 for additional units which will remain at $25 per unit and certificates issued after June 30 of the year of the payment of such amount.

Solid waste fee increase
Council increased the solid waste collection fee to $11.50 per month, which will be billed on a monthly basis on the water bill. The sewerage treatment fee for families receiving household rates will remain three dollars per month.

City’s fiber network
Council authorized an agreement with Time Warner Cable to maintain the city’s fiber interconnection between Cleveland Heights and neighboring communities. It also approved the purchase of 1,500 miles of fiber optic cable.

Cleveland Heights City Council

FirstEnergy meets with City of Cleveland Heights to address power outage concerns

Deanna Bremer Fisher
Cleveland Heights Mayor Ed Kelley and Council Member Jason Stein met with John Skory, president of CEI (FirstEnergy), on Dec. 30 to discuss the city’s concerns about the company’s handling of the power outage caused by Hurricane Sandy. Both Kelley and Stein had expressed frustration at a Nov. 7 city council meeting, and Stein had requested a meeting in a letter he sent to Anthony J. Alexander, president and CEO of FirstEnergy, that same day.

The storm caused the downing of several trees and power lines. More than 11,000 Cleveland Heights residents lost power, and many were without power for more than five days.

Stein reported that Skory “made a strong verbal commitment to improve FirstEnergy’s storm preparation and management, as well as reduce the non-storm-related power outages that occur in the city.” Skory asked for an opportunity to show that “positive changes will be made,” and committed to returning within a month “to share a plan for the city’s power grid with a detailed map of what we can do to improve problem areas and offer resolutions to these problems.”

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Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of the Future Heights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

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FIRSTENERGY MEETS WITH CITY OF CLEVELAND HEIGHTS TO ADDRESS POWER OUTAGE CONCERNS

FirstEnergy meeting
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Abandoned dog
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Ivy Observer: Blanche Valancy.

FirstEnergy meeting highlights
Council authorized an agreement with Time Warner Cable to maintain the city’s fiber interconnection between Cleveland Heights and neighboring communities. It also approved the purchase of 1,500 miles of fiber optic cable.

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Communion of Saints team moves on to districts in robotics competition

Amy Fischer

Take a daylong competition, eight boys, one girl, and expertly executed robot missions and presentations, and you end up with two trophies and another shot at doing your best. Welcome to the First Lego League (FLL) Lego Robotics Competition, held at Hathaway Brown on Dec. 1. The Communion of Saints School’s Saber Sockets team competed for the second year, and walked away winners in two categories. The team will move on to the district competition, to be held on Jan. 12 and 13 at the University of Akron.

FLL introduces younger students to University of Akron.

FLL program: Lego robotics, real-world problem solving, and exhibiting FLL’s core values. These values include teamwork, finding solutions to the problem presented, honoring friendly competition, sharing experiences with others, and displaying cooperation (a FLL term for intense but friendly competition) and gracious professionalism while having fun.

In the robot performance stage of the competition, teams have three chances to run their robots through a series of tasks. Each task has a point value, and the more the tasks the teams accomplish, the more points they earn. The Saber Sockets earned consistently high scores in each of the three robot performance rounds, and one round earned the team the highest score of the day. As a result, the Sockets took home the Robot Performance Award—the award for the highest performing robot in the competition.

For the problem-solving portion of the program, the students started in early August to work on the problem presented by the FLL. This year’s problem concerned how best to improve the lives of senior citizens. The Saber Sockets researched and met with their Senior Partners (the grandparents of one of the team members) to learn about the problems that seniors face. The team then identified one problem and developed its own innovative solution. At the competition, team members conveyed the problem and their proposed solution in a skit. The judges then questioned team members about their research and their proposed solution.

The Saber Sockets also earned the competition’s Inspiration Award for their enthusiasm and superior exhibition of FLL’s core values.

Communion of Saints School offers Lego Robotics as one of its after-school enrichment courses. Communion of Saints School (formerly Saint Ann School) is located at 2160 Stillman Road in Cleveland Heights.

Amy Fischer is a member of the School Advisory Committee and a past co-president of the PTO at Communion of Saints School, formerly Saint Ann School, in Cleveland Heights.
District names interim principal for Boulevard after placing principal on administrative leave

Kim Sergio Ingla
The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District announced on Nov 28 that Karen Muffley would be the interim principal of Boulevard Elementary School through the remainder of the 2012-13 school year.

Katrinka Dean, principal of Boulevard, was placed on administrative leave on Nov. 1. Dean was named principal of Boulevard in June, and began work on Aug. 6.

Angie Shaker, director of communications for the district, confirmed in a Dec. 11 e-mail that Dean was still being paid by the district. Her contract is for two years, at an annual salary of $104,712.

Muffley's contract is as interim principal of two elementary schools buildings. Prior to that, she served as an elementary school principal in the Copley-Fairlawn City School District in Summit County, and the Tuslaw Local School District in Stark County. She earned her doctorate in K-12 educational administration from the University of Akron.

"Dr. Muffley draws on a record of success and years of experience as an elementary building principal," said Heuer. "She possesses all of the necessary skills to lead Boulevard during this transition time."

Kim Sergio Ingla is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer. She lives in the Shaker Farm Historic District in Cleveland Heights.

Heights High senior to play in Army All-American game

Simone Quartell

Cleveland Heights High School senior Shelton Gibson was selected to play in the 2013 U.S. Army All-American Bowl at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas on Jan. 2. The game will be televised live on NBC. Gibson, a fourth-year member of the Cleveland Heights Heights High Tigers team, was one of just 90 high school students nationally to be chosen for the game—the largest in the country for high school students.

Gibson is a two-sport athlete, who has excelled at both track and football. "He has an unbelievable talent and has not yet reached his full potential," said Kristen Hughes, the school's athletic director. "We are very proud of him and look forward to following his career."

"Having two players selected in consecutive years speaks volumes for our football program," Hughes added. Last year, Heights High senior Kyle Dodson received the honor.

The award was a surprise for Gibson, who is ranked sixth in the nation for wide receivers. "It is really great, but I definitely did not expect it," he said. He credits several adults in his life for supporting him in his football career. "My coaches have been great and, of course, my parents and grandparents."

Gibson's mother, both his grandparents, his aunt and his younger sister sat on the stage as he accepted his jersey. He thanked them for their support, saying that without them, "I'd be nowhere." Gibson's mother, Shalett, was "ecstatic" when she heard that her son had been selected for the game. She hopes he will continue to play football in college, although he is undecided about his next educational move.

The other members of the football team also attended the ceremony and cheered loudly for their teammate. They lined up afterward to have their pictures taken with Gibson in his jersey.

At the ceremony, American Family Insurance presented the Gibson family with The Dream Protector All-American Family Award. It is given to an athlete and his or her family who have had an exceptional positive influence in their community. Achievements in both the classroom and in extracurricular activities are considered.

Simone Quartell, a Heights High graduate, is a student at Cleveland State University and a Heights Observer intern. Joy Henderson, parent/community liaison at Heights High, also contributed to this article.
Meeting highlights
NOVEMBER 26, 2012
All board members were present.

Field trips
The board approved a field trip to Columbus for the Model U.N. Club, for grades 10–12, Dec. 9–11.

Interim Boulevard principal
The board appointed Karen Muffley as interim principal of Boulevard Elementary School.

Open enrollment policy
Joseph Micheller, director of special programs, presented a discussion of a Limited Open Enrollment Policy. The district would open spaces for students who do not live in the district, and the state would pay the state funded amount to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights district. After discussion, the board was not ready to approve the policy for next year.

DECEMBER 4, 2012
Karen Jones, Nancy Peppler and Ron Register were present.

Library board interviews
It is the responsibility of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education to appoint interviewers for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library. At this meeting, the school board interviewed candidates Beth Stratton of Shaker Square, Robert Simonds of Edgewood Road, and Jeffrey Emmett of Euclid Heights Boulevard for a seven-year term ending Dec. 31, 2019. Questions from board members included whether the Heights library should continue to operate as a separate library system, how the library should connect to students, and how the candidate defines the role of a library board trustee.

Following the interviews, board members discussed the candidates and selected Jeffrey Emmett as the language arts director and facilitator coordinator at Ursuline College and has an M.S. in pharmaceutical science from Wayne State University. He has served as president of a national organization that has the goal of increasing the number of minorities in the fields of chemistry and engineering. He sees his role as library board trustee to be a liaison to the community, and would like to increase the library’s offerings in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director, who was in the audience, noted that the board currently has only one female member and one University Heights resident, and that the library has a newly created volunteer group to advise on fundraising.

LWV observer: Nancy Ditch.

LWV observer: Adelle Cohn.

LWV observer: Karen Jones.

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Looking for earlier and often expanded postings of meeting summaries online at www.heightsobserver.org.

See disclaimer on page 4.

Cleveland Heights-University Heights School Board

Gia Parker

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District initiated performance-based reading groups in the 2011-12 school year to address the needs of students at all levels. Last summer, the Ohio State Legislature passed a law commonly called the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. The law requires that at the start of the 2013-14 school year, districts administer reading tests and develop reading improvement plans for students who are not on track. Districts must provide early intervention, and retain students who are not meeting the required reading scores by the end of third grade.

“The district made proactive decisions well before the third grade reading guarantee became law,” said Joe Mahoney-Curry, Title I lead teacher at Boulevard Elementary School. “We are now in our second year of performance-based grouping because we believe students will be readers by third grade. Through our grouping practices and the careful selection of our assessment tools, we want to make appropriate adjustments to address the needs of individual learners.”

Teachers assess each student’s reading level using texts found in the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, which examines comprehension, fluency, talking, writing, and thinking about what students read. Teachers then use the assessments to design instruction aligned to Common Core State Standards.

Students read aloud in a one-on-one setting and then have a conversation with the teacher about the material. The data gathered helps teachers tailor their instruction to individual learners and identify students who need enrichment interventions.

“Teachers are very excited about the new assessment tool because it will enable teachers and students to become reading partners,” said Mahoney-Curry.

English Language Arts (ELA) teachers meet for district level professional development throughout the school year to discuss instruction plans and reflect on their successes. Title I lead teachers support the ELA teachers by participating in professional learning communities, collecting and discussing student data, planning interventions, and assisting teachers in the primary grades.

The CH-UH kindergarten curriculu focuses on oral language development and lays a foundation for learning to read. This focuses builds students’ vocabulary, word comprehension, and background knowledge. Every day, teachers learn something new about their students and make instructional decisions about individual needs. For example, if a student needs more help with letters and sounds, a specific technique is taught to that child.

According to the Ohio Department of Education, students who are identified as “not-on-track” and who fail to attain the appropriate level of reading competency by the end of third grade will not advance to fourth grade. Multiple measures of reading, including the Ohio Achievement Assessment, will determine if a student is to be retained.

In the CH-UH district, students in grades 1-3 receive 135 minutes of daily reading instruction in groups designed to meet their specific academic needs. As a student’s reading skills improve, instructional changes within the reading block occur.

CH-UH schools to provide Third Grade Reading Guarantee

To help carry over students’ enthusiasm for reading from the end of one school year to the beginning of the next, the district offers two summer reading programs. Camp Jumpstart, an intensive program designed to bolster early literacy skills, and Books A Go Go, a family program of reading-related activities.

To help students stay on track, parents and guardians should participate in parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights, and one-on-one reading with children at home.

Family communities offer programs to support the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, including Many Villages and Family Connections.

Launched by Reaching Heights, Many Villages is an in-school tutoring program designed to help elementary students succeed, and deliver classroom assistance. While the main focus is K-3 literacy, the program has received requests from teachers for math, science, and social support. For more information about Many Villages, visit www.reachingheights.org.

Family Connections offers several readiness programs for preschool children and their families, to ensure success once they enroll in school.

Play Activities With Children introduces children and their parents to learning activities in key skill areas, via home visits. Play-a-Day, a six-week family literacy series offered at each elementary school, engages families in play-based activities to build literacy skills and help parents incorporate learning into everyday activities. Kindergarten Kickoff supports a smooth transition to kindergarten by exposing students to kindergarten activities, and giving parents a chance to learn about expectations for kindergarten and ways to support students at home.

Each elementary school in the CH-UH district has a family resource center where families can meet with a Family Connections liaison and borrow learning materials for home use. For more information, contact the elementary school in your neighborhood or call Family Connections at 216-321-0079.

Gia Parker provides operations support for the communications and community engagement office of the CH-UH school district.

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ok, sweetie, now

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love,

and the staff
Roxboro principal dons chicken outfit for a good cause

Deanna Bremer Fisher

Tara Grove, Roxboro Elementary School principal, promised her students that she would dress up as a chicken if they read more than 1,000 books for the Dougbe River Read-a-thon. On Nov 30, she made good on her promise and donned the chicken suit.

“I was elated to hear that the students had read 1,700 books” said Grove.

Grove agreed to dress like a chicken in order to encourage reading at home, and to raise funds for Roxboro’s sister school in Liberia. Roxboro, as an International Baccalaureate Candidate School, uses a method of instruction that encourages inquiry-based learning and international-mindedness.

Grove had asked students to vote on an activity that school staff would take on if the students succeeded in reading at least 1,000 books during the month of November. The students voted for the principal to dress like a chicken for an entire day.

The read-a-thon is one of a series of fundraisers Roxboro Elementary students participated in, to raise money for a school in Liberia, Africa—the Dougbe River Presbyterian School. Rev. Francis Miller, the pastor of Noble Road Presbyterian Church in Cleveland Heights, and Isaac Monah, a church elder and native of Liberia, have led the effort to build the school in an area where they believe there has never been one.

Monah returned to his native country in 2007, he found that the situation had not improved, and he resolved to build a school to bring new opportunities to the children, and greater prosperity to the region.

Monah shared his vision with members of the Noble Road Presbyterian Church, which launched a mission to build the school. The Cleveland-based Presbytery of the Western Reserve has adopted the project, and 27 worship communities and four schools have contributed so far.

After years of planning and fundraising, the Dougbe River Presbyterian School opened the week of Nov 30. The school serves 97 children (55 boys, 42 girls) from three villages. Plans call for the construction of dormitories so that children in an additional nine villages along the Dougbe River can attend.

Roxboro students raised more than $5,600 for the school with a variety of activities, including the read-a-thon, daily fun activities during International Education Week, Nov. 12–16, a benefit sale at Ten Thousand Villages, and a special concert at which Roxboro students sang “In This World Together” (the school song of the Dougbe River Presbyterian School). Roxboro Middle School students participated by hosting a staff vs. students dodge ball game and raffle.

Grove said that her students will stay in contact with their sister-schoolmates, and incorporate lessons about Liberian culture into their studies. “They do not have electricity,” said Grove, “so we will send correspondence through the mail and will keep updated by e-mails sent each month by the principal when he goes into a local town.” She said that students will learn about the crops that the Liberian students will grow on school grounds, and will explore how Liberian cultural is similar to, and different from, their own.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

WKYC meteorologist talks weather to Gearity students

WKYC meteorologist Marcus Walter captured the attention of second-grade students at Gearity Elementary School on Dec. 5 when he talked about weather and how it impacts our lives. The students had been studying weather for several weeks, including severe weather patterns and the importance of being prepared. Ellen Liss, second-grade teacher, spearheaded the unit on weather with the second-grade team and Brian Stern, art teacher.

WKYC meteorologist Marcus Walter speaks to Gearity students about weather patterns and their impact on our lives.

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Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library Board Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 19, 2011

All board members were present.

Judy Russo retires from the University Heights Library

Judy Russo, who began work on Sept. 14, 1987 as a part-time circulation assistant for the University Heights branch, is retiring as branch circulation supervisor. A retirement resolution, read by Board President James Roosa, noted her ability as a supervisor and her representation of the University Heights branch in the library’s staff association. Many of the library’s pages become friends with her and returned online to visit.

Superstorm Sandy affects libraries

Superstorm Sandy caused the closure of the Lee Road Library for two days and other branches for one day. On reopening, staff offered heat, light, charging of phones and computers for many citizens, and went beyond the call of duty to help the community. The storm caused leadage at the Noble Neighborhood and Coventry Village branches.

Board for new library fund

The board of directors for the new Fund for the Future of Heights Libraries consists of Sue Pardee, treasurer; Jim Burger, secretary; and Courtney Whitehill, treasurer. The next meeting, Monday Feb. 11, will be with the Cleveland Foundation to hear a presentation on donor-advised funds.

Dobama increases liability insurance

As requested by the board, Dobama Theatre has increased liability insurance up to $2 million for the privilege of serving wine to patrons.

Friends of the Library

A new Friends board is taking office, with Louisa Oliver as incoming president. For the first time, the group is sending a year-end solicitation letter to members.

October public service report highlights:

• The program “Harvey Pekar: a Literary Life” drew approximately 175 people and was well covered by Cleveland media. A statue of Pekar stands on a desk near the Harvey and friends bookstore on the second floor of the Law Road Library.
• Amanda Burns was co-presenter of Beachbrook’s STEPS parenting skills class to teen parents at Cleveland Heights High School.
• Greg Fisher presented a book talk to seniors at Warrensville Community Apartments during the Mandel JCC’s senior lunch program.
• Noble Neighborhood Library hosted its first after-hours program with the “Night of the Living Dead Teen Read Week” program. Forty teens dressed as zombies attended.
• In conjunction with SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), the training department started a six-part series on small business. Class members gave positive reviews of the sessions.
• About 60 people attended a Senior Health and Wellness Fair on Oct. 13.
• A monthly informal book discussion group called Concrete Jungle Warriors has goals of engaging teens in being excited about reading and aware of a larger worldview.

Library board welcomes new member and honors outgoing president

Jeffrey Eummer, who works in Ursuline College’s chemistry department, has been appointed to the board of trustees of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library. His term will begin in January.

Eummer, 50, has lived in Cleveland Heights for four years with his wife, Laura, and son. He replaces outgoing board president Esther Moss who is retiring after 14 years.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education approved the selection of Eummer at its Dec. 6 meeting. The local school board appoints the trustees as it is the tax authority for the public library.

In addition to being a lab coordinator at Ursuline, Eummer has taught chemistry at Lakeland Community College in Ohio and Martin University in Indiana. He has worked as a chemist for a variety of companies, including Bristol-Myers Squibb. From 1997–99, he served as president of the Connecticut chapter of the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE), a group that encourages minorities to pursue careers in chemistry and engineering.

He has also coached his son’s Cleveland Heights recreation league baseball team.

His background in science and his passion for science education are part of what inspired him to apply for the position. “I’d like to be the library’s liaison to the community and our libraries has been steadfast,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Library board director. “We will miss her.”

Moss joined the library board in 1999 and served on both the planning and external relations and operations committees. She served as president in both 2005 and 2012 and as secretary in 2010. “Her dedication and service to our community and our libraries has been steadfast,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Library board director. “We will miss her.”

Moss’s interest in libraries and literacy grew from her years teaching children with learning and behavioral disabilities in the Cleveland Metropolitian School District.

Sheryl Banks is the marketing and community relations manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library.

Observer advertising is good for your business and good for your community.
Many people turn down their thermostats in the winter to save money. The institute recommends setting thermostats no lower than 68 degrees, to prevent hypothermia. You can save money on heating by closing off unused rooms (shut the heating vents and close the doors), keeping blinds and curtains closed, candlelight and window, and installing storm windows and insulating film.

Dominion East Ohio’s Winter Crisis Program (800-282-0880) provides help for low-income seniors who are having trouble paying their heating bills and are threatened with disconnection.

HRRC classes on topics pertinent to seniors include Aging in Place, Energy Efficiency, and special workshops. Participants in the Senior Repair Program can benefit from a 90-minute home inspection to assess and prioritize repair needs and “aging in place” issues, assistance in reviewing contractor estimates, inspections of completed work and special workshops.

The program is a comprehensive housing resource for the region’s aging population. Participants pay a modest program fee. Residents of Cleveland Heights, University Heights and South Euclid who attend one class can receive a 90-minute in-home repair consultation for $25. Residents of other communities can attend a class and receive a 90-minute consultation at the HRRC office for $5. To register for a class or home inspection, contact Wesley Walker, HRRC senior repair specialist, at 216-381-0600, ext. 22, or wwalker@hrrc-ch.org.

HRRC’s Senior Repair Program has been made possible through grants from the McGregor Foundation and the United Black Fund.

Allison Urbanek is director of programs at HRRC and enjoys working one on one with residents to solve their home repair dilemmas.
Heights Youth Theatre presents Ohio premiere of ‘A Little Princess’

Directed by Pierre-Jacques Brault, with music direction by Joanna Li, Heights Youth Theatre’s production of “A Little Princess” debuts on Jan. 11.

The cast features local students in first through twelfth grades, many of whom live in Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

“A Little Princess” tells the story of Sara Creere, the young daughter of a wealthy adventurer who is sent to a boarding school in Victorian England, but soon finds adventure is also in her blood. When Sara hears reports of her father’s death, her life takes an unexpected turn as she is forced to become a servant.

Professional musicians will play the score, which features music by Andrew Lippa. The book and lyrics are by Brian Crawley, based on the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Cast members include: Talia Cosenzino (Sara), Cleo Cosenzino (Aljana), Lauryn Hobbs (Ajuna), Charles Miller (Pasko), Christina Ciofani (Miss Minchin), Courtney Nelson (Miss Amelie), Emily Jenks (Ermengarde), Emily Kenville (Tina), Claire Falkov-Gomez (Jessie), Emily Gyorki (Jane), Halle Dray (Lottie), Gus Mahoney (James), Katie Wilkinson (Queen Victoria), Matthew McAllister (Mr. Skipworth), and Alexander Martinez (Widow Zama).

All performances will be at Wiley Middle School Auditorium, 2181 Miramar Blvd. in University Heights. Show dates are Friday, Jan. 11 & 25 at 7 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 12, 19 & 26 at 2 p.m., and Sunday, Jan. 20 & 27 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are $10 for general admission, and $5 for seniors and children younger than six; cash or check only. The box office opens 45 minutes prior to each performance.

Call Ellen at 216-580-2335 for ticket and group seating information. For more details, visit www.heightsyouththeatre.com.

Mary Patton of University Heights is a PR consultant and member of the Heights Youth Theatre Advisory Board.

Vietnam drama produced by Playwrights’ GYM at Dobama

Jewel Mouthbroop

Committed to producing new works by new and established playwrights, Dobama Theatre offers the Playwrights’ GYM, a special program for local dramatists. The GYM provides playwrights with the opportunity to workshop new plays and collaborate with a director. The GYM aims to nurture new work, with the goals of growing a new crop of directors and developing plays for future Dobama productions.

This season’s GYM production is “Ghosts of War” by Christopher John- ston. The play, based on interviews with a retired Marine officer who served in Vietnam, is about Jim Kyle’s 40-year search to learn what happened to his friend Danny, who was killed at Khe Sanh in 1967. Kyle was a member of the First Battalion, 9th Marines, commonly known as the “Walking Dead.” The play explores the experiences of three Marines who served in Vietnam. One dies, leaving a promise unfulfilled, another is severely wounded and remains haunted by war, and the third loses his family in an act of angry self-destruction, but finds redemption when he uncovers the truth about his friend’s heroic death.

Playwright Christopher Johnston is also a director whose work has appeared at Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT) and Dobama Theatre’s Night Kitchen (barebones, late-night productions). His play “The Mad Mask Maker of Maigh Eo” premiered in March 2006 at CPT and received an Honorable Mention in the Northern Ohio Live Awards of Achievement. As a freelance journalist, he has published more than 3,000 articles in numerous publications.

“Ghosts of War” features George Roth, an Equity member who has appeared in several Dobama productions. He trained at Yale University and at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. Roth has been working professionally in the theater for more than 25 years. His film and television credits include “Batman” and “Murphy Brown.”

Charles Kartalis is directing “Ghosts of War.” He has appeared as an actor on local and regional stages, including the Cleveland Play House (CPH), CPT, Dobama Theatre, Ensemble Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company and Syracuse Stage. He performed most recently in “Every Good Boy Deserves Favor” with the Cleveland Orchestra, “Galileo” at CPH, and “The Seafarer” at Dobama.

“Ghosts of War” will be performed Wednesday through Saturday evenings and Sunday matinees from Jan. 16-27. General admission is $15; $5 for full-time students with valid ID. For more information, call the box office at 216-932-1396 or visit www.dobama.org.

Jewel Mouthbroop is a Cleveland Heights resident, a member of the FutureHeights Board of Directors, and chair of the Heights Observer’s Editorial Advisory Committee.

Mary Patton of University Heights is a PR consultant and member of the Heights Youth Theatre Advisory Board.
Mamaí Theatre Co. takes up residency at Ensemble

Jewel Moulthrop

In 2010, four working mothers—theater artists, colleagues and friends—decided it was time to create their own opportunities. "Don’t wait to create" became their inspiration, and producing celebrated plays that had not been seen in Northeast Ohio in recent years became their vision. From that, Mamaí Theatre was born.

The four co-founders—Bernadette Clemens, Wendy Kris, Christina McBurney and Derdriu Ring—will serve the company in several capacities. Clemens, co-artistic director and producer, trained at Columbia University and the American Drama Academy. Her performance credits include the Vineyard Theatre, Gotham City Improv, Cleveland Play House, Great Lakes Theatre Company, Guthrie Theatre, and the Pittsburgh Irish Classical School of Acting in Dublin. She has performed in regional and local productions throughout the United States. Ring’s credits include Cleveland Play House, Great Lakes Theatre Company, and the Pittsburgh Irish Classical School of Acting.

In obedient to the philosophy of the Academy of Performing Arts at Chagrin Falls, academic associate and producer, received her training in Paris and Montreal. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Kent State University and has served on the faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts at Chagrin Falls. Ring is a member of the Chagrin Arts board and on the faculty of The Academy of Performing Arts at Chagrin Falls.

Wendy Kris, artistic associate and producer, received her training in Paris and Montreal. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Kent State University and has served on the faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts at Chagrin Falls, School of Cleveland Ballet, Tri-C Encore Program, Fairmount Performing Arts Conservatory and Qigong Academy.

Christine McBurney, co-artistic director and producer, is the current chair of the theatre arts department at Shaker Heights High School. In addition to a Master of Fine Arts degree from Kent State University, her training includes Shakespeare & Company, National Institute on Teaching Shakespeare and Juilliard School.

Derdriu Ring, artistic associate, holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in music and English from University College Cork and is a graduate of the Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin. She has performed with the Pittsburgh Irish Classical Theatre Company, Guthrie Theatre, Irish Rep and Geffen Playhouse. Ring’s local credits include Cleveland Play House, Dobama Theatre, Great Lakes Theatre and the Beck Center.

Mamaí (pronounced mab-may, the Irish word for “mother”) will present its inaugural season this summer, in residence at Ensemble Theatre at 2843 Washington Blvd. in Cleveland Heights. The season begins with the national premiere of a contemporary translation of Medea. The play will run Thursdays through Sundays from June 13–30.

Then, beginning on July 18 and running through Aug. 4, Mamaí will bring “Boston Marriage” by David Mamet to the local stage. Written in response to critics’ charges that Mamet “can’t write women,” the playwright dives beneath the petticoats and protocols to examine the personal and political, turning his gaze on female agency in the world and female sexuality at home.

For more information and to purchase individual tickets, subscriptions and sponsorships, call 216-570-3403 or visit www.mamaithetreecom. Supporters of Mamaí Theatre Company at the $50 level will receive two tickets to each play; season program acknowledgement and reserved seating.

Jewel Moulthrop is a Cleveland Heights resident, a member of the FutureHeights Board of Directors, and chair of the Heights Observer’s Editorial Advisory Committee.

Sacred spaces vary widely in Heights Libraries photo contest

Sheryl Banks

This year’s Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library photography contest drew an eclectic mix of images. Jenny Greene, adult services librarian and coordinator of the annual photo contest, thinks the variety is result of the contest’s theme, “Public Places, Sacred Spaces.”

“What strikes me about the photos people submitted is that they prove that just about any place can hold a special, sacred meaning for someone,” said Greene. “Our winning photos include landscapes, cityscapes and buildings.”

A case in point is the winning photo, “Indoor Skeeball Range and Amusement Center,” by Mark Cargile. The image, said Cargile, is important to him because it captures the wonder and excitement his grandchildren experience when he takes them to amusement park arcades, places they love. “I also became fascinated with the lights and the textures all around you when you’re in these places,” said Cargile. “It’s hard to capture that light (a flash won’t really work), so I5 well the photo came out so well. It looks more like a painting than a photograph.”

Cargile commented that he is glad the Heights Libraries contest attracts so many photographers, especially in an age when so many people are using cell phones to take photographs instead of learning the art and craft of more traditional photography.

The Heights Libraries photo contest is an annual event co-sponsored by University Heights business MotoPhoto, which provides the contest prizes. Ten final photos, chosen by library and MotoPhoto staff from 46 submissions, were displayed for one week at each branch of Heights Libraries during November, so members of the community could view the finalists and vote for their favorites. A total of 820 votes were cast, resulting in the following five winners:

First place, Mike Cargile for “Indoor Skeeball Range and Amusement Center”; second place, Scott Pollock for “Kiva at Mesa Verde, CO”; third place, Scott Pollock for “Redwood Grove at Armstrong Redwoods Park, CA”; fourth place, Eric Silverman for “Pylon and Progressive”; and fifth place, Ed Becker for “Going to the Sun.”

The winning photos are on display at the Lee Road Library at 2345 Lee Road and at www.heatheightslibrary.org.

Sheryl Banks is the marketing and community relations manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library.
A week before Halloween, students at Lake Erie Ink’s Ink Spot after-school program were asked to write a description of a house on three-dimensional foam panels. The goal was to teach the concept of personification, giving human traits to nonliving objects. The results surprised the staff.

The prompt was the idea of Lydia Munnell, an AmeriCorps volunteer with the Northeast Ohio Literary Corps stationed at Lake Erie Ink, a Heights-based nonprofit co-founded by Amy Rosenbluth and Cynthia Larsen that provides writing opportunities for young people.

“I expected spooky houses full of vampires and ghosts,” said Munnell. “What I didn’t prompt or expect was for every description to be a realistic and heartbreaking sketch of an abandoned house.”

“When we broke to write, the kids were quiet and started immediately. I was excited for what they’d produce, but still assumed it would be a bunch of stories about haunted houses with bloody walls. I would have accepted those stories—part of what I feel so strongly about at Lake Erie Ink is that Amy and Cynthia have created a space where kids feel free to write what they want—but I should have known they would go deeper.”

As Munnell moved among the foam houses, reading, a pattern emerged.

“Every kid had written a story about a lonely, abandoned house,” she said. “Without even trying, they had co-written the story of a generation of Cleveland kids. It was the fruit of the housing crisis, and it was their real lives. They knew about the shadow an abandoned house casts on a neighborhood and front yards scarred by the constant stabbing of ‘for sale’ signs because these houses are on their streets.”

“They weren’t prompted to write about foreclosure, and if they had been, what came out wouldn’t have been nearly so organic or honest,” said Munnell.

Lake Erie Ink, located in the Coventry School building at 2843 Washington Blvd., provides academic support and opportunities for young people in Greater Cleveland to express themselves through creative writing. To learn more or to volunteer, visit www.lakeerieink.org or contact Lydia Munnell at 216-532-4757 or staff@lakeerieink.org.

See more of the students’ work online at www.heightsobserver.org.

Cleveland Heights portrait painter finds service through her art

Rob Lucarelli

The Howson Gallery at Judson Park presents “Capturing Essence,” an exhibit of portraits of Judson residents painted by Cleveland Heights artist Debbie Vail.

The paintings will be on view through Jan. 6 at Judson Park, 1801 Chestnut Hills Drive in Cleveland Heights.

Vail didn’t explore her interest in art until after completing a 20-year nursing career and teaching. She discovered her love of portraiture and color at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Cuyahoga Community College, the Cleveland Museum of Art and through private instruction.

“I struggled with the direction I could take my art that would include service,” said Vail. “Then my husband suggested I listen to an NPR interview with an artist who volunteered at a VA hospital painting portraits. A few weeks later, I was starting my first portrait at Judson.”

“Over the last five years, I’ve met 84 fascinating people,” Vail said. “I’ve heard their stories, met their families, and marveled at the history they’ve experienced.”

She is currently in her fifth year volunteering at Judson, painting portraits of residents. The work was presented at Design a Life, a national conference sponsored by Cleveland State University in May 2008.

Vail has been a finalist in juried shows at the Art Guild of New York, Bay Arts of Ohio, and the Orange Art Center. She also paints private portrait commissions. Her work can be seen online at www.debbievail.com.

Rob Lucarelli is director of communications for Judson Services Inc.
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Who would have thought that a couple of engineering majors attending Cleveland State University in the 1970s would eventually preside over a string of specialty restaurants that boast a storied history in the Heights—all based on a passion for bread. Certainly not John Emerman and Tatyana Rehn, the once-mARRied couple who own Stone Oven Artisan Bakery and Restaurant, but that's exactly what they've accomplished over the past couple decades.

“We were both mechanical engineers and didn't particularly like working in that field. We wanted to do something a little more creative and fun,” said Emerman.

It was Rehn's love affair with bread baking—spawned by attending the grand opening of Emerman's brother's restaurant in New York, where she sampled what she described as the best bread she'd eaten since emigrating from Russia—that laid the groundwork for what has become a wildly successful concept. You might say she became instantly hooked.

“You might say she became instantly hooked. With much encouragement from John and his family, I just went off making bread 24/7, as I was doing my engineering job and raising two kids. Then I was laid off from my job,” Rehn recalled.

Emerman had worked in restaurants and coffee shops during and after college and enjoyed the business. They figured that Rehn's passion for breadmaking, initially just a hobby, made merging the bakery/café concept a business proposition too good not to pursue. 

“John was very optimistic about opportunities,” said Rehn. “And with his great encouragement, I found myself in business a month after getting laid off—literally.”

They initially ran the business out of their home, as a wholesale operation, selling to local restaurants and grocery stores. They swiftly outgrew that and began sharing space in someone else’s bakery until further growth necessitated a move to the corner of Lee and Meadowbrook roads in 1995.

“We had a strong wholesale business going that was enough, really, to pay the rent, so anything that came through the front door was sort of gravy. People loved the place and were excited about it,” said Emerman.

“Not only that, we were able to person-alize the space. Aesthetically, it's much more pleasing and it feels like a home, and a lot of people do feel like they're a part of it.”

They now operate Stone Oven shops in the downtown Galleria at Erieview and at the Eton Chagrin Boulevard shops in Woodmere. A year and a half ago, they teamed up with a local cake and pastry maker and opened up Luna Bakery Café in Cleveland Heights's Cedar Fairmount neighborhood. They also operate a warehouse at 36th and Carnegie, where the bread is produced for all the locations.

Watching that (Cedar Fairmount) area and having associations with it, we wanted to do something there for a long time. When that space became available, I wanted to do something, but not another Stone Oven. It's too close to this one. We wanted to do something so we partnered with Bridgette Thiebault,” said Emerman. So far, he said, the concept of serving baked goods and light fare, including crepes and paninis, has worked out well.

Speaking to the couple inside the Lee Road store, one feels a palpable sense of their deep appreciation for their customers and satisfaction about what they've accomplished.

“To me when I truly stop and think about it, it's amazing. It's absolutely amazing because neither of us came from an environment where we could have learned anything about running a business,” said Rehn. “We feel very fortunate. It's a 24-hours-a-day operation, but when we stop and think about it, I'm very grateful.”

Richard Stewart is the owner of Digizoom Media and a member of the FutureHeights Board of Directors.

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