Strong mayor or city manager sole CH charter issue this fall

Bob Rosenbaum

The fight over competing ballot issues to decide whether to keep or change the structure of Cleveland Heights City government was growing increasingly contentious. But CH City Council took a step back from the brink on July 29, when it voted to place only one issue on the ballot in November.

The city’s voters will be asked, yes or no, do you want the city to switch to a form of government led by a popularly elected mayor. That means a second issue, containing a passel of other proposed changes to the city charter, will not come before voters this year.

City council’s action was a victory for Citizens for an Elected Mayor (CEM), the grassroots campaign that had gathered signatures from 4,000 registered voters to place a referendum on the ballot.

It was a setback for another group, Cleveland Heights Citizens for Good Government (CHCGG) PAC, which sought to place that second issue on the ballot. That ballot issue would have been based on recommendations of the council-appointed Charter Review Commission (CRC), which worked for more than a year and opposed changing to a strong-mayor form of government.

The funding of CHCGG was a source of the growing anger between sides. According to media reports, its initial support included donations, some as large as $2,500, from five CH City Council members—the same people who had determined the makeup of the CRC and who would be responsible for placing its recommendations on the ballot.

Last week, a copy of an e-mail message from early June was circulated on social media. In it, the Washington D.C.-based International City/County Management Association (formerly the International City Managers Association) promised a matching donation of up to $25,000 to the CHCGG PAC from its Fund for the Future of Professional Management, to fight “to retain council-manager government in Cleveland Heights.”

All of that was brought to the floor on Monday during an hour-long session of public comment. Speakers supporting the grassroots campaign at times accused council members of using national-style money and politics...continued on page 4

New CH-UH superintendent will meet community this month

Coiffed Cavanaugh

On Aug. 1, Elizabeth Kirby takes on her new role as the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District superintendent.

All community residents and district families are invited to attend informal get-to-know-you gatherings with Kirby, beginning Aug. 5:

• Monday, Aug. 5, 6-7:30 p.m.—A dinner chat at the City School, 1749 Lee Road.
• Thursday, Aug. 8, 7:30-9 a.m. – A coffee chat at On the Rise Artisan Breads, 3471 Fairmount Blvd.
• Tuesday, Aug. 13, 3-4:30 p.m.—A playdate at Noble Elementary School, 1203 Ardsley Street.
• Wednesday, Aug. 14, 3-4:30 p.m.—A playdate at Boulevard Elementary School, 1749 Lee Road.

Kirby, who comes to the Heights schools after 23 years as a teacher, principal and school administrator in Chicago, is a native Clevelander. CH-UH Board of Education members voted unanimously in March to name her the district’s new superintendent, from a field of four finalists. She replaces former superintendent Talissa Dixon, who is now superintendent of Columbus Public Schools, and takes over from Brian...continued on page 6

National Night Out returns to Purvis Park Aug. 6

Mike Cook

After a successful inaugural event last year, National Night Out returns to University Heights on Aug. 6, 7-8 p.m., at Purvis Park.

National Night Out is an annual community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make neighborhoods safer and more caring places in which to live.

This year’s University Heights event will offer free food, music, inflatables, games and finger painting. Police and fire department vehicles...continued on page 9

CH mayor and Ensemble Theatre director attend NEA workshop

Deanna Bremer Fisher

Cleveland Heights Mayor Carol Roe and Ensemble Theatre Executive Artistic Director Celeste Cosentino traveled to Washington, D.C., in mid-July to attend the inaugural Local Leaders’ Institute on Creative Placemaking.

They were among six teams, each comprising a local arts leader and a government official, representing small, medium and rural communities that were selected to participate from among 148 applicants. Cosentino spearheaded an effort last year to apply for a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town grant for the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus project. Though she did not receive a grant, she was invited to apply for the workshop...continued on page 6

University Heights Police Officer Ben Fehlow with young residents at last year’s National Night Out event.

University Heights is one of more than 130 Ohio cities that are participating in National Night Out...continued on page 6

Volunteer for Cleveland Heights and University Heights • Read more at www.heightsobserver.org
The Heights Observer is not an ordinary newspaper; it is a nonprofit publication for residents of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

The Heights Observer does not have a writing staff; it is written by you—the readers.

Individuals throughout the community decide what stories they want to write, then submit them for publication. University Heights, or Cleveland Heights is welcome to contribute regularly, occasionally or even just once. Is there something you think should be covered in the Heights Observer? If so, please write it on your own, or with friends, neighbors or colleagues. Our volunteer editors will make sure it’s ready to publish and contact you with any questions.

If you’re writing a news article, it should be clear and factual. If you want to express an opinion, submit it as a letter to the editor or as an opinion piece. Either way, make sure it’s about something specific to our two cities.

To make a submission of any kind, go to www.heightsobserver.org and click on “Submit an Article” at the left.

For information about writing style, article length, etc., click on “Become an Observer” at the left. For questions that aren’t answered there, call the FutureHeights office at 216-499-6433 or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

Articles to be considered for the September issue must be submitted by Aug. 21. We will publish some articles online as they come in—and still consider them for the next print issue. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

Letters Policy
The Heights Observer welcomes letters to the editor. They must be submitted electronically, with the writer’s name and e-mail address, to www.heightsobserver.org/members.

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Opinion

Four problems City voters should think about

Vince Reddy

Cleveland Heights voters will soon decide whether to replace our council-manager form of government with a mayor-council model. If voters approve changing to an elected mayor this fall, the city’s first elected mayor would not take office until January 2022. During a time when Cleveland Heights is facing accelerating competition from its neighbors, and other daunting challenges, a caretaker government would run the city for more than two years. That’s a problem.

Our lack of a mayor-council government isn’t a problem, but the pervasive lack of understanding of our current council-manager government is, especially when the presence of an informed and involved citizenry is a hallmark of any successful narrative. The populist-style call to allow the voters of Cleveland Heights to elect their mayor is compelling on the surface, but it is disingenuous in its implications that the city does not already have a democratically elected government. That’s a second problem.

The seven members of Cleveland Heights City Council are elected at large and are directly accountable to the city’s voters, and council is responsible for choosing a professional city manager. City managers can be drawn from across the United States or even beyond, if warranted. This is not preclude the appointment of a city resident (current or former), if a city resident is the best candidate. The pool of potential mayors, by comparison, is limited to current city residents. That’s a third problem.

As a neighbor pointed out to me, our school system is run like a council-manager government. The school board comprises elected citizens serving on a part-time basis, who hire a professional superintendent from what is often a nationwide search. It is hard to imagine support for replacing the superintendent with an elected leader who would also be a district resident before seeking election.

The mayor-council style of local government is not superior to the mayor-council system in place. Many cities, including some in Cuyahoga County, are well served by the mayor-council model. There are far more cities, however, where elected mayors have created more problems than they solve. When county voters decided to adopt the home-rule powers that come with a charter county government in 2000, this supported the establishment of what is essentially a mayor-council government at the county level. I realize now that the council-manager government used in many charter counties across the United States would have provided a better selection of chief executives than the popularly elected Ed FitzGerald and Armond Budish turned out to be.

There’s also a fourth problem with the proposed mayor-council amendment that voters need to consider. The proposal states that a full-time elected mayor would be “accountable, visible, decisive, available, and responsive,” yet its proposed charter language states that “holding the office of Mayor does not necessarily preclude limited outside employment or other outside work by the person holding the office of Mayor.” I think this is the reason for the unusual and explicit accommodation? I’d like to know. Wouldn’t you?

Please consider the wisdom of four problems to Cleveland Heights. Serving on the city’s Charter Review Commission and studying this issue for 16 months helped me recognize these flaws with Citizens for an Elected Mayor’s populist proposal. I hope that you will recognize these problems, too.

Vince Reddy is a former Heights Observer board member and a 22 year resident of Cleveland Heights. He recently served on the city’s Charter Review Commission.

Powerful-major model carries risks

Jessica Schewber

I lived in Cleveland Heights from 2006–14. Moving here from a small town in the Pacific Northwest, I was skeptical of any good fortune in winding up in a community where there were more progressive, ethical leaders running for city council than open seats.

Cleveland Heights has a long history of engaged citizens and robust nonprofit organizations fighting for open housing, nondiscriminatory practices and preservation of the community’s unique character.

So there seems something off to me in the characterization of Cleveland Heights as a town in dire need of an immediate change in government structure.

Cleveland Heights has challenges like all aging inner-ring suburbs in a region hemorrhaging population, but we need to consider whether advocates for a strong-mayor system have misdiagnosed the problem and offered up the wrong solution.

I’ve lived in the city of Cleveland for four years. I invite anyone who believes a strong-mayor system will result in more accountability to come visit me in Ward 4.

Perhaps you know of my city page on line

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Change or status quo?

Kermit Lind

Thanks to a loose coalition of nearly 4,000 Cleveland Heights voters who signed petitions this spring, all CH voters will be entitled to vote on whether to add an executive mayor to city government. An effort of this scale done in just a few weeks is itself an encouraging show of the vitality that characterizes the community.

Cleveland Heights provides residency for people of many different walks of life and heritages. It has highly regarded public facilities—think of the library system, exceptional public safety and emergency services, great parks and multiple recreation venues, and the arts. Its demographic profile reveals a rich mix of races, religions, cultures and levels of wealth.

These valued features are all results of change, and the community’s sustainability depends on adapting to more change. That goes for the city’s form of government as well. Voting residents decide to keep or change their form of government, and Cleveland Heights residents are in that process now.

Neither the council-manager nor the popularly elected-mayor form is inherently superior—each may have advantages for certain situations and conditions. Neither is immune to corruption or mismanagement. They fail or succeed by their capacity to serve their voting constituency.

CH’s form of government was adopted nearly a century ago. Since that time, none of the many newer suburbs has [adopted] a council-manager government. In Cuyahoga County, ceremonial mayors and city managers are entirely unique. I see this as a handicap for Cleveland Heights because its circumstances require more attention, collaboration and occasionally contention with other municipalities, government agencies and institutions.

Would effective executive authority have allowed Severance to decline without a serious fight?

Economic forces are being dealt with in this region by executive mayors rather than part-time ceremonial ones, or managers employed by part-time council members. As the largest first suburb on the east side of the county, CH needs the stronger voice of an elected executive mayor to avoid being marginalized or left out of what happens outside city hall.

A serious challenge for the city is the preservation, revitalization and development of its residential assets, in all price ranges. The economic crisis in the last decade is a call to action that requires new strategies, policies and procedures that fit current and future circumstances of this housing market. The dwindling owner-occupancy of housing and loss of property tax base value is a systemic threat. No single department—housing, building, planning, economic development or law—can fix it. The problem requires the mobilization and coordination of all departments.

The community also needs to engage positively to ensure sustainability for all neighborhoods, not only for a fortunate few. While good PR is helpful, it’s not sufficient to deal with deep challenges below the surface.

I sense a persistent waning of confidence in the current city government by many longtime Cleveland Heights advocates. This is distressing when it detracts from the critical support for constructive changes to sustain the community’s vitality. We need an educated awakening to 21st-century realities that put Cleveland Heights’ sustainability in doubt. It does not seem that those favoring the council-manager approach are making a persuasive case for success with the status quo.

This is why I urge fellow voters to add a citywide elected mayor to upgrade the community’s capacity to advance toward a more just sustainability for all. More importantly, I urge voters to become alert to the social, economic and cultural dynamics already changing our civic environment. Knowledge, not nostalgia, is the most essential change of all.

Kermit J. Lind is clinical professor of law emeritus at Cleveland State University. Lind now writes, consults and lectures on community development law and public policy.
Strong-mayor advocates omit details

Robert Jefferis

In letters for a proposed ballot issue for a directly elected mayor, Citizens For An Elected Mayor (strong-mayor advocates) leave out important details about changes to our current form of government in Cleveland Heights.

In our current form we pay each of our democratically elected, part-time council persons a whopping $9,270 per year. Our council president earns an additional $2,470 per year to be a public face of council and to herd council members toward consensus, just like the speaker of the house for the Ohio House and the U.S. House of Representatives.

For the privilege of being council president, democratically elected by members of council, the city charter allows that person to be called the mayor. The mayor has a single vote on council, just like the other council members. We already democratically elect our ceremonial mayor.

The strong-mayor advocates, in details of the ballot measure, now propose that we add a full-time, directly elected mayor, and pay the mayor like other mayors (Beachwood’s Merle Gordon topped out at $175,000 plus perks, before being unseated). Yet this “full-time” mayor would be permitted to hold another job—mysteriously excepting Cleveland Heights-University Heights and East Cleveland schools, but not other nearby districts such as South Euclid or Shaker Heights.

The proposed ballot issue would also declare the strong mayor head of police and fire, as director of public safety; head of all departments; allow the mayor to “appoint, promote, transfer, reduce or remove all officers and employees;” and [give] the mayor “judicial powers granted by the general laws of Ohio.” One can hear the deals being cut with such a grant of powers and salary.

Council members Jason Stein and Kahill Seren favored placing only the grassroots measure on the ballot. Council members Melissa Yasinow, Michael Ungar, Carole Roe and Mary Dunbar all favored placing both issues on the ballot and letting voters sort it out. They also were listed as contributors to the CHCGG PAC, and each spoke on record opposing a change in the form of government.

In the end, the issue was decided by council’s newest member, Craig Cobb, who had served on the CRC, had continued...
Of mayors, city managers, and history lessons

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

In his opinion in the July Heights Observer, “History proves council-manager plan works well,” former Cleveland Heights council member and one-time mayor Alan Rapoport profiled Frank Cain, the city’s first mayor, who held the office for 32 years. After being directly elected himself in 1914, when Cleveland Heights was a village of 5,000, Mayor Cain led the charter commission that ultimately called for seven council members elected at large, and an appointed city manager. (In 1914 and in 1921, when the new charter was approved, only men could vote.)

Surely no one ever was more confident than Cain that his fellow council members would select him to be mayor, as they did for the following three decades. By all accounts, he did a great job. He also benefited from being in the right place at the right time, leading a wealthy suburb of the booming city of Cleveland during the Roaring ’20s.

We appreciate Rapoport’s sharing this history, and we want to extend the lesson back a little further, into the 19th century. At-large elections and appointed city managers are often characterized as an “efficient” response to corrupt partisan politics. That may be partially true, but the fact is that wealthy civic and business leaders throughout the U.S. were alarmed at the prospect of losing political control. Charles Francis Adams Jr., a great-grandson of President John Adams, put it succinctly: “Universal suffrage can only mean a Board of Directors and a Chief Executive Officer—hardly a democratic system.”

With an elected mayor, the council serves as a check on the mayor, who must gain majority approval for most important decisions and all major expenditures—just as a city manager must. Yes, the mayor can veto, but a supermajority of council can override. And while an elected mayor, the voters are the ultimate check on power. Yes, all the voters: male, female, trans, Black, White, native-born and naturalized citizens. If elections aren’t working fairly and properly, fix the elections. Don’t throw out democracy, or worse, claim that an appointment system is somehow “more democratic” than one in which the electorate has the power to select. As has been noted elsewhere, the council-manager structure follows the corporate form of a board of directors and chief executive officer—hardly a democratic system.

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Music camp promotes growth

Susie Kaeser

The struggle is real, and it is good. This was the theme for the Heights Summer Music Camp held June 10–15 at Cleveland Heights High School. This was the 15th camp season and, like the other 14, it was a great week of exploration, growth, engagement and success.

Reaching Heights, our local community support organization for the Heights schools, sponsors the camp that provides fifth- through eighth-graders who are residents of the Heights school district with the chance to engage in an intense week of playing their instruments in chamber groups and an orchestra. They also explore music in choirs, jazz groups or ukulele ensembles, and they learn about musicianship.

This is all provided by a staff of 16 professional musicians and music educators and 22 high school mentors. Many staff are alumni of the Heights music program. I founded the camp with Tamar Gray and Betsy Neylon, and I direct it.

Learning, like much of life, is about finding ways to engage with difficult and daunting challenges. At music camp we ask young musicians, many of whom have played their instruments for less than two years, to play advanced music.

Campers need to be comfortable with their instruments, knowledgeable about how to use their fingers to create each note, able to imagine how the music should sound, keep the tempo and rhythm, count, play in exact unison with more than 100 other musicians, follow the conductor and understand the language used to give instructions. They must be comfortable with not knowing the music, making many mistakes, trying over and over, and listening to adults who they don’t know very well. It goes way beyond simple multitasking.

Campers engage in these activities twice a day in an orchestra, and they apply these skills in small chamber groups where they cannot hide what they don’t know. No matter how capable our musicians are, the struggle is real. They are facing challenges, and when they do, and when they make progress, it is good.

Our goal is not to humiliate our campers and expose what they don’t know. It is to provide them enough support, encouragement and direction to help them engage in a demanding experience and find success. Every step forward is rewarding. It is a wonderful experience of self-discovery. Facing adversity—in this case, adversity that is not life-threatening in any way—is a source of growth, confidence and, we hope, motivation to engage and grow.

It is also a great lesson in how to face adversity—something no one can escape.

Learning music is a wonderful lesson about how learning works and its fantastic rewards. This is not about judgment, jumping through hoops of compliance or proving to the legislature that they have invested taxpayer dollars wisely and should continue doing so.

Rather, it is authentic learning. We are fortunate to have the financial support from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and several generous individual donors, and the time to offer a challenging, engaging and rewarding learning experience to young people. This should not be a luxury of summer. It should be a source of growth, confidence and, we hope, an escape.

It is also a great lesson in how to face adversity—something no one can escape.

The struggle is real, and it is good! It is a wonderful lesson about how learning works and its fantastic rewards. This is a lesson that they have invested taxpayer dollars wisely and should continue doing so.

It is also a great learning experience to young people. This should not be a luxury of summer. It should be a year-round driver of public education.
Teachers often worry about time away from classrooms

A Teacher’s Voice

Ari Klein

I have a memory of when I was in first grade and my mom and I went to my teacher’s apartment on Superior Road, near Forest Hills, with a gift for her new baby. I do not recall my teacher being absent from school, so perhaps she gave birth at the beginning of summer.

I have heard negative comments from parents and students about teacher absences, largely because things are never the same with a substitute. As part of our union’s work in arranging leaves of absence for teachers for various reasons, I can tell you that most teachers are concerned about what happens when they are not in the classroom. In fact, just today I received an e-mail from a teacher who will be on an extended leave beginning at the start of the upcoming school year. She is concerned because she has not yet received a job posting for her position.

This teacher is worried about her students. She wants to know that her teaching team will have someone who is qualified and is able to hold things together while she is out. I have counseled teachers who want to delay needed surgeries or medical treatments until summer or school holidays—times when their procedures will have the least impact on students (even though a delay might not be in the teacher’s own best interest).

One of the most common reasons for leave is maternity/child care. There is no paid time off for maternity leave/child care in our district, and a teacher must use part or, in some cases, all of her accumulated sick leave. If a teacher runs out of sick leave, she will not be paid until she returns to work and will have to cover the cost of health insurance if the absence exceeds the 12 weeks of the federal family medical leave provisions.

Because our local union is mostly female, women’s issues are important to us. When a teacher leaves or returns to work during the school year, it is difficult for everyone. In the end, teachers have to think about the welfare of their own children and families when considering how long to be away from their classrooms.

Unfortunately, for many teachers family finances dictate how long they can afford to stay home with their babies. Many women lack the protection of a union contract, and many women must work several part-time jobs to pay for their own medical insurance.

It seems unfathomable that in one of the richest nations in the world maternity and child-care leaves of absence, as well as health care, is not a right for everyone. I believe that at least one parent should be able to stay home after the birth of a child. I know that it is not always financially possible for our teachers to take an extended leave, but at least in our contract, it is an option.

The next time you are critical of a teacher’s extended absence, please consider the reason. In most instances—maternity leave or illness—our teachers remain concerned about what happens in the classroom during their absence. It is certainly a disruption, even with the best substitute, but teachers are people and, like the rest of us, occasionally have needs that necessitate an absence.

I hope that we have the will as a nation to expand basic rights for family leave to more working people. It is the right thing to do.

Ari Klein is a lifelong community member, math teacher at Cleveland Heights High School, and president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.
Follow UH’s Cooper on Instagram

Mike Cook

Cooper the Chicken, the brand ambassador for the city of University Heights, is now on Instagram. He can be followed at “cooperchicken.”

In his role as brand ambassador, Cooper celebrates all things University Heights—from parades and concerts, to lemonade stands and local businesses.

Cooper originated as a nameless stuffed toy chicken wearing a T-shirt bearing the new University Heights logo, distributed at last year’s University Heights Civic Awards. A “Name That Chicken” contest soon followed, with the name “Cooper” being submitted, independently, by Clare Nolan and Jackson Lovato.

Earlier this summer, according to lore, a bag of Bialy’s Mish Mosh mix somehow got spilled on the Cooper toy at the reception desk at UH City Hall. There must have been some magic in that Mish Mosh mix he found, as the Cooper toy came to life and began to dance around.

After explaining his love for the city, Cooper was hired by Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan to serve as the city’s first brand ambassador.

The job doesn’t pay, but Cooper is permitted to live in the basement at city hall.

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UH community safety meeting set for Aug. 13

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor and Safety Director Michael Dylan Brennan invites all residents and business owners to the city’s annual Community Safety Meeting on Aug. 13, 6–7:30 p.m., at the University Heights Library on Cedar Road. Light refreshments will be served.

Fire Chief Robert Perko, Police Chief Dustin Rogers, City Prosecutor Michael Astrab, and Law Director Luke McConville will make presentations to the community, and then take questions from the audience.

Among other topics, Perko will discuss the newly reinstated fire prevention bureau, while Rogers will discuss the city’s annual crime report.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

Local news that speaks to you

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wjcu.org/media/heights-now

University Heights Fire Chief Robert Perko will discuss the city’s fire prevention bureau at the Aug. 13 community meeting.

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Cleveland Heights City Council

JUNE 17, 2019

Council members present were Mayor Carol Roe, Vice Mayor Melissa Yasnow, Craig Cobb, Mary Durbin, Khalil Saren and Jason Stein. Michael N. Ungar was absent, but listened by telephone. The meeting lasted from 7:40 to 8:29 p.m.

City-owned property transfer

Council unanimously passed an ordinance authorizing transfer of city-owned Grandview-Byrdville Development LLC and praised the Russo family’s involvement in the Cedar Fairmount Business District. It was noted that the new 64-car private parking lot will help ease parking in the district.

Top of the Hill Parking

First reading of an ordinance to implement a temporary parking plan during Top of the Hill construction will be followed by a public comment period. The legislation was presented as Ordinance 57-2019 and can be found on the city’s website: www.clevelandheights.com.

CDGB agreements

CDBG Funding Agreement 14-1661 for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. Council members praised the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) in this endeavor. The agencies, amounts and purposes are:

- Bhutanese Community of Greater Cleveland, $8,000 for its job training program.
- Central Bible Baptist Church, $8,000 for its Neighborhood Sensors Recessive Center.
- Cedar Taylor Development Association, $10,000 for street scape enhancements.
- Family Connections of Northeast Ohio, $20,000 for its Family Schools Connections Program.
- FutureHeights, $33,000 for its Community Capacity Building Program.
- FutureHeights, $10,000 for the Cedar Lee Mini-Park Placemaking Project.
- Gasher, $8,000 for a program to help eligible residents access government assistance programs.
- Heights Emergency Food Center, $25,510 for operating and capital improvement expenses.
- Home Repair Resource Center, $117,327 for multiple loan, grant and counseling programs.
- Heights Youth Club Inc., $10,000 for its after-school/early education Plaza Program.
- Lake Erie Ink, $12,015 for its Ink Spot After School Program.
- Open Door Academy, $15,000 for its year-round enrichment program for youth living at risk.
- Severance Tower Local Advisory Council, $10,800 for its Accessible Community Garden Project.
- Start Right Community Development Corporation, $10,000 for its food bank program.

Council meeting suspension in August

Council approved suspending council meetings for the month of August.

Mayor’s announcements

Mayor Roe announced that PowerPoint presentations from the June 12 tax abatement workshops for homeowners are available on the city’s website, under Economic Development/Community Reinvestment Area (CRA).

City Council members present were Mayor Carol Roe, Vice Mayor Melissa Yasnow, Craig Cobb, Mary Durbin, Khalil Saren, Jason Stein and Michael N. Ungar. The meeting lasted from 7:34 to 8:17 p.m.

Public comments

Top of the Hill: A resident expressed concern about temporary parking plan during Top of the Hill construction and referred it to the Safety and municipal Services Committee.

Community Development Block Grant

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Meeting highlights

In addition to Cleveland Heights, the other five communities that participated were: Cherokee Village, Ark.; Dorrance County, Md.; Lexington, Ky.; Palonia, Colo.; and Ulbert, N.Y. County.

Established by Congress in 1965, NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities.

LISC focuses resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America. Since 1979, LISC has invested $20 billion to build or rehab 400,500 affordable homes and apartments and develop 66.8 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

Learn more at www.lisc.org.

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

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

Tax budget

Council adopted the 2020 tax budget and designated certain law department attorneys. Council Member Ungar addressed the speed with which the meeting moved through the finance legislation, noting that each of these issues had been fully discussed prior to this meeting.

Public talks and walkways

Council Member Dunbar celebrated the public safety and capital projects continuing progress to make the walkways ADA compliant. The Housing Committee continues to look for ways and means to create greater safety in the city’s public parks for pedestrians and bikers.

Mayor’s report

Mayor Roe praised the collaboration with FutureHeights, specifically focusing on engagement and discussion around Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park.

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

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
Heights Observer remembers Jim Henke

Jessica Schantz

Jim Henke, a prolific contributor to, and volunteer with, the Heights Observer, died on July 8 from complications related to dementia, according to media reports. He was 64.

Henke began writing for the Heights Observer in 2017, following an illustrious career that included covering music for Rolling Stone magazine and 15 years as a curator at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

A Cleveland Heights resident, Henke served as co-chair of the Heights Observer Advisory Committee with Henke.

“Jim’s contributions to the Heights Observer were substantial,” said Kim Sergio Inglis, the publication’s editor-in-chief. “I knew of his work through my own former career as a book publicist who handled publications by other Rolling Stone contributors. The fact that a writer of Jim’s calibre and reputation was willing to cover such local topics with such enthusiasm seemed remarkably pertinent. The fact that he did it, unbeknownst to us, while facing serious health issues makes his dedication even more noteworthy.

There were months when he would submit four or five stories, or more, and he could turn them around in less than a day. Given our reliance on volunteer writers to provide all of the Observer’s content, his work really shaped our paper for a time.”


Jessica Schantz is the e-news manager at the Heights Observer and a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.

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Continued from page 14

Fred D’Ambrosi

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORSD) said work at Lower Shaker Lake dam is complete for now, but Horseshoe Lake will remain drained at least through next summer, while engineers try to solve structural problems with its dam.

Both dams are categorized as Class I by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) because their failure would result in “probable loss of life.”

Contractors began draining Lower Shaker Lake in June, leaving 4-foot-deep pools of water for fish and turtles. When the lake started to refill in early July, people reported seeing dead fish.

Jeff Jowett, senior watershed team leader for NEORSD, said a fish survey taken before the project showed an overwhelming majority of the fish were carp and goldfish, considered invasive species, but any fish deaths were unintentional. He said oxygen, water temperature, or numerous other factors could have caused the problem.

Witnesses around the lake also expressed concern that a dead snapping turtle was found on South Park Boulevard, and they saw other turtles apparently struggling to move across the mud of the drained lake.

Jowett said for a recent project at Green Lake, NEORSD hired a nonprofit Herps Alive to temporarily move turtles while work was being done. Herps Alive determined there was sufficient habitat for the turtles at Lower Shaker Lake. Jowett said it’s normal for turtles to cross roads in the late spring and early summer in search of mates or nesting areas.

(See a Shaker Lakes Nature Center article on the topic here: https://shakerlakes.org/turtlecrossing/)

Aside from fish and turtles,
CH and the strong-mayor dilemma

Sarah West

The room where it happens; The art of the compromise; Hold your nose and close your eyes; We want our leaders to serve the day; But we don’t get a say in what they trade away; We dream of a brighter future; But we dream in the dark for the most part.

“The Room Where It Happens,” by Lin-Manuel Miranda

On June 11, Cleveland.com reported that “in a vote of 8-1, the city council approved An Elected Mayor (CEM), which seeks to transform the governmental structure in Cleveland Heights to a strong mayor model, met the signature quota required to place its initiative on the November ballot initiative in Cleveland Heights.” This initiative will counter the city’s proposal to retain a city-manager model. If the move to a strong mayor passes, an entirely new organizational structure for city government will have to be created. It’s a resource-heavy undertaking that deserves discussion and deliberation.

At every CH Charter Review Committee (CRC) meeting, a common refrain committee members heard was that the role of the city manager is “not accountable” to the community. As a CRC member, this made no sense to me. The city manager is directly responsible to an elected council for his/her job performance—measurable by any number of validated indices—and can be removed by a majority of that body (see City of Cleveland Heights Code of Ordinances, Article 16, Section 1608). In addition, CRC members—myself included—deducted that if the citizenry is unhappy with the performance of the city, their existing remedy is to demand a new city manager from their elected council. This straightforward solution has been rejected by CEM. Tony Cudak, campaign manager, has asserted that, “the mayor would be there [in city hall] for residents all day, every day!” Given the number of meetings, events, visits, invitations and other responsibilities any executive has, the idea that the city’s strong mayor would be sitting “all day, every day,” in an office of three dozen or so elected officials, who are responsible for the residents’ concerns is unrealistic and simply unfeasible—administrators—mayors OR city managers—resource and delegator. Cuda, a man who a mayor “would be there for residents” begs two questions: Which residents? And, more importantly, which mayor?

One reason CRC members shied away from the introduction of a strong-mayor model for Cleveland Heights was to avoid the kind of long-term, system-improvable corruption experienced by other cities where executive council members wielded a kleptocratic authority, as evidenced by popularly elected, Brooklyn Park, Beachwood and Middleburg Heights all experienced municipal disruption after their mayors landed under clouds of suspicion for poor transparency, allegations of harassment and aggressive management, or, in the case of Cleveland Heights, accusations of embezzlement. CRC members wanted to protect the city from an ertuzi executive before “siting” all mayors, political and not community based.

Although it claims to be candid-neutral, I posit that CEM has already vetted possible mayoral candidates. Some CRC members are insiders with deep connections to elected officials who, behind closed doors, expressed their own desires for Cleveland Heights to move to strong mayor. Bob Brown, president of the board of directors of FutureHeights, confirmed at the Feb. 1, 2018 CRC meeting that “in the end, the mayor [Cheryl Stephens] invited interested parties to her home to discuss such an initiative. Monty Python taught us that “strange women living in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government.” Neither is falling in line behind cults of personality and bolstering political and personal pro quo. One can only conclude that the city will not only be led by an incompetent mayor will bring a more responsive, accountable governmental structure.

Using these development projects as bargaining chips or examples of “effective” government does not address the fundamental issue. The commission spent 16 months on this process! Its members listened to public testimony, heard opinion, and considered options and improvements to the existing system. Nor did a strong-mayor system prevent Cleveland Heights from an ersatz executive government, an ill-considered proposal for water privatization—have merit. These problems can be addressed through existing checks and balances. Under the proposed strong-mayor model, the mayor is up for election every four years, offering less accountability not more.

City council appointed a Charter Review Committee to study what form of government was in the best interest of all people living in Cleveland Heights.

The committee spent 16 months on this process! Its members listened to public testimony, heard opinion, and considered options and improvements to the existing system.

By an overwhelming majority, the non-partisan members of the commission elected to keep the current system in place, with improvements including additional ethical requirements for elected officials and staff.

The advocates for a strong mayor had their say. They just didn’t get their way.

I am a Cleveland Heights voter who do their homework and consider whether a rebalancing of the checks and balances in favor of a powerful mayor is in the best interests of Cleveland Heights. What I fear for Cleveland Heights is a culture of corruption, which historically comes with politicized one-party rule. Watch out, citizens of Cleveland Heights.

Jessica Schreiber is a retired attorney, and former FutureHeights board member, and former volunteer editor and contributor to the Heights Observer.

Cleveland Heights is a community defined by its citizens’ engagement and leadership. This is especially true in times of transition and even crisis. The citizens of Cleveland Heights look to the future and will, when needed, challenge conventional wisdom by speaking truth to power through words and action.

In the 1960s, members from Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights and Cleveland led the effort to stop the planned Clark, Lee and Heights freeways, which would have run through the heart of the North Park Shaker Lakes area, and the Lee, Woodland, Mayfield Lee neighborhoods. Cleveland Heights, as we know it, would not exist if these freeways had been built.

Recently, the community came together to support a Silver Linings bond issue to rebuild its public school buildings. The outstanding restorations of Heights High is evidence of the success of this citizen-led effort.

Currently, the Citizens for an Elected Mayor committee collected 3,187 valid signatures to put a charter referendum on the ballot. This initiative is another example of citizen engagement and future-looking leadership.

This is an historic and defining opportunity for the citizens of Cleveland Heights to decide the city’s form of government—city manager or council or elected mayor and council. The outcome will determine the structure of the city’s executive and governing administration, and accountability. The voters will either accept the status quo ante or vote to change the government structure to an elected mayor who is directly accountable to voters. The future of Cleveland Heights will be determined by this vote.

The importance of the outcome of the charter initiative, the city must stop and hold in abeyance all development activities for the Top of the Hill, Meadowbrook and Lee, and Pewsey. Pewsey is a community which historically comes with politicized one-party rule. Watch out, citizens of Cleveland Heights.

Lance Mason, previously convicted of felons domestic violence, as a former volunteer editor and contributor to the Heights Observer.

Michael Knoblauch, a 46-plus-year resident of Cleveland Heights, is a former board member of FutureHeights and the Heights Observer.
Noble Neighbors is planning activities and events for the summer and the rest of 2019.

Already underway is the inaugural season of the Noble Gardeners’ Market, which takes place on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon at Noble and Roanoke roads, through Sept. 21. Backyard and community garden growers sell their fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants, and sellers and buyers have been exchanging more than greenery at the market. Gardeners are sharing growing tips, community gardens are finding new growers for their plots, and new friendships are sprouting among neighbors.

Sellers may sell freshly grown produce and plants but may not sell processed food or non-plant items. Notably, sellers are not required to live in Cleveland Heights. Buyers are encouraged to bring small bills to make purchases, because the sellers are not outfitted for selling in the way that professional market farmers would be.

Meanwhile, Green Noble, a group that is spearheading a variety of projects to promote habitat development for birds and wildlife, is partnering with Ohio State University for its final two projects to promote habitat development for insects, birds and humans, is partnering with Ohio State University for its final two projects.

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“Light Up Noble,” a neighborhood effort to display lights during the holiday season, is up to the window decorator. The neighborhood; people living outside the neighborhood are welcome to attend. Noble Neighbors is planning activities and events for the summer and the rest of 2019. Already underway is the inaugural season of the Noble Gardeners’ Market, which takes place on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon at Noble and Roanoke roads, through Sept. 21. Backyard and community garden growers sell their fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants, and sellers and buyers have been exchanging more than greenery at the market. Gardeners are sharing growing tips, community gardens are finding new growers for their plots, and new friendships are sprouting among neighbors. Sellers may sell freshly grown produce and plants but may not sell processed food or non-plant items. Notably, sellers are not required to live in Cleveland Heights. Buyers are encouraged to bring small bills to make purchases, because the sellers are not outfitted for selling in the way that professional market farmers would be.

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Brenda H. May is one of the Noble Neighborhood leaders. Check out the group’s story at www.nobleneighbors.com.

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Howard Hanna — presents — ROARING 20s GARDEN PARTY IN — CLEVELAND HEIGHTS INGLEWOOD HISTORIC DISTRICT — a benefit for — Future Heights

To find out more about the work the church is doing, visit www.cbwbaptist.org. To learn more about the church’s upcoming events, call 216-291-4406.

Central Bible Baptist Church invites community to free block party

Katrice Cain

Central Bible Baptist Church will host its annual community block party on Sunday, Aug. 10, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The free event is open to the entire community, and will take place at the church, located at 2289 Noble Road. For more than 10 years, the church has hosted the block party to engage, educate and empower adults and children of all ages. This year’s event will feature words of empowerment, food, music, games, crafts, special performances, a clothing drive, face-painting, cooking demonstrations, free Christian books and resources, and a puppet show.

There will also be free health screenings and educational materials focused on important health issues.

Free backpacks filled with school supplies for children in kindergarten through grade 12 will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information about the block party, call the church at 216-291-4406.

Katrice D. Cain is a member of Central Bible Baptist Church in Cleveland Heights.

Future Heights

Thank you to everyone who made our 3rd annual benefit a success!

Our Honorees —

Tommy Fello owner of Tommy’s restaurant since 1972

Suzanne DeGaetano manager & co-owner of Maccas Bars Books on Coventry since 1982
Save the date for Sept. 15 home and garden tour

Susan Roberts

The 42nd annual Heights Heritage Home & Garden Tour, presented by Heights Community Congress (HCC), is planned for Sunday, Sept. 15, noon to 6 p.m. This year’s selection of homes will focus on the Coventry and Fairmount neighborhoods, and showcase several elegant and historic Cleveland Heights homes, built in the early 1900s, that were designed and built by the premier Cleveland architects and builders of the era. All of the homes have maintained their original essence, often combining an old-world feel with mid-century furnishings and updated kitchens and baths.

The traditional preview party for tour sponsors, patrons and special guests will be held Saturday evening, Sept. 14, in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church’s majestic Tucker Hall. Party attendees will be greeted with a champagne cocktail, and have the opportunity to stroll through the Nicholson B. White art gallery, linger in the church’s lovely stone patio, and partake of some hearty appetizers. Lolly the Trolley will then transport guests on a sunset “sneak peak” of a select group of homes on the tour. Afterward, partygoers will be treated to a casual dinner, with food served from various tasting stations, capped off with delectable desserts and unique chocolates. Music by an ensemble of Heights High students, and a few piano selections by one of this year’s homeowner honorees, will also be a feature of the preview party. For more information about the party, or to purchase a tour sponsorship package, call the HCC office at 216-321-6773, or visit www.heightscouncil.org.

Tickets for the Sunday tour are on sale for $25 per person if purchased before Labor Day. After Labor Day, tickets will be $25. To purchase tickets online, visit HCC’s website. Tickets can also be purchased in person at the following businesses: Appletree Books, Breene’s on the Heights, Dunn Hardware (Lyndhurst), Heinen’s (South Green Road), The Stone Oven, Tommy’s restaurant, and Zagara’s Marketplace.

For information on group discounts call the HCC office or send an e-mail to info@heightscouncil.org.

Susan Roberts is the 2019 home search chair for the Heights Community Congress Tour Planning Committee.

CH Senior Center News

Amy Jenkins

Several years ago, fiber artist Martha Young decided to share her talents with the seniors at the Cleveland Heights Senior Activity Center (SAC), introducing them to the fine art of quilting. She provided her expertise and all the materials needed to begin a basic quilting project. Most of the folks who participated were new to quilting and all of them completed the initial project—a quilted table runner.

Since then, the group has continued to grow, friendships have developed, and some fantastic artwork has emerged.

Projects by the quilters will hang on the walls of the SAC for the months of July and August. In September, the quilting group will begin meeting again on the first, second and third Thursdays of the month, at 1:30 p.m. Quilters of all levels of experience are invited to participate.

Beading weaving is another unique and exquisite art form taught at the SAC, on Tuesdays at 12:30 p.m. Instructor Myriam Ribenboim shares her love of beading, teaching those in her class how to create a beaded rope and more. All that is required is a magnifying glass/ lens, and the desire to learn.

Both of these classes are offered free of charge through the enthusiasm and generosity of the instructors, who volunteer their time.

Check out the quilt show, quilting and beading classes, and other activities at the SAC. Have some fun and learn something new!

The Cleveland Heights SAC, located in the CH Community Center at 1 Monticello Blvd., offers a variety of programming for those 60 and older. A complete schedule of programs is published in the community center’s newsletter, available online at www.chparks.com.

SAC membership is $5 for Cleveland Heights residents. To sign up, bring a recent piece of mail (such as a bill) and a photo ID.

University Heights residents who would like to join SAC must first register with Patrick Grogan-Myers, University Heights community development coordinator, at 216-932-7800, ext. 203, or ppgogan@universityheights.com. Membership is $60 for University Heights seniors.

Amy Jenkins is supervisor at the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging and the Senior Activity Center. She can be reached at 216-691-7379 or ajenkins@chhts.com.
Politics and the proposed change in CH government

Alan Rapoport

Proponents of getting rid of the manager-council system of government in Cleveland Heights want a full-time elected mayor who will appoint a full-time professional city administrator. They believe this will result in a partnership between an administration focused on efficiency and an elected official focused on the big picture. But they ignore how poorly this system necessarily would work in practice because of politics.

The proponents want one supervising administrative official, hired by a mayor, to organize daily activities of the government. This sounds like not much of a change from the professionalism of the present manager-council system. But a city manager (CM) works for an entire city council. No one council member can fire a CM. The proposed new system instead would substitute a city administrator (CA) working only for one person. This CA would be a mere instrumentality of the mayor’s sole exercise of power. A CM will have the true formal education, training and experience of a public administrator. A CA, as a purely political hire, might not have any of that. What is proposed therefore would be very different from what we have now. City government would become more political and less professional.

The manager-council system was adopted as a reform measure. It was designed to remove politics from local government as much as possible. A CA purposefully is a non-political hire. A CM is subject to the professional code of ethics of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). By comparison, a CA purposely would be chosen to be politically responsive to the mayor. A CA would not be subject to the ICMA ethics code. A CM works for seven politically elected council members. But election of council members at large, and not by ward, encourages them to think more about general social problems and less about individual political demands. Their insulation by a CM from daily operations discourages the political interference with city employees. And, since firing a CM requires a majority vote, checks and balances exist that are missing when a CA can be fired by the mayor alone. Any action by a CA would be approved by the politically elected mayor. For this reason, the proposed new system would reinstate precisely the same political operations in governing that original reformers wished to avoid. These reformers instead wanted procedural assurances that the operation of local government was done with the honest, clean and largely free of politics.

The present system actually prevents had government. It encourages decisions made after an objective and professional assessment of local needs. In its place, the petitioners urge a system that makes probable executive decisions based on the whims and subjective desires of only one person.

The potential for corruption and abuse of power would increase. One mayor is easier to influence improperly than the majority of a city council. A benevolent, caring and productive person might become a strong mayor. But so might an angry, abusive, and incompetent person elected only because of the adoration of just one name. The petitioners can name some good strong mayors in other cities. But there also are many cities with great city managers and many others with bad strong mayors. Under our present form of government, and despite occasional controversy, Cleveland Heights has been professionally managed and scarred. The present system has resulted in good local government that should not be taken for granted. It is not time to take our chances with a drastic change of it.

Jack Newman and Mike Gaynier

Why uproot Cleveland Heights’ long-standing collaborative, professional government in favor of creating one person, political power center to face off with city council? Proponents [of change] claim we need “checks and balances”— as if our seven separately elected citizen council members need to be “checked” or “balanced” by some other elected person who wields veto power and appoints (and removes) all city administrative personnel, including the very highest officials. As we see all around us, it is often a prescription for conflict, waste, and civic paralysis. As we see all around us, it is often a prescription for conflict, waste, and civic paralysis.

Strong-mayor systems risk conflict and cronyism

Jack Newman and Mike Gaynier are co-chairs of Cleveland Heights Citizens for Good Government, a PAC formed to inform voters about the benefits of the council-manager form of government. Both served on the CRC.

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Heights Observer August 1, 2019
Heights High students train as first responders

Two Cleveland Heights High School students, along with a few dozen students from other districts, learned how to fight fires and respond to emergencies at the Cuyahoga County Community College Public Safety Training Center during a two-week program in June. Students learned how to hose down a controlled car fire, conduct a search and rescue operation and respond to a hazmat incident.

During a hazmat exercise, Mike Sieman, who will be a Heights High sophomore in the fall, played the role of scene commander. Wearing full fire gear, he relayed information to a dispatcher on a radio handset as a hazmat team surrounded a car at the far end of a parking lot. “We have a hazmat team entering the hot zone,” he told the dispatcher. “We have a hazmat team entering the hot zone,”

Mike Sieman of Cleveland Heights High School runs a hazmat exercise at the Tri-C Summer Public Safety Academy. He said the program inspired him to consider a career as a firefighter.

“The hands-on fire training is interesting,” Sieman said. “We’re all engaged. They are giving us different real-life scenarios.”

Located on the Tri-C Western Campus in Parma, the training center was dedicated in 2016 to address a critical need for public safety training in Northeast Ohio. A Key Bank Foundation grant of $1.4 million supports the center and includes a campaign to recruit minority and female candidates for first-responder jobs. The grant also supports the summer academy, which is tuition-free.

“Here is a need to get more women and minorities involved in public safety and give them opportunities to be in leadership roles,” said Terry Muff, project manager for public safety education at Tri-C. “This program gives them hands-on experience. We gear them up 100 percent, so they understand what it’s like.”

James Copeland, a director of the Tri-C training center, said many students in high school public safety programs return to Tri-C and become first responders. “This is where the career path starts,” he said. “It all starts with the career programs in the schools.”

Sieman said he is considering the Tri-Heights Fire Tech program, based at Warrensville Heights High School. Open to juniors and seniors, the Tri-Heights Fire Tech program started in 2016 and serves students from Warrensville Heights, Maple Heights, Bedford Heights, Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights. The program provides students 60 credit hours toward an associate’s degree, emergency medical training and a firefighter’s license, with certification. Kyler Harris, who will be a Heights High senior, also participated in the program. You can see a Spectrum News story that includes Sieman here: https://bit.ly/3oQfZMl.

Harlan Spector is a Cleveland-area writer and a communications consultant for Warrensville Heights City Schools.

Heights Observer August 1, 2019

www.heightsobserver.org
JULY 2, 2019

Board President Jodi Sources, and board members Jim Pusch, Dan Heintz, Beverly Wright and Mala Levan were present. Treasurer Scott Gainer was also present. Interim Superintendent Brian Williams was on an educational trip to Egypt. The meeting began at 7:03 p.m. and adjourned at 9 p.m.

Public comments

Solar panels: Several community members expressed their support for installing solar panels on Heights High. One audience member advised that the board must proceed with caution to ensure that the community receives the best possible outcome.

Solar panel update

When Heights High was renovated, it was made “solar ready.” The board is studying the best way to proceed with installing solar panels at the high school, and potentially other buildings in the system. After much discussion, it was proposed that a working group of community members with expertise in this area be formed, to help the board determine the best means of procuring a contract with a solar energy provider.

Food service agreement

The board approved the resolution re­newing a contract with AVI Foodsystems. PTA council had sent a letter endorsing the contract. AVI has committed to making 75 percent of the food from local sources or suppliers.

Voucher impact

The district is still losing money to state vouchers. Treasurer Gainer did not have an exact dollar amount, due to a difference in the data received from the state and his records. Board Member Heintz reported that, as a parent, he regularly receives solicitations from private schools trying to get his family to leave “the failing district” where he feels his son is getting a good education.

School resource officers

The board discussed the role of school resource officers (SROs). Board members had concerns regarding whether SROs understand that they work under different expectations and limitations while working in the schools than when working outside the schools.

Cell phone policy

There was a discussion of the district’s cell phone policy. The board directed the superintendent’s designee to draft a policy specifying that use of a cell phone in a classroom be at the discretion of each teacher.

Canterbury trees

Seven silver maple trees at Canterbury Ele­mentary School were found to be dead or dying. Four of those trees have been removed. Neighbors have expressed concern that the trees were removed needlessly. Due to the concerns, the district hired two additional arborists to assess the health of the two remaining trees that are scheduled for removal. Both arborists determined that the trees are dying and a potential danger. The district is aware of the potential danger after a tree fell on the swing set at Roxboro Elementary School last year.

Public comment opportunities

Heintz expressed a desire to allow pub­lic comments at board work sessions and special sessions. There are many districts in the state that allow public comments at these sessions. Other board members raised concerns about potential conflict with sunshine laws. Special sessions and work sessions are designated for specific purposes, and there is to be no discussion of other issues at those meetings. Community members may not be aware of, or concerned with, that constraint. After a lengthy discussion, Board President Souris­ni said that she would discuss the issue with the district’s counsel. The discussion will continue at the board retreat.

The League of Women Voters needs additional board observer volun­teers. No LWV observer was available to cover the June 24 joint BOE - Cleveland Heights City Council meeting. The LWV Height Chapter continues to seek additional observers to assure full coverage of public meetings. If you are interested in helping the LWV cover city council [Cleve­land Heights and University Heights] and school board meetings, please contact Maryann Barnes at mbarnes@lwvgreater­cleveland.org.

Look for earlier and often expanded postings of meeting summaries online at www.heightsobserver.org. See disclaimer on page 9.

The League of Women Voters needs additional board observer volun­teers.
Library launches new learning resources for kids

Isabelle Rew

On Aug. 19, Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District students will begin a new school year. With this year’s summer reading program winding down, Heights Libraries is gearing up its programs and services to support children and families with what can be a challenging back-to-school transition.

The first few weeks of school can be difficult for kids as they adjust to a new environment and face the consequences of academic probation and break with weaker academic skills,” said Sam Lapides, Heights Libraries youth services manager. This widely documented phenomenon is called “summer learning loss” or “summer slide.”

“That’s where the library steps in. Once the school year starts the library is here for everyone,” Lapides said. “At Heights Libraries, we offer staff- and volunteer-run drop-in homework help programs on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, in addition to a wide variety of activities during the week to promote and encourage a love of reading. Another popular program we began last year was ‘Paws and Read,’ which allows children to read to a trained therapy dog named Emma.”

While these in-house programs are limited to library hours, library users can take advantage of learning resources outside of library branches by checking out materials. These days, a library card provides users with much more than access to printed books and magazines; it opens doors to e-media services, premier databases, and innovative learning technologies, too.

“We are constantly evaluating our services to meet the changing needs of the community,” said Lapides. “That’s why we’ve started offering Launchpads. Launchpads are durable and secure tablets that are touch-loading interactive apps and other learning materials for children on subjects including science, writing and reading comprehension.”

“We added the Launchpads to our collections in June to give customers access to learning tools they may not have at home. Because no Internet connection is needed, the tablets can be used anywhere,” said Charlotte Blasier, youth services librarian. “They are a great mix of education and fun! They are also virtually indestructible, with a rubber bumper cover and durable tempered glass.”

The Launchpads come with locked cases and chargers. They are currently available for one week checkout from the Lee Road branch, and cannot be placed on hold or renewed.

“September is National Library Card Sign-Up Month, but we believe it’s never too early to start taking advantage of what the library has to offer,” Lapides said. “Literacy takes many forms. We’re here to meet children and families where they are and help them get to where they want to be.”

To learn more about Heights Libraries learning resources and programs, visit www.heightslibrary.org.

Isabelle Rew is the community engagement associate for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.
Library staffers are matchmakers

Sheryl Banks

Is there anything more satisfying than finding a book, movie, or piece of music that speaks to the soul? One you find yourself begging your friends and family to read, watch or listen to? The Heights Librarians Matchmakers love that feeling, too, and they want to help library customers experience it as often as possible.

Matchmakers is a group of library staffers whose mission is to help customers find materials that reflect their interests, passions and needs, that they just can’t seem to locate on their own.

“A Matchmaker will never judge you on what you like to read,” said Matchmaker Andrea Lynn. “Our role is to talk to you about what you find appealing in a book, audiobook or DVD. The Matchmakers are happy to take the time to have a conversation with you about what you like to read, watch or listen to. Our goal is for you to walk away with not just one, but several books you can’t wait to get home and start reading.”

Similar to other matching services, such as OkCupid and Match.com for dating, or the Pandora streaming music service, Heights Libraries Matchmakers can build a list of suggestions based on customers’ current likes, dislikes and interests. And while customers can certainly avail themselves of online sources, such as Goodreads for books and Rotten Tomatoes for movies, the Matchmakers offer them something online sources can’t: a one-on-one relationship with a human who cares about their experience.

“We read the awful books and watch the bad movies so you don’t have to,” said Jenny Greene, Matchmaker and librarian, with a laugh. “Everyone’s time is valuable, and there’s nothing worse than wishing you could have the time back that you spent on a movie or book that you didn’t enjoy.”

Customers can e-mail the Matchmakers at matchmakers@heightslibrary.org with a list of likes and dislikes, and receive a personalized list of suggestions. Or they can stop in and talk to a staff person, who can find a Matchmaker for them to talk to, who can customize suggestions to their specific tastes.

“The first question a Matchmaker will probably ask is about a book that you read recently that you really liked,” said Lynn. “That’s the starting point for a fun and engaging talk about books. We have all kinds of readers on the Matchmakers team. Whether you like dark suspense, science fiction and fantasy, romance, or literary fiction, we can point you toward some books we think you’ll enjoy. Everyone on the Matchmakers team loves to match up books and readers.”

Matchmakers also provide recommendations through their blogs, which can be found at www.heightslibrary.org/recommend. The blogs are searchable by reader age, genre and topic, with categories including “Beginning reading,” “Historical fiction,” “Sci-Fi” and “Self-Help,” just to name a few.

“We’re the best-kept secret in the system,” said Greene, “but we’re hoping that will change as word gets out about us.”

Sheryl Banks is the communications manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.

Library

Pavers & Remodelers

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What’s going on at your library?

Coventry Village Library
1927 Coventry Road, 216-321-3400

Tuesday, Aug. 13, 4:30 p.m.

Garden Pizza Party. The party will start off with a tour of the library’s garden, identifying herbs and vegetables that we can eat. We’ll make pizza sauce and pesto, then add cheese and some vegetables (hopefully some from the garden!) to make a pizza. The party will finish with stories about the garden.

Lee Road Library
2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Wednesday, Aug. 14, 7 p.m.

The Wild World of DNA Testing. Learn about the differences and similarities between some of the more popular DNA tests, such as those offered by 23andMe and Ancestry.com, and find out how you can use this information to help track your ancestry. Mandatory registration opens on Aug. 4.

Noble Neighborhood Library
2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Thursday, Aug. 15, 7 p.m.

Google Drive Part 1. Google Drive is a powerful tool for companies, students, and everyone else. Learn how to access your files from anywhere, and find out how Google Docs can act as a free alternative to Microsoft Word. A Gmail account and experience with Internet basics is recommended for class participants.

University Heights Library
13866 Cedar Road, 216-331-3470

Thursday, Aug. 8, 6:30 p.m.

Storytime Yoga. Children ages 5 to 10 can stretch their imaginations and muscles with Storytime Yoga. The library is partnering with Yoga Roots to teach kid-friendly yoga based on favorite books. Participants should wear clothes that allow freedom of movement, and bring yoga mats or beach towels.

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Lee Road Dog Grooming provides style and care

Libba Jackson-D’Ambrosi

Linda McFadden, who loves dogs and Ohio, has brought her advanced grooming skills to Cleveland Heights, where she opened Lee Road Dog Grooming, at 2246 Lee Road, in September 2018.

Born in Glasgow, McFadden grew up among show dogs in Jersey, Channel Islands, where her mother was a dog show judge. McFadden came to the U.S. to show dogs. First stop, Medina. Then she had a dog grooming shop in California’s Bay Area for more than 20 years. But she missed Ohio, and saw opportunity in Cleveland Heights.

McFadden knows best practices for each breed. “I’ve seen the best examples of different breeds, and try to give a pet version [of the style], maybe a bit modified so it’s easier to look after,” she said. She does all the grooming herself, serving only about four dogs a day, and prides herself in creating a relaxing experience. “I love it when people say ‘he doesn’t mind coming in here at all,’” she commented.

She has a new bathing tub and uses Artero, a gentle and hydrating grooming product line from Spain. According to McFadden, a trip to the groomer “is not a big deal” if dogs are exposed when they’re young. “Sometimes people say, ‘He doesn’t like it, that’s why I don’t bring him in all the time.’ I say it’s the opposite. If you bring him in often, he’s used to it, it’s no big deal, it’s a day at the spa. I love it when people say ‘he doesn’t mind coming in here at all,’” she commented.

She specializes in smaller dogs, and is usually booked a week in advance. To make an appointment, call 216-675-4455 (leave a message if she can’t answer).

If you drop in, you might meet YaYa and Stormy, McFadden’s toy poodles. YaYa was the 2018 Westminster Kennel Club “Best of Opposite Sex” winner (meaning she was named the best dog in her breed that was the opposite sex of the Best of Breed winner). Clients can park in front of the shop, or take a stroll on Lee Road.

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If people can bring them in once a month they can have practically any haircut. If you want to leave it two months you might want it cut a little shorter. Poodles and labradoodles are quite high maintenance. If you want to wait three months that’s fine, too, but they need to be cut quite short to avoid matting.

For those who want to bathe dogs at home, McFadden advises, “Be sure to brush them before the bath as well as after to avoid matting.”

Noting that show dogs love to be groomed, McFadden commented, “They make good house dogs, too. People love getting puppies. I tell them, ‘Puppies are great, but you might also want to consider a retired show dog. The breeders can’t keep them all, and are very happy to have them go to have a nice life with somebody.’ They’re very well trained.”

“Dropping off a dog for grooming can be like the first day at preschool, but McFadden said pet parents should be “matter-of-fact, taking a quick and calm exit. All will be well.”

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Clients can park in front of the shop, or take a stroll on Lee Road.

“I love that lots of people can walk here,” McFadden said. That way the dogs can strut their stuff on the way home.

Libba Jackson-D’Ambrosi earned a bachelor of journalism from University of Missouri. Her communications career in radio, television, education, philanthropy, water and wonder runs through seven states.
CH’s Frank creates meaningful marketing campaigns

Shari Nacson

Cleveland Heights resident Roger Frank is managing partner of Little Jacket, a branding and visual design firm that has created visual legacies for national, regional and Heights-based institutions.

Originally a Westsider, Frank and his wife, Heidi, considered moving to Cleveland Heights or Shaker Heights, “but kept being pulled to Cleveland Heights,” which they’ve called home since 2001.

“One of the things I love about the Heights is feeling like we live on an island,” said Frank. “You can park your car for the weekend and walk everywhere.”

Venturing down the hill for work, Frank enjoys Little Jacket’s studio space in Little Italy, a site of creativity and camaraderie that contains time capsules such as antique file boxes and marketing artifacts from past and current campaigns.

While Little Jacket’s clients vary, the firm is nonprofit, education and community-development institutions. Current clients include the American Library Association, Overdrive/Libby, Cuyahoga Public Library, University Hospitals, and

BUZZ ANGLE FOR ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE.

Little Jacket’s most visible local project was the CH-UH City School District’s “Public is for all” campaign, which included fence banners that surrounded Heights High during its renovation. Frank said the inspiration for that campaign came from interviews in which community members were asked what the word “public” meant to them. Over four days, the team met with a few dozen students and faculty, interviewing each for a half-hour, recording video segments, and taking the iconic black-and-gold portraits that adorned the corner of Cedar and Lee roads for several seasons.

Little Jacket’s work is “truly meaningful and deep,” said colleague and client AnneMarie Grassi, executive director of Open Doors Academy (ODA), a nonprofit that provides mentorship for more than 50 area youths plus their families, with a success rate of 100-percent completion of secondary education.

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, whose congregation literally opened its doors to community youths during after-school hours, founded ODA in 2002. Frank joined ODA’s board in 2009 as chair of the marketing committee, was board president for four years, and has been an at-large board member since 2015.

“You can see the emotion on his face” said Grassi, “He really believes in these kids. It’s true of all the organizations he works with. His work is his passion—and his passion is his work. He takes on projects that he really cares about and is invested in. He truly believes in the work he’s doing.”

Little Jacket’s campaign for the CH-UH school district recently shifted into its next phase, “Excellence is for all.” According to Scott Wortman, supervisor of communications for the district, phase two photos have transitioned from portraiture to a candid, photojournalistic style that shows community members in action.

“[Frank] brings a very special and unique connection between the district and Little Jacket because he is a district parent,” said Wortman.

With a rise in enrollment for the first time in eight years, there is optimism that the branding campaign has made a difference.

Another current Little Jacket project is marketing the College Club of Cleveland residences. Matthew Wymer, of WXZ Development, said, “It is the best experience we have ever had at a creative/design/marketing firm. They make the process fun.”

Little Jacket delivered on the developer’s wish to preserve what is historic, while offering appealing modern options, producing collateral that has a tactile, vintage feel, and relates to Frank’s favorite feature of Heights living—its walkability.

Mostly a mom, Shari Nacson, is a freelance editor, social worker, and nonprofit consultant who makes her home in Cleveland Heights. More than anything, Nacson is inspired by kids and adults who build connection through kindness.
Music Hop bands to be announced Aug. 16

Ann Kaslow

The public is invited to attend a band lineup announcement event for the seventh annual Heights Music Hop 7-9 p.m. on Aug. 16 at the BottleHouse Brewery and Meadery, 2500 Lee Road.

At the event, organizers will announce the acts for this year’s free live-music festival.

The three-day weekend of more than 60 musical performances will take place Sept. 12-14 in more than 28 venues across three business districts in Cleveland Heights. The event offers a variety of musical genres, such as classical, rock, rap, country, reggae, bluegrass and American roots.

Heights Music Hop began in 2013. Jeff Coryell, a former FutureHeights board member, believed that Cleveland Heights had the artists, musicians, resources, and public interest to warrant organizing a large-scale music festival. Other individuals, business owners, and partner organizations quickly joined the mix including fellow board member Greg Bonanno. Although he has been stationed more than 7,000 miles away for the last several years, Bonanno is still an ardent supporter.

“...what it was to become and how we were going to arrive at that point took the better part of the next eight months. The plan worked—we delivered an event that proved the Heights had an appetite for a large-scale music festival.”

Bonanno came to Cleveland Heights in 2007 to study music. He later took a job that involved programming daily performing arts events. “Music and the arts are extremely important to me,” he said. “I believe the arts are as necessary as the air we breathe and the food we eat. It is imperative we enrich ourselves with the diverse flavors of art—and it is equally important that we grow and cultivate the future food by supporting local artists.”

Bonanno said he spent countless hours working on the Hop and enjoyed every minute of it. “I worked with people who shared a passion for building a conspicuous event meant to draw attention to the community and bring members of the community together,” he said, adding, “the people are what made my time living in the Heights so memorable. They zealously advocated, by words and actions, that the Heights was a place where everyone had the opportunity to own a role in improving the community as a place to live, work and play.”

Bonanno led the Heights Music Hop Committee from 2014 until May 2015 when he took a job overseas. “After delivering a successful proof of concept, we did it again. In the second year we expanded the event to include more venues, a larger roster of artists, and tested the idea of multiple days in different business districts.”

He emphasized that the festival would not have been able to develop, grow, and sustain itself without the support of many contributors, including city officials and police, local merchants, musicians, volunteers, sponsors, committee members, partner organizations, the special improvement districts, and community members eager to participate in the festival.

“One major contributor to the early success of the Hop was Jim Henke,” said Bonanno. “From writing stories about the festival, to helping book the artists, to fundraising, and always injecting committee meetings with his sense of humor. I just learned of his passing and want to remember how he helped grow and shape this event to what it is today. May he rest in peace rockin’ out to the Music Hop of the heavens.”

This year’s Hop kicks off on Thursday, Sept. 12, in Coventry Village—continues on Friday, Sept. 13, in Cedar Fairmount; and culminates on Saturday, Sept. 14, in Cedar Lee.

Cedar Fairmount will host bands 6-9 p.m. on Sept. 12 at the following venues: Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Camp, Mac’s Backs Books, the Coventry Village Branch of Heights Libraries and the Macaron Café Cleveland.

Cedar Fairmount will host bands 6-10 p.m. on Sept. 13 at the following venues: Appletree Books, Lana Bakery Café, The Fairmount, Nighttown, Pavilion Home & Floral, Parnell’s Pub, Still Point Gallery and Green Tara Yoga.


Heights Music Hop is presented by FutureHeights, in partnership with the city of Cleveland Heights. It is supported in part by the residents of Caraboga County through a Caraboga Arts & Culture grant. The event is also made possible in part by state tax dollars allocated by the Ohio Legislature to the Ohio Arts Council (OAC). The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. Additional sponsors include: Dominion Energy, Coventry Village, Cedar Fairmount, and Cedar Lee special improvement districts; Keller National; Greg Bonanno; Small Organization Solutions; and the Heights Observer.

Heights Music Hop is free and open to the public. For more information, visit the Heights Music Hop website, www.heightsmusichop.com, its Facebook page, @heightsmusichop on Instagram, and @HeightsMusicHop on Twitter.

Mike Cook is the FutureHeights Heights Music Hop coordinator.

August season finale concerts to rock UH

Ann Kaslow

Greg Bonanno (left) with former FutureHeights board members Patty Carlisle and Clare Taft.

Cleveland’s Breakfast Club “Best Cleveland’s Breakfast Club” voted by Cleveland’s Breakfast Club and Cleveland Hot List in the 2014 Nightlife Awards.

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August season finale concerts to rock UH

Mike Cook

Cleveland's Breakfast Club and Yiddishhe Cup will conclude the University Heights Summer Concert Series this month at Walter Stinson Community Park.

An 80s-music cover band, Cleveland’s Breakfast Club will play Aug. 8. Yiddishhe Cup (aka Funk A Del) will bring its klezmer/funk/rock show to The Walt on Aug. 15. Both shows start at 7 p.m.

Cleveland Hot List voted Cleveland’s Breakfast Club “Best Local Band.” The group has opened for acts that include Coolio, Nelly, Breit Michaels, and Lita Ford.

-formed in 1988, Yiddishhe Cup is one of the top 10 klezmer bands in America, according to Shalom America Worldwide. The band has played throughout the United States at festivals, colleges, and hundreds of Jewish celebrations.

Cleveland’s Breakfast Club will play University Heights for the first time, while Yiddishhe Cup is a returning favorite. For a preview of the bands in performance, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEZyxiNNK and www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6N6aMWDt.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

**August season finale concerts to rock UH**

Ann Kaslow

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Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

**August season finale concerts to rock UH**

Ann Kaslow

August season finale concerts to rock UH

Mike Cook

Cleveland's Breakfast Club and Yiddishhe Cup will conclude the University Heights Summer Concert Series this month at Walter Stinson Community Park.

An 80s-music cover band, Cleveland’s Breakfast Club will play Aug. 8. Yiddishhe Cup (aka Funk A Del) will bring its klezmer/funk/rock show to The Walt on Aug. 15. Both shows start at 7 p.m.

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**August season finale concerts to rock UH**

Ann Kaslow
Heights Arts kicks off August with diverse lineup

Lauren Freeman

As the summer winds down, cool events are happening at Heights Arts.

August kicks off with Show Off, an exhibition curated by Heights Arts’ High interns Ava Collyer and Mia Miller, featuring art by Heights High students. Show Off’s opening reception is Friday, Aug. 2, 6–9 p.m., and the show runs through Aug. 25.

On Saturday, Aug. 3, at 7 p.m., Heights Arts hosts a fight to the death in 17 syllables—the annual Haiku Death Match. It’s bigger than ever this year, moving to the larger stage of Cain Park’s Alma Theater. Eight poets, including 2018 defending champion Cordelia Eddy, will go head-to-head, vying to win the title of Haiku Death Match Master.

Audience members vote to determine the winner. Tickets are $25 ($17 for Heights Arts members) in advance, and $28 ($20 for members) at the door. Member tickets can be purchased at Heights Arts, or online at www.heightsarts.org. General tickets can be purchased online at www.cainpark.com, in person at the Cain Park box office, or at the door the night of the match. This event is co-presented by Heights Arts and Cain Park.

In Heights Arts’ Spotlight Gallery, a show of works by printmaker Jennifer Leach, on the theme of female identification, will be on view through Aug. 11.

August at Heights Arts wraps up with the Friday, Aug. 30, opening of Untouched: The Digital Paradox.

Matthew Hollowell, professor and chair of jewelry and metals at the Cleveland Institute of Art, is guest curator for the show, a group exhibition that explores the evolving role of technology in the creation of art. Artists in the show include George Kozman, Barry Underwood, //Benezet.Vogl (Margarita Benezet and Markus Vogl), Janice Lesman-Mos, Marcus Brathwaite, Tony Ingrisano, Yasiel Valdes, and Matthew Hollowell. The Aug. 30 opening reception is 6–9 p.m.

For more information on Heights Arts programs and events, visit www.heightsarts.org.

Lauren Freeman is a marketing intern at Heights Arts.

Burning River Baroque opens its eighth season

Paula Maust

Thoughtfully crafted programs inspired by the current social climate are once again at the heart of Burning River Baroque’s upcoming season, which will shed light on unconventional 17th-century women and issues surrounding mental health.

The group, known for both socially motivated programming and dynamic interpretations, will open its eighth season with a performance of A Mad, Burning Desire on Aug. 22 in Cleveland Heights.

The program highlights the extraordinary accomplishments of the first English actresses who gained the legal right to take the public stage in the early 1660s. Many of them capitalized on early modern society’s fascination with mental illness and catapaulted themselves to fame by portraying characters who descended violently into lovesick madness on the Restoration stage. English philosophers and medical experts alike began to think of psychological maladies as medical conditions requiring treatment by doctors rather than as spiritual deficiencies to be handled by religious authorities over the course of the 17th century.

At the visual epicenter of London’s cultural fascination with madness was Bedlam, a facility that was transformed from a dilapidated hospital into a sprawling mental institution in 1676. Wealthy visitors regularly came to Bedlam to pay to be entertained by those society deemed insane. This cultural phenomenon of making a spectacle of the mentally ill converged with spectacular mad scenes that were brought to life by the first English actresses in the Restoration theater. A Mad, Burning Desire features the mad songs by Henry Purcell, John Eccles, Godfrey Finger and John Blow that captivated London’s theater-going audiences in the 1690s.

Burning River Baroque will take audiences far beyond the music in these performances. Engaging dialogues about the ways the perception of mental health issues in the early modern period is directly related to the stigma surrounding mental health in contemporary times will challenge audience members to consider how we might address the mental health crises many are facing today.

Praised as a group that “left an indelible imprint on my psyche” (Boston Musical Intelligence), Burning River Baroque offers vibrant musical performances that inspire engaging dialogues and meaningful social change. You can experience A Mad, Burning Desire on Aug. 22 at 7:30 p.m., at a house concert in Cleveland Heights. A suggested donation is $20. RSVP at www.burning-river-baroque.org for the address and to reserve your spot. Other performances of A Mad, Burning Desire will take place in Cleveland Heights in October. You can find more information at www.burning-river-baroque.org.

Paula Maust is co-director, with Malina Rauschenhek, of Burning River Baroque. She holds graduate degrees from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and the Cleveland Institute of Music. She teaches classes in music theory, history, keyboard skills, and aural skills at the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University.
The water’s fine, or so I hear

David Budin

I was sitting at Cumberland Pool recently, under a big umbrella, so it was cool (in the shade). I hang out at Cumberland sometimes, not to swim, but to watch my grandchildren. I used to go there to swim, but it’s been a while . . . like, since I was 9.

My mother took me to Cumberland’s baby pool (which was located in a different part of the park then) for my first six years, and then I started hanging out at the big pool with friends. I always felt as though something was wrong, though, and it took me a couple of years to figure out what it was. I finally realized: It was that I hated swimming. Everything about it.

I stopped going. Forever. Until I began frequenting the pool again when my grandchildren started going. But I don’t swim there, or go into the water, or dress in anything other than street clothes, or leave my chair once I sit down. I’m just there.

So, when I was sitting at Cumberland the other day, my mind drifted back to the times I did enjoy myself back to the times I did enjoy myself—when I got to Heights High and was forced to take swimming lessons (you had to have, and pass, as many semesters of swimming class as you had semesters of high school in order to graduate). The school, with about 1,500 boys, had only about 50 men’s swimsuits. And you couldn’t bring your own. That meant that only the boys whose swimming classes were held during first period, and maybe second, would get swimsuits to wear. Boys and girls had separate swimming pools, but, still . . .

So, if you were lucky, you’d get first-period swimming, even though it might be only an hour after waking up, and eating breakfast, and, for most of the school year, during the winter. And even if you were lucky enough to get a swimsuit to wear, only about 12 of the 50 had waist sizes anywhere near 30. Most were somewhere between 46 and 64. So when a kid like me (at the time), with a 32-inch waist, put on suit with a 62-inch waist, and tied the string as tight as possible, and got into the water, the suit turned into a balloon, full of air, which made him look like a lily pad, and then, eventually, the air came out. At which point everyone around him backed away and pointed out, loudly, that giant bubbles were coming out of . . . his swimsuit.

I was able to get out of swimming class a couple of semesters with some kind of trumped-up medical excuse. (Bone spurs? I don’t remember.) And I knew I was going to quit school toward the end of my third year (of three), so I just skipped swimming class, and all gym classes, that term. But that still left three semesters when I couldn’t get out of swimming.

The first time, when they futilely tried to get me to accomplish something, after I told them that I couldn’t swim at all, I tried to trick them. They told me to stand in the shallowest end, and pick up a coin that was on the bottom of the pool. I pushed it over and then up the wall with my foot, while holding onto the side, and grabbed it. I showed it to them, thinking that they would then leave me alone. But they said, “Good. Now you know you can put your head under the water, so let’s go to the next step.” I admitted what I had done, so they just spent the rest of the classes—that semester, and the other two—trying to figure out how to deal with me, which they never did.

But, anyway, I like hanging out at Cumberland. And the grandchildren love the water, and they’re learning how to swim. Which is a great thing. As long as someone who isn’t me has to go in with them.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications, the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author, and a professional music critic and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop music history.