



HEIGHTS OBSERVER

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Vote for Best of the Heights in 2020

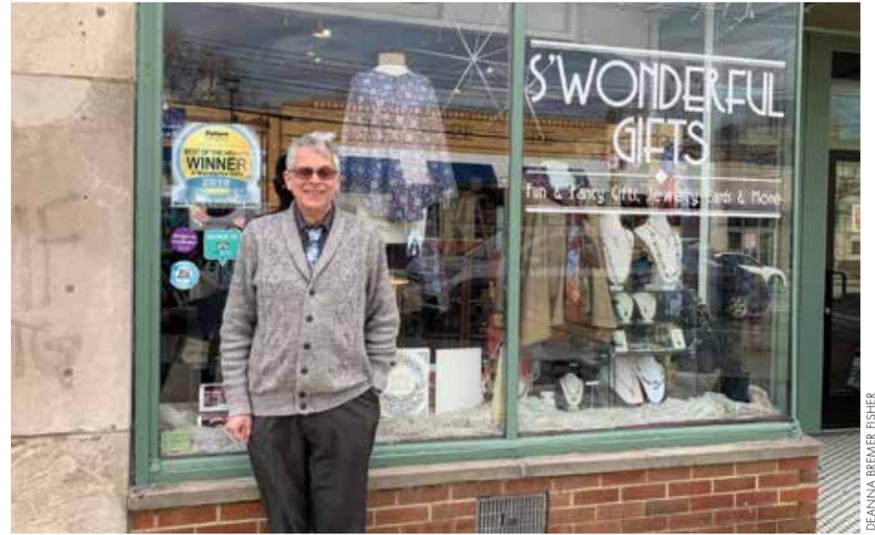
Deanna Bremer Fisher

The Heights prides itself on being home to many locally owned, independent businesses. Beginning Jan. 1, Heights residents can show their appreciation for these businesses by voting for their favorites in the FutureHeights 2020 Best of the Heights Awards contest.

Since 2005, FutureHeights—a nonprofit community development corporation—has conducted the Best of the Heights to recognize the unique attributes of Heights businesses, and their contributions to the local economy. Each year, residents cast their votes for their favorite businesses by nominating them for an award in a variety of categories.

FutureHeights has selected 12 categories for this year's ballot, including Best New Restaurant or Bar, and Best New Business.

Residents are encouraged to



Bill Wort, owner of S'Wonderful Gifts, stands outside his shop on Lee Road. S'Wonderful won Best Place to Find Unique Gifts in 2019.

vote for their favorite businesses online at www.futureheights.org, or by using the paper ballot that will appear on the last page of the January and February print issues of the *Heights Observer*. Voting will conclude Feb. 15, and winners will be announced in the April issue of

the *Heights Observer*.

All Cleveland Heights and University Heights businesses are eligible to be nominated.

“Those of us who live in Cleveland Heights and University Heights sometimes take it

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Library board welcomes new members

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest board members, Patti Carlyle and Gabe Crenshaw, whose terms begin in January 2020.

Carlyle will serve a full seven-year term, replacing Chris Mentrek, whose term ends December 2019. Crenshaw will serve a two-year term, replacing outgoing board member Suzann Moskovitz, who is leaving after serving five years.

Carlyle, a University Heights resident for 14 years, is the director of content marketing at Brand Muscle, a Cleveland-based Internet marketing company. She also serves on the Fair Housing Board of University Heights, and has volunteered for a variety of CH-UH nonprofits over the years, including Canterbury Elementary School PTA, the Heights Music Hop, Lake Erie Ink, and FutureHeights, where she also served on the board.

“Years of local activism seem to have pointed me here and I'm so excited to join the Heights library



Outgoing library board member Chris Mentrek dressed as the Mad Hatter for an Alice in Wonderland-themed children's program.

board,” said Carlyle. “I'm looking forward to applying my knowledge of, and affection for, our community to optimize programs, keep the CH-UH school and library connection strong,

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CH-UH district places operating levy on March 17 ballot

Cathan Cavanaugh

The CH-UH City School District has voted to place a 7.9-mill operating levy on the March 17 ballot.

The school board made the decision on Dec. 9, after reviewing a report from its citizen-led Lay Finance Committee (LFC), delivered by committee member Ryan Routh at its Nov. 5 meeting. The report stated that the district will face a clear need for increased operating support in the first half of 2020 in order to avoid cuts to educational programming.

“Our committee has carefully reviewed the financial projections for the CH-UH school district,” said Routh. “We believe that an operating levy of 7.9 mills is the minimum amount needed to sufficiently cover the costs to operate the district. This increased support would have to be approved by voters in March 2020 in order to avoid harmful budget cuts.”

The LFC recommended a levy of 7.9–9.5 mills.

On Dec. 9, the CH-UH Board of Education (BOE) voted to accept the minimum, 7.9 mills, which will cost homeowners an additional \$23 a month per \$100,000 of home value.

“The state budget that was passed this summer holds CH-UH funding flat, and there is no reason to believe that state funding will increase,” Routh continued. “Furthermore, future cuts are already included in the forecast. The dis-

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Construction on Top of the Hill to begin

Deanna Bremer Fisher

Construction on the mixed-use Top of the Hill (TOH) project is expected to begin the first quarter of 2020. The project—on approximately four acres of city-owned property at the corner of Cedar Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard, at the top of Cedar Hill—is highly visible and serves as a gateway between the Heights and University Circle. Its develop-

ment has been a longtime goal of the city.

The city's Architectural Board of Review approved final design drawings for the \$84-million TOH project in October 2019. The project calls for 261 market-rate luxury apartments, more than 11,000 square feet of first-floor commercial space, approximately 25,000 square feet of green space, a 550-space parking garage, and additional surface parking.

Since the demolition of Doctors' Hospital in 1969, the site has primarily been a surface parking lot, known as Municipal Parking Lot #9 (MPL #9), serving residents of nearby apartments and condominiums, as well as patrons of local businesses, such as Night-town.

The developer, Flaherty & Collins Properties, has prioritized the construction of the

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Letters Policy

The *Heights Observer* welcomes letters to the editor. They must be submitted electronically, along with the writer's name, phone number and e-mail address, to: www.heightsobserver.org/members.

HEIGHTS OBSERVER

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About the Observer

The *Heights Observer* is not an ordinary newspaper; it is a nonprofit publication for residents of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

The *Observer* has no 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. Anyone in 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 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 "Member Center" 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 216-320-1423 or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

Articles to be considered for the February issue must be submitted by Jan. 13. We 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.

Parent volunteers urge support for public schools

To the Editor:

As many in our community are already aware, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education has voted to place an operating levy on the March ballot. I am a member of Citizens for Our Heights Schools, a committee of parents and residents volunteering to ensure the successful passage of this levy. It is never easy to step up for this task, but I do it because I know it is necessary.

The way Ohio funds public education—long deemed unconstitutional—requires districts to return to voters every few years just to keep pace with inflation. Through careful budgeting and cutting of excess expenses, CH-UH has stretched the most recent levy to last four years instead of the projected three. But this year, there is additional need due to the devastating financial effect that EdChoice vouchers have had on our public schools.

The expansion of vouchers to include children who have never attended district schools, coupled with the state's two-year freeze on public school funding, means that CH-UH pays out more dollars in EdChoice vouchers to private and religious schools than it receives in per-pupil funding from the state—up to \$10 million more. There is simply no way to close this gap while continuing to provide a high-quality education for our district's children without asking voters for their support. If this levy doesn't pass, the projected \$5 million in needed cuts would include 67 full-time staff—a loss that would be felt by every student across the district.

You will hear a great deal more about this issue in the coming weeks and months, both in our local news and on social media, and I urge you all to have an open mind. Listen to the experts, consider the importance of strong public schools to a community, ask respectful questions when you need to. In the end, I hope you will stand by me and the rest of the steering committee—Kristi Bidinger, Phil Trimble, Saroya Queen-Tabor, Andrea C. Turner, Jon Benedict, Karen Rolfe, and David Tabor—in voting yes for our public schools.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

Cleveland Heights

(A freelance writer for the CH-UH City School District, Dietrich Gallagher wrote this letter as a volunteer.)

TOH dog park is badly situated

To the Editor:

This is a small detail with long-term impact:

At the last Architectural Board of

Review Top of the Hill meeting, the developer and the architect unveiled a dog park for the project. At first, it doesn't sound bad, but it will be located across from the main entrance to the Buckingham Condominiums.

Very bad choice. The Buckingham's front door will be across from a potentially noisy and smelly space. Ah, but they said that everyone will follow the rules and if they don't they will be tracked down using their dog's DNA.

It's almost guaranteed that there will be problems. It is unfair that Buckingham residents will have to deal with this on a daily basis. Doesn't the city realize that this is their front door? Would any of us be pleased with this addition across from our main entry? Can we be more realistic about this?

Right now there is a small collection of boulders at the corner, with existing trees and bushes that look fine. The plan is to remove all of that existing landscaping, add fake turf, plant along the sidewalk side, and locate the dog turf toward the front-door entry lobby. If the landscaping was cleaned up and left alone, it would continue to provide some screening.

To be fair to these residents, the park should be placed near one of the new apartments since it will be used by those residents. Smelly planning. Noisy planning. Bad planning!

Richard Bozic

Cleveland Heights

TOH is not for the middle class

To the Editor:

At a recent CH City Council meeting I heard a couple of council members say that the Top of the Hill (TOH) project will have a positive impact on Cleveland Heights' middle class. May I suggest that no members of the middle class will be able or willing to live there; it is not aimed at us.

TOH is a "luxury" project. Comparing it with the nearby One University Circle, a similar project, is instructive in learning what we are in for. At One University Circle, studio, or efficiency, apartments start at \$1,500 per month. Each bedroom adds about \$1,000 per month, so two- and three-bedroom units cost about \$3,500 and \$4,500 per month, respectively.

I'm a member of the middle class and the age of many "empty nesters"—a demographic the developers and city leadership have said TOH is trying to attract. I'm certainly not interested in moving into an efficiency apartment, and I'm not about to move into a \$3,500 to \$4,500 apartment. Most of us didn't become members of the middle class by spending these rates on rental housing!

We have been promised that

TOH will bring with it green space. There are, in fact, three "green" spaces; but one of these is a proposed dog park that will be fenced in under lock and key. It is aimed at the luxury tenants of the project, and its greenness will actually come from Astro-Turf—as if painting plastic green still constitutes a "green" space. So my neighbors and I in the Buckingham Condominium (surrounded by TOH) will be able to enjoy all the noise and odor from a dog park, but not actually take part in it.

Top of the Hill seems to be coming, like it or not. I just hope that most of our Cleveland Heights citizenry understand the scope of what we're looking at.

Don King

Cleveland Heights

LEVY continued from page 1

district is projecting that [it] will be able to find an additional \$750,000 in budget cuts each of the next three fiscal years. This will become progressively more difficult."

"It's clear that the time to place a levy on the ballot has come," said Jodi Sourini, BOE president. "The board and administration have placed great importance on reducing costs and using taxpayer dollars wisely, without compromising classroom instruction. But we are at the point where any more significant cuts to personnel and services, like those that would be necessary without a levy, would drastically reduce the quality of our children's education. We cannot let that happen."

School districts in Ohio are financed with a combination of federal, state and local funds. At the state level, school districts receive funding from the Ohio Department of Education's general revenue funds and Ohio Lottery profits. At the local level, school districts receive funding from locally levied property taxes, which are prohibited by state law from rising with inflation. This is why the CH-UH City School District, like other districts in Ohio, must periodically ask residents for increased operating support to pay for educational needs, such as teachers and programming.

[Editor's note: The last operating levy to be passed in the district was in November 2016, in the amount of 5.5 mills. Through "responsible fiscal management," the district says it has "stretched finances to make it last for four years—a year longer than anticipated." Regardless of whether voters pass the 7.9-mill levy, the 5.5-mill levy, like all previous levies, will continue. Once passed, levies are ongoing. Scott Gainer, district treasurer, was unable to provide the current total levy amount before the *Heights Observer's* January press date.]

Cathan Cavanaugh is the supervisor of communications for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

Out-of-control school spending is destroying the Heights

Geoff Johnson

The CH-UH school district spends money at astronomically high levels, and it's devastating our community. The district's budget shows that it plans to spend \$615 million over the next five years. That is \$200 million to \$250 million more than every other comparable district in Greater Cleveland—other than Shaker; we are “only” spending \$80 million more than them.

Do you have the income to pay more than \$72,000 in property taxes, the highest rate in Ohio, on your \$130,000 home over the next 12 years, or \$132,000 on your \$130,000 home over the next 20 years? This is what is coming down the pike if we don't dramatically change course.

Is it more expensive to educate low-income students? Then why does Euclid, a district with more students than Heights, and one that also pays out vouchers, spend \$399 million vs. our \$615 million?

When you run the numbers out into the future, they truly become absurd. At annual 2.5-percent budget growth, the CH-UH district will spend more than \$1 billion more than Euclid over the next 20 years, to educate fewer kids.

Then you look and see that our median household income is \$36,397. And when you run the

numbers, at 2.5-percent yearly budget growth, you see that because of our enormous budget we have astronomical property tax increases coming over the next 3 to 12 years. And you see that our tax delinquency rates are already increasing to frighteningly high levels, which is truly terrifying because it means we are destroying our taxpayer base.

And, no, this isn't about vouchers. Even if you take the entire \$28-million five-year voucher expense off the table without offsetting the corresponding state revenues (which the district has yet to show), we still are spending \$52 million more than Shaker, \$171 million more than Solon, \$193 million more than Strongsville, and \$188 million more than Euclid.

The numbers make it extremely clear that we lack the income base to support our property taxes at current tax levels. Raising them further will destroy the Heights.

For the sake of our community and its long-term viability, we have to vote “NO” on the 2020 levy. The current path is not close to being sustainable, which is not fair to anyone, especially our kids.

Geoff Johnson is an attorney who has lived in Cleveland Heights for more than 20 years. His wife graduated from Heights High.

TOH project uses doublespeak

Joyce Rajki

Doublespeak, according to Wikipedia, is language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words.

Here in Cleveland Heights we're told that Top of the Hill (TOH) will provide luxury apartments. Examples of luxury are difficult to pick out, because the architectural drawings that have been provided to citizens are missing critical pages, and the pages that have been provided frequently lack detail. The developer says the lane between the tower building and the garage will be “stamped asphalt.” Stamped asphalt seems cheap. How can cheap be luxury?

One construction method—that for the 500-plus car garage—definitely does not fit into the luxury category. It is cast-in-place (similar to the notorious University Square Target garage), rather than poured-in-place, which the city has at Cedar Lee and Coventry.

Green space is another double-speak item. As it stands now, the TOH project has one publicly accessible green space, on the slope with a retaining wall, west of Nighthtown.

The other “green space” is the gated (for TOH tenants only) AstroTurf dog park that is replacing a grove of trees at the front door of the Buckingham Condominiums. Well, I do admit that AstroTurf is usually green.

Another example of double-speak involves two of the four TOH ordinances that CH City Council passed on Dec. 2. Labeling two of them as “housekeeping” issues is deceitful, because most people do not relate “housekeeping” to financing. At the same meeting, a second amendment to the TOH Development Agreement was passed on “emergency” basis—“necessary for the preservation of public peace, health, and safety.” (A fourth ordinance seemed presented in a straightforward manner, though it involved a surprising \$30-million bond issue.)

Refer to George Orwell's classic essay, “Politics and the English language,” which discusses the distortion of language for political purposes.

Joyce Rajki, a 49-year resident of Cleveland Heights, is advocating for quality design and construction that will stand the test of time.

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Empty nesters should flock to TOH

Lee Batdorff

I'm pleased to learn that Cleveland Heights City Council, by a 6-1 vote, approved [what I understand to be] the proposed \$84-million, 10-story Top of the Hill (TOH) project with 275 market-rate luxury apartments.

When I moved to Cleveland Heights in 1966, I lived near an eight-story brick building facing Cedar Road west of Fairmount Boulevard, a former apartment house that served as Doctors' Hospital. Someone, I don't recall who, startled me by saying, "Don't go to that hospital. It is a bad hospital!"

Eventually Doctors' Hospital moved to Mayfield Heights, and now is Hillcrest Hospital, part of the Cleveland Clinic. From what I can tell, it is a good hospital. The former hospital site, however, has been a parking lot ever since.

Several proposals were made for this site over many decades. It's not easy trying to balance how such a property is put to the highest and best use for all of Cleveland Heights and its taxpayers—while not unduly infringing on nearby neighbors. Some people will never be happy.

In 1998, as an activist on a public policy issue representing the Ohio Sierra Club, I presented a slide show, "Suburban Sprawl is at Your Expense," funded by the George Gund Foundation. A tenet

[of it] was making use of underutilized properties in the city to bring in more tax dollars. I made a presentation at the Fairmount Presbyterian Church before an audience of Cleveland Heights citizens. Two women argued that I was advocating wrecking the area with new development. I was flummoxed. I felt better when then Cleveland Heights Mayor Edward Kelley met me in his office and offered support to continue. Unfortunately this project did not continue.

Later, about 2002, still an activist, I attended meetings between members of the Hessler Neighborhood Association (HNA) and University Circle Incorporated (UCI) over a proposed large residential and commercial project along Euclid Avenue at Ford Drive, the site of which was then a gravel parking lot known as "The Beach." Two ladies from HNA were in attendance. I watched them vocally work over UCI's presenters as with verbal howitzers. I recalled my tormenters at the church. Except, this time I was on the side of the protesters.

Because the project site abutted Hessler properties, neighbors had a right to be heard in the design of the project that finally became Uptown. While some Hessler supporters are not happy

with what Uptown became, I think it did a good job not placing a tall building directly against neighboring smaller-scale residential properties.

Mostly three-floor apartment houses about the TOH project site. Several four- and five-floor apartment houses are nearby, and eight-story Waldorf Towers is 1,200 feet north of TOH. The planned 10-story TOH apartment house is about 200 feet from the nearest two- to three-story residences, to the south across wide Cedar Road.

TOH is designed to serve "empty nesters" among others. I've long known the Spencer family who lived in a single-family home on E. Monmouth Road in Cleveland Heights. After a few decades, with their three children grown up and gone, Pete and Heidi Spencer wanted to downsize from their, so to speak, "empty nest." They first looked in Cleveland Heights and found nothing. To stay relatively close to their former home, they moved to a suite in a big apartment house in Shaker Square, paying taxes to Shaker Heights and Shaker schools.

My hope is that TOH provides a place for affluent Cleveland Heights residents to stay in Cleveland Heights, and keep their tax payments here, too

Lee Batdorff has been a Cleveland Heights resident since 1966.



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Requiem for responsible development in CH

Joan Mallick

Barring a miracle, CH City Council will pass financial legislation this month that will allow construction to begin on the Top of the Hill (TOH) project. This legislation will complete the package of financial transactions associated with the project. The city has yet to produce a comprehensive financial statement indicating revenues and costs to the city for TOH. At public meetings, city representatives discuss revenues but never costs. I searched council minutes, legislation, and TOH contracts to calculate the revenues and costs shown below. They show that TOH will be a major, long-term drain on city finances.

Total estimated revenues to CH over 30-year term of agreement: \$20,250,300

- Land lease at \$10/year: \$300
- Payment by developer in lieu of taxes (tax rebate) to schools of \$400,000 per year: \$12 million
- Payroll taxes of new residents and employees of \$275,000 per year: \$8.250 million

Estimated direct costs, plus revenue loss, to CH: \$43,970,000

- \$1.8 million grant to developer paid by City Revenue Bonds, including interest: \$2.3 million
- Loss of revenue from parking garage (assumes 300 spots will be rented at a rate of \$30/month):

\$5.67 million

- Tax rebates to developer of \$1.2 million per year: *\$36 million (*The city argues this is not a cost because it is money never received. The TIF agreement requires the developer to make payments in lieu of taxes so funds are deposited to a city/school system account. The city sends 25 percent to the school system and rebates the rest to the developer. This is equivalent to someone sending a check for a \$100 debt and asking for \$75 back. Most people would conclude that it cost \$75 to get \$25, not that the \$75 was lost revenue.)

Net cost to CH: \$23,719,700

The developer's website boasts \$2 billion in completed construction. Figures from other projects show that the developer gets an average of 36 percent of its funding from public subsidies. At the current estimated cost of \$75 million for TOH, the developer will be getting 32 percent of its funding from Cleveland Heights. Clearly this is a profitable company that is astute at securing public funds to guarantee, if not enhance, its profits.

City representatives tell CH residents that no development would occur without subsidies. However, by insisting that TOH be built as a single entity, the city has shut out developers who would be more likely to build smaller build-

ings without giant subsidies. Studies of subsidized projects in other cities suggest that slower, incremental development would generate nearly the same revenue as highly subsidized projects. There is no evidence that the city has seriously sought alternatives to this massive development.

The hotel, office space, retail space and for-sale townhouses that were part of the original plans for TOH were removed. These eliminated components would have created more payroll taxes, bed-use taxes, and property taxes from permanent residents, resulting in more revenue for the city and less for the developer, who will collect rent in addition to subsidies under the revised plans.

City officials either do not understand the long-term ramifications of publicly subsidized projects, or do not care about kicking the debt can down the road. Their motivation for constructing this behemoth seems to be the satisfaction of saying they completed a project that has been discussed for decades. They have demonstrated that they are not acting in the best financial interests of residents.

The next CH City Council meeting is Jan. 6. Every CH citizen should contact council members and tell them not to pass the upcoming financial subsidies for TOH.

The TOH project might not be in everyone's backyard, but there

are projects coming soon to the Cedar/Lee/Meadowbrook, Severance, and Noble/Nela neighborhoods. Early indications are that large subsidies are being planned for those projects, as well. Failure to hold council accountable for TOH finances will allow its members to continue to drive the city toward economic ruin. The current financing of TOH sounds a death knell for fiscally responsible development in CH, now and in the future.

Joan Mallick is a 48-year resident of Cleveland Heights. She cannot imagine living anywhere else, but is concerned about the direction the city is going in, in terms of viable economic development.



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Lake Erie Ink inspires new growth

Sarah Kloos

Just a few months after I graduated from college in 2018, I sat down for an interview with Amy Rosenbluth at Lake Erie Ink (LEI). I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but Amy listened to my ramblings and half-assured statements about my qualifications. I had experience as a writing tutor, working with children, and being a member of a team. I had never stood in front of a classroom or created a lesson plan. Instead of that being a problem, [Amy presented it] to me as an opportunity—a way to expand my professional skills. With each question, I replied with, "Sure, I could do that." LEI seemed to fit my assortment of interests and proposed a new challenge, so I dove in.

Task by task I began to take on more of a role in LEI's marketing and communications, something I was never trained in during college, but an area of work that intrigued me. Designing flyers, organizing e-newsletters, and planning promotional posts has shown me that my organizational prowess also has a creative side, one that makes itself known in the office as well as the classroom.

I was also given a role as a teacher in poetry workshops and journalism programs without hesitation, which allowed me to flex my skills even further.

Over the past year at LEI, I have

witnessed growing confidence in individual students. I have learned the benefits of the push and pull, the give and take. I have seen powerful words come from tiny hands. I have learned a deeply rooted patience during middle-school poetry workshops, and the ability to prioritize perspective after feeling that I had failed. I have discovered the joy of a teacher, smiling at the visible growth of her students. I have experienced many firsts inside the classroom and out, all crafted into a haphazardly arranged nonprofit collage. And it is beautiful, peeling edges and all.

The staff at LEI encouraged my interests, listened to my ideas, and fostered a work environment of dedication and respect that I strive to find wherever my future takes me. LEI is not only a writing space for youth, but a place of mentorship for young adults like myself in the phase of transition. While LEI focuses on fostering creativity in youth, it is an asset to folks of all ages in our community. I am incredibly grateful for all that I have learned over the past year at LEI and am confident that I will be able to dive into any new challenge with both feet.

Sarah Kloos graduated from Hobart and William Smith Colleges with a bachelor's in English. She currently lives and works in Cleveland Heights, but will be moving to Chicago in January.

BEST OF THE HEIGHTS continued from page 1

for granted that we have so many choices to shop and eat at unique, locally owned businesses," said Robert N. Brown, FutureHeights board president. "When my wife and I travel outside of the Heights, we quickly realize how our shopping and eating choices are often limited to national chains. In our Heights community, connecting with the familiar long-term owners and employees of our businesses makes shopping and dining more than a business transaction. For us, many of these businesses 'feel like home!'"

According to a study conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, each dollar spent at a locally owned, independent business returns three times more money to the local economy than one spent at a chain. Because local businesses are often owned by people who live in the community, those owners have a natural interest in the community's long-term health, and many participate in community causes.

"So much of Cleveland Heights is within walking distance of a commercial district offering a variety of businesses," said Michael Bier, chair of the FutureHeights Planning & Development Com-



mittee. "There are many communities across the country that wish they could say that. We are so lucky to have not only nearby districts, like Noble, Cedar Lee and Taylor, but they are lined with shops, restaurants and services that are extremely valuable to our community. Supporting them is part of the pleasure of living in the Heights."

To vote in the Best of the Heights Awards, visit www.futureheights.org, or fill out and return the paper ballot. For more information, call FutureHeights at 216-320-1423 or send an e-mail to info@futureheights.org.

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



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Seventh annual CH Democracy Day is Jan. 30



HEIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

We think many readers will agree that democracy in America has taken a beating over the past several decades. In particular, since the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision 10 years ago this month, ever greater amounts of money have flooded our electoral process. The dangers posed by unregulated corporations have become increasingly evident to the average person. Still, the effects are insidious. All of us have learned to speak the language of commerce, and do it with scarcely a thought: hospital patients are now health care consumers; library patrons have become customers; even the word "citizen" has been replaced with "voter," "taxpayer," or "stakeholder."

There will be some plain speech about American democracy at Cleveland Heights City Hall on Thursday, Jan. 30, starting at 7 p.m., when Cleveland Heights celebrates its seventh annual Democracy Day. Whatever your political persuasion, we hope you will attend, and consider adding your voice.

Democracy Day consists of a public hearing hosted by CH City Council, "to examine the impact on our city, our state and our nation of political influence by corporate entities and big money." Anyone who so chooses

may speak for up to five minutes on this topic. Please understand: the term "corporate entities" is deliberate. It includes nonprofit as well as for-profit corporations, labor unions, and professional associations (which often engage in lobbying). These legal entities all have, and should have, certain statutory rights, but they are not entitled to any of the constitutional rights originally intended for human persons. Corporate entities do not vote, and Americans must put an end to their pouring money into electoral campaigns and using their "personhood" rights to manipulate our political system.

Of course, Cleveland Heights cannot fight a constitutional battle alone. Citizens across our state and country have passed resolutions and ballot issues establishing Democracy Days in their communities. In 2019, the following Ohio cities held Democracy Day hearings, as voted by their citizens: Brecksville, Chagrin Falls, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Defiance, Kent, Mentor, Newburgh Heights, Shaker Heights, South Euclid and Toledo.

Last year, at the sixth annual CH Democracy Day, 20 people testified about a broad range of topics, including:

- The fossil fuel industry's hold on the Ohio General Assembly; specifically our state senator Sandra Williams, whose benefactors include AEP Ohio, Dominion, BP America, and First Energy, her largest named contributor.
- The threat to direct democracy posed by Ohio House legislation that would weaken and obstruct citizens' access

to the initiative process guaranteed by the Ohio Constitution.

- The difficulty of passing bi-partisan, common-sense gun laws, due to the influence of gun manufacturers and the National Rifle Association.
- How Cleveland-based Sherwin-Williams Inc. has harmed communities and generations of children by influencing legislators to block laws requiring lead remediation.
- The fight against corporate interests, in Cleveland and nationally, for better public transit.

We know from observing the recent campaign for Issue 26 (the elected mayor charter amendment) that Cleveland Heights neighbors with different political views can and will work together, both productively and gladly, to achieve

a common goal. This is the essence of a functioning democracy, and it is something the leaders of our political parties would rather we never learn.

We look forward to seeing many friends—new and old—at CH Democracy Day 2020.

(For background on the annual public hearing and how it came about, see "The backstory to Democracy Day," *Heights Observer* Vol. 11, Issue 1. Heights of Democracy columns are archived at www.heightsobserver.org/read/opinionblogs/columns/heights-of-democracy.)

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.

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Class size matters



A TEACHER'S VOICE

Ari Klein

I currently have 42 students in two classes at the high school—an average of 21 students per class.

What this average does not reveal is that one class has 15 students and the other has 27. In which section would you prefer to have your child enrolled?

The personal attention a student receives in a class with fewer students is palpable. I spend a good deal of class time walking around to see how students are working and help those who need assistance.

Averages can be deceptive, however, and fail to tell the whole story about class size.

Students who have special needs are in classes that have a low teacher-to-student ratio, established by special education law. At the other end, there are large ensemble classes where the ratio is much higher.

If we look at only academic classes, what then is the ideal number of students? There's no simple answer.

I recall that in the early 1990s, teachers had more say in how our academic sections would be organized. In the math department, we decided that Algebra I classes should be small, but that some upper-level classes could be larger—perhaps as many as 28 students.

It is still true that ninth-graders taking Algebra I need more attention.

Entry-level foreign language classes should also be smaller to accelerate learning through increased opportunities to speak the language more often.

Upper-level classes would also benefit from small class sizes, but often we need to prioritize due to budget constraints.

This year there are 64 academic classes at the high school that have 30 or more students. There are 124 classes with 28 students or more.

In all my years at CH-UH, these numbers are unprecedented. We have been cost cutting for

several years in a row, and this is the sad result.

Teachers with five classes of 28–30 students will not be able to give the kind of individual attention that students require.

Grading papers for 130 or more students is a Herculean task that usurps the lives of teachers outside of school.

To add to their burden, teachers may also be asked to substitute for a colleague when an absence has not been filled. When this happens, a teacher's planning time is reduced.

Because CH-UH is short on substitute teachers, so far this year there are three times as many unfilled substitute slots as there were in each of the last three years. (If you have a college degree, please consider signing up to substitute teach in our district.)

Class sizes at the middle school are slightly better, but I believe that class sizes for younger students should be smaller.

Between our two middle schools there are 31 academic classes with 28 or more students. There are 81 sections with 25 or more students.

Elementary class sizes in our district have been more appropriate, although occasionally a few classes in the district have had more than 25 students. Ideally, a primary class should not have more than 20 students, in my opinion.

Budgets are tight. A levy is on the ballot. State funding is broken. We are not wasting tax dollars.

CH-UH administration and the Board of Education take the task of educating the whole child very seriously.

We do some things very well, but class sizes cannot continue moving upward as they have in the last few years. Teachers are overwhelmed and our students are being shortchanged.

Class size matters!

Ari Klein is a lifelong community member, math teacher at Cleveland Heights High School, and president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.



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Let's make 2020 the year of the teacher



THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

It's a new year—2020. Let's make it the year of the teacher!

Let's put up banners at the top of Cedar Hill, up and down Lee and Coventry and all along Taylor and Noble roads, declaring our respect for teachers and our gratitude for their important work.

Students are deeply affected by these adults who, while not family, are intimately involved in their lives. Our community is also deeply affected by these professionals who work valiantly to realize our aspirations for our youth and to prepare them to be wise voters and leaders. While the rest of us are sequestered for the most part from other people's children, teachers spend every day with the young people of our community. They are the front line of educational opportunity.

We expect teachers to know each student in their care, hold high aspirations for them, treat them with patience and kindness, be firm but fair, find their strengths and build on them, create an engaging and safe environment, honor the children's emotions and nurture their social development, develop their skills and unique minds, and create great citizens and workers.

It's a tall order.

Sadly, teachers are too frequently blamed for social inequality and demonized for test scores. People who don't know them, and don't value our precious public school system, make judgments from afar.

Public education, and the teachers who do this glorious work, are under attack. Let's defend them. Let's express our commitment to public education by demonstrating our confidence in our educators. Reject testing as a measure of education quality.

We want children to love learning and to keep learning as the world around them changes. For teachers to deliver this outcome, they need to be free to teach without fear of unfair consequences. When we trust teachers, see them as allies, value their contribution to child development in all of its forms, and address legitimate problems, they will do their best to give us what we need.

Let's challenge the test-and-blame narrative that privatizers use, for the benefit of an unaccountable private and profitable alternative, to justify disinvestment in public schools. Test-based accountability marginalizes teachers and teaching and makes the classroom a toxic place for children. Let's say no to testing and yes to teachers and learning!

In today's disheartening anti-public-school environment, support for teachers is not meant only for the educators. Supporting our teachers is also a way to affirm to each other our shared commitment to public education. Our voices need to be loud and

clear. A lot is at stake!

In the year of the teacher we will affirm our public schools by building consensus around the pro-teacher approach to public education. Support for teachers will be a required qualification for those seeking legislative office, and all education legislation will recognize the importance of teachers.

School reformers tried to shut down the teacher voice when they started to attack the public system. They called any teacher who challenged "accountability" an apologist. It worked for a while, but not anymore. I appreciate that, in the venues where I have advocated for public education, teachers are always present. They know why it matters.

It has been teachers' unions all over the country who have been the vanguard of resistance to harmful public policy. They know how it hurts their students. They know the reality. They are allies for the common good—not just for their own good.

While their jobs are at stake, so is our future, and teachers are protecting our democracy. Let's join with them

by holding them up as the invaluable resource that they are.

Susie Kaeser is a 40-year resident of Cleveland Heights and the former director of Reaching Heights. She is active in the Heights Coalition for Public Education and the League of Women Voters.

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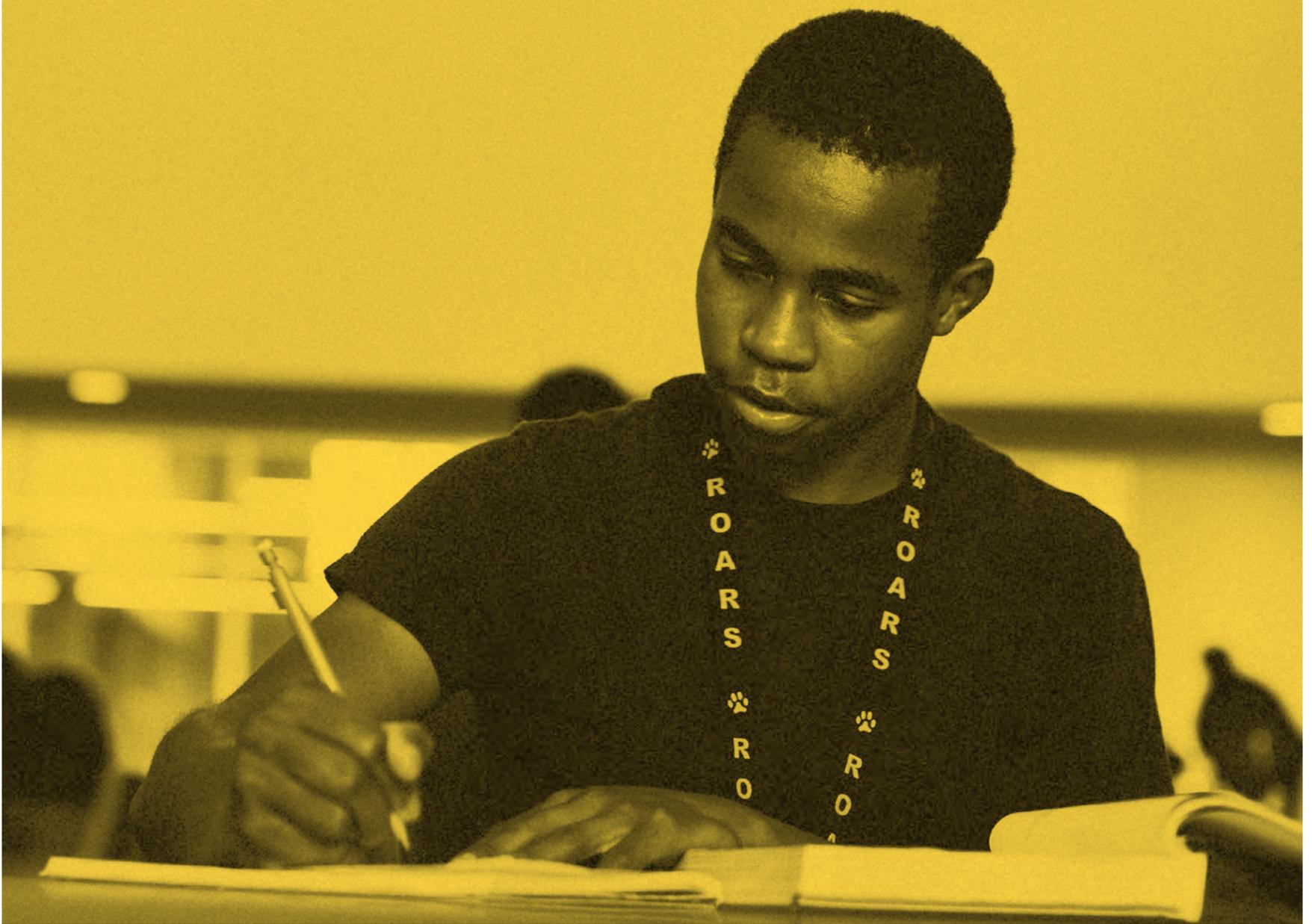
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Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 18, 2019

Council members present were Mayor Carol Roe, Vice Mayor Melissa Yasinow, Mary Dunbar, Kahlil Seren, Jason Stein, and Michael N. Ungar. Craig Cobb was absent. The meeting lasted 7:36–9:04 p.m.

Public comments

A recent presentation by consulting firm AE7 Pittsburgh, of a redevelopment planning process to engage the Severance property's current owner, attracted much attention. Council members-elect Melody Joy Hart and Davida Russell suggested delay of [voting on] this item until they are seated in January, noting that it is the single most important project at this time, and a legacy of the council.

Architect Paul Volpe strongly opposed engaging the firm. FutureHeights, which is CH's Community Development Corporation (CDC), had done a study of Severance six months ago, prior to the RFP. He pointed out that the FutureHeights proposal was less expensive and included a great deal of pro bono work. He thinks the city is not yet prepared to do the study or to hire a consultant.

City planner Bob Brown supports the city's initiative with this problematic property, but says it's impossible to endorse the AE7 proposal without seeing some of the other 16 proposals. He added that FutureHeights should be part of the team. [Brown is president of the FutureHeights Board of Directors.]

FutureHeights Executive Director Deanna Bremer Fisher echoed Brown's ideas. She pointed out that FutureHeights was unable to participate in vetting the proposals because it was part of a team that submitted a proposal. She wondered what the expectations of FutureHeights would be now.

City manager's report

City Manager Tanisha Briley's update can be found on pages 2–10 of the council packet on the city's website.

Severance Town Center redevelopment plan

This resolution to hire AE7 Pittsburgh, LLC, to undertake a redevelopment planning project, received a third reading, but no vote this evening, after considerable discussion at council's committee of the whole meeting.

Five council members weighed in on this item: Ungar, Dunbar, and Roe did not favor waiting to seat new council members [before voting], while Stein and Yasinow were willing to do so.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

DECEMBER 2, 2019

Council members present were Mayor Carol Roe, Vice Mayor Melissa Yasinow, Craig Cobb, Mary Dunbar, Kahlil Seren, Jason Stein, and Michael N. Ungar. The meeting lasted 7:35–9:44 p.m.

First amendment rights of public officials

Law Director William Hanna responded to a citizen's allegation at the Nov. 18 council meeting that several members had "violated their oath of office" by contributing to a political action committee against Issue 26. Hanna stated that he could find no evidence of unlawful acts, as the sunshine laws apply to the discussion of public business but not to discussion of political matters, a first amendment right.

Public comments

Ten residents spoke about a wide variety of concerns, including Top of the Hill and adequacy of the housing and forestry budgets.

City manager's report

City Manager Tanisha Briley's update can be found on pages 4–12 of the council packet on the city's website.

Top of the Hill legislation

Four ordinances pertaining to the Top of the



Hill project passed, with Kahlil Seren voting against all of them:

- Ordinance 109-2019 conditionally determines and authorizes preliminary actions necessary to issue economic development revenue bonds, including nontax revenue (NTR) bonds of up to \$2 million to pay for the city's contribution to the project and tax increment financing (TIF) revenue bonds in the estimated amount of \$30 million to finance project costs. The NTR bonds will be payable by the city from revenues such as fines, forfeitures, fees for services and other revenues that do not constitute taxes. The city will issue the TIF bonds, which will be payable solely from tax revenues generated from the project and project owners. The city will forego some tax revenues, but will not be obligated to make any payments on the TIF bonds.
- Ordinance 114-2019 amends the development agreement to clarify the respective obligations of the city and developer Flaherty & Collins Properties (F&C) to fund an expected gap between project costs and TIF financing proceeds.
- Ordinance 115-2019 designates the Cleveland Heights Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) as the agency of the city and makes various other changes to the CIC's organizational documents for compliance with state law relating to the issuance of the NTR and TIF bonds.
- Ordinance 116-2019 replaces a prior ordinance that declared improvements to real property in Top of the Hill to have a public purpose and therefore would be exempt from real property taxes. This ordinance (116) amends the development and school district compensation agreements, primarily to change the effective date of the tax exemption from 2020 to 2021, in anticipation of the current construction schedule.

City Manager Briley presented a history and some background. The city has owned the land since Doctors' Hospital was demolished in 1968. The current project began in April 2016, and 42 public meetings have taken place since, in an effort to be responsive and transparent. The city has looked at many funding sources and feels confident that the NTR bonds can be repaid without impacting the city's budget.

Council members Dunbar, Stein, Yasinow, and Roe expressed their support for the project. Council Member Seren explained his dissenting votes: He is not conceptually against the development. He is disappointed in the design for this project, but his main concern is how these bonds enable avoidance of prevailing wage requirements. By using the city rather than the County Port Authority as the bond issuer, F&C is skirting the Port Authority's prevailing wage requirements. He said that the county would decline to issue the bonds if the purpose of the county's involvement was to skirt the Port Authority's prevailing wage requirements.

LWV Observers: Blanche Valancy and Kathy Petrey.

Expanded reports are available online at www.heightsobserver.org.

TOP OF THE HILL continued from page 1



As construction on the Top of the Hill garage begins, the city has identified temporary parking spaces for permit holders and patrons of Nighttown.

TOH parking garage during the first stage of the project. Garage construction is expected to take 9–12 months. Upon completion, the new garage will replace the 225 surface spaces currently on the site (including 175 city parking-permit spaces), and add an additional 325 spaces to accommodate the new TOH residents and visitors.

MPL #9 was due to close Jan. 1, so that construction could commence; however, according to the city's website, "as a result of unforeseen delays in the start of construction of the Top of the Hill project, the closing of Lot #9 has been postponed. MPL #9 will remain open Jan. 1, 2020 until further notice."

The city approved a Temporary Parking Plan in July 2019 that assigns permit holders spaces in nearby lots during construction. The city's plan identified 333 temporary permit-parking spaces in nearby lots and surrounding streets, as shown on the map.

Nighttown patrons will be able to park in a designated private lot containing 50 spaces situated on the construction site, immediately west of the restaurant, adjacent to the Nighttown patio. Brendan Ring, owner of Nighttown, said that the lot will be fenced and gated. "There are 52 metered spots at present,"

said Ring. "So Nighttown will actually be in a better position during construction in regard to parking. I anticipate zero parking discomfort for Nighttown customers during this very exciting time for the Cedar Fairmount Business District."

Residents of the Buckingham Condominiums will be able to park in a lot situated on the construction site.

In 2019, the city expanded Municipal Parking Lot #22, located at 2171 Bellfield Ave., from 19 spaces to 64, in order to provide additional spaces for permit parkers during construction.

Brian Anderson, business development manager for Cleveland Heights, said that the city has been in direct communication with the permit holders affected, and will be in touch with them again as soon as the construction timeline is finalized, to give them adequate notice of parking changes.

For more information regarding the TOH project and temporary parking, visit www.clevelandheights.com/988/Top-of-the-Hill, contact Anderson at 216-291-2617, or Economic Development Director Tim Boland at 216-291-4857.

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

Rendering of the Top of the Hill project



This is the most recent rendering of the Top of the Hill project that developer Flaherty & Collins will construct at the intersection of Cedar Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard.

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January is often considered the month for deep reflection. We look back at the year behind us and then look forward to the future year.

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UH children are eligible for free books

Mike Cook

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) is a unique, early-years book-gifting program that mails a free, brand-new, age-appropriate, high-quality book to enrolled children every month, from birth until age 5. The program provides each child with a home library of up to 60 books, and seeks to instill a love of books and family reading from an early age.

According to The Literacy Cooperative, in University Heights there are about 2,700 children, ages 5 and younger, who are eligible for the program. However, the current enrollment in University Heights is only 373 children.

"This is a great program for kids in our community," Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said. "Check it out for your children."

Parents of children ages 4 and a half and younger can enroll online at www.literacycooperative.org. There is

no cost or obligation to the child's family.

More than 40 studies have shown that the program has a significant and positive impact on family literacy habits, kindergarten readiness, and third-grade reading on grade level.

This program is available in University Heights thanks to the Heights Family Foundation. It also serves Cleveland Heights and other Greater Cleveland communities, including Shaker Heights and East Cleveland.

In Greater Cleveland, The Literacy Cooperative is implementing and managing the rollout of DPIL in an effort to reach more than 15,000 children. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to improve kindergarten readiness and family literacy habits in select communities.

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

LIBRARY BOARD continued from page 1

and promote initiatives that support the social safety net."

Crenshaw, a Cleveland Heights resident for 15 years, is a college counselor with a bachelor's in management from Case Western Reserve University and a master's in higher education administration from the University of Akron. A former trustee of the non-profit Seeds of Literacy, and current trustee of the Black Professionals Association, Crenshaw is also a member of the Roxboro Middle School PTA and the CH-UH City School District Family Engagement Task Force.

"The library is the beginning of literacy for many people, from a young child whose parent has checked out a book to read to them, to an adult who no longer wants to be functionally illiterate," said Crenshaw. "I believe literacy is an essential tool that is necessary to be successful in life, and the library offers many resources and serves as an essential building block toward literacy."

Crenshaw, who is African American, sees her addition to the board as a means to support inclusivity. "I will add another level of diversity to the library board," she said. "It is important for organizations to have leadership that represents the community it serves."

Mentrek, the outgoing library board president, served on the board 2015-2019. His five-year tenure included the Heights Libraries' acquisition of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus, the elimination of overdue fines, and the renovation of the University Heights branch.

"The end of my term is as good a time as any to reflect on the great work the library has done during my time on the board, but those accomplishments owe far more to the everyday deeds of ordinary folks than the grandstanding of any leadership," said Mentrek. "I'm excited about the library's work in the next five years. We have a great group of trustees on the board, with two ter-



Gabe Crenshaw is one of two new members of the Heights Libraries board of directors.



Patti Carlyle is the other member of the Heights Libraries board.

rific additions coming aboard in 2020."

In addition to serving on the library board, Mentrek was a frequent library volunteer, riding the book bike to community events, helping out with the Mobile Food Pantry's produce distribution program, and even dressing up as the Mad Hatter for an Alice in Wonderland-themed children's program.

"There's an all-too-prevalent local attitude that civic leadership is reserved only for the great and powerful," Mentrek commented. "Volunteering with the library board is a tremendous opportunity for everyday citizens to help shape their hometown's future."

James Roosa, who previously served as vice president of the library board and chair of its operations committee, succeeds Mentrek as board president

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

Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus to hold chili cook-off Feb. 23

Deanna Bremer Fisher

Coventry P.E.A.C.E. (People Enhancing a Child's Environment) Campus will host its second-annual chili cook-off 5:30-8 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 23, at 2843 Washington Blvd.

Tickets are \$5 per person (or \$20 per family) and include all-you-

can-eat chili, fixings, sides, dessert, beverage, and one vote for a favorite chili. Families will receive three "votes" for their entrance price. Attendees who wish to vote for more than one chili can purchase extra "votes" for \$5 each or 6 for \$20.

Area residents are invited to

enter a chili to compete in one of three categories: Best Meat, Best Vegetarian, and Most Creative. Winners in each category will be announced at 7 p.m. and will receive a cash prize, a custom ARTFUL trophy, and bragging rights. The cost of entering a chili is \$20. Participants are asked to pre-register their chili by Feb. 15; there are a limited number of spots in each category.

Learn more and purchase tickets at www.coventrypeacecampus.org. All proceeds benefit Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus, a sustainable, supportive and collaborative facility

for organizations that offer artistic and educational opportunities and community services for residents of the Heights and Greater Cleveland.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights, publisher of the Heights Observer and president of Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus.



HRRC announces January classes



David Brock

Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC) will offer classes for both beginners and experts this month.

On Tuesday, Jan. 21, HRRC will hold a power tools workshop, one of its most popular recurring classes. Participants will get to work with cordless drills, angle grinders, hand sanders and circular, miter and reciprocating saws. The single-session class will give beginners the experience they'll need to start working on their homes themselves, while home-repair veterans will have a chance to brush up on their skills.

"Carpentry and Your Home's Interior: Home How-To for Women," will be offered through HRRC's Women's Home How-To

Carpentry & Interior Repairs Series, and will begin on Wednesday, Jan. 22. The six-week evening series will teach participating women how to make common household repairs with their own hands. In the first session, students will build a model wall structure using power tools. During the following five weeks, they will add drywall, flooring, ceramic tile, paint and more to their walls. The volunteer instructors will also provide advice on safety, tool usage, measuring and other tricks of the trade.

The cost for the power tools workshop is \$25, and the cost of the how-to course is \$150. Income-based discounts are available, and the start time for all sessions is 7 p.m. For more information and to register, visit www.hrcc-ch.org.

David Brock is the education and outreach coordinator for HRRC.

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CH Senior Center News

Amy Jenkins

Why not take a dance class in the new year, to spark your fitness routine? The Cleveland Heights Senior Activity Center (SAC) offers a variety of classes for all levels, with no partner or experience required—and two of the classes are free!

Line Dance (contemporary style) promotes physical fitness through dance exercise. Join instructor Gladys McGlothlin on Mondays, Jan. 27 through March 23, 9:30-10:30 a.m. The fee for this class is \$25 for eight weeks.

Zumba Gold is dance and exercise combined. Instructor Anita Bartel keeps participants moving and having fun. The class meets on Tuesdays, Jan. 14 through March 31, 11 a.m. to noon. The fee is \$40 for 12 weeks.

Argentine Tango, a social dance based upon the natural walk, is for adults of all fitness levels. Instructor Ann Dobyms teaches the basics of the dance, as well as a bit about its history and the culture in which it developed. Participants should wear comfortable clothes and bring either leather-soled shoes or heavy socks that will slide on the floor. The class meets on Friday mornings, 9:30-11 a.m., through Jan. 31, with a new session to start in February. The class fee is \$25 for 8 weeks.

English Country Dance is an ongoing program of traditional English dancing that takes place on Wednesdays at 10 a.m. Wes Senseman

instructs this free class.

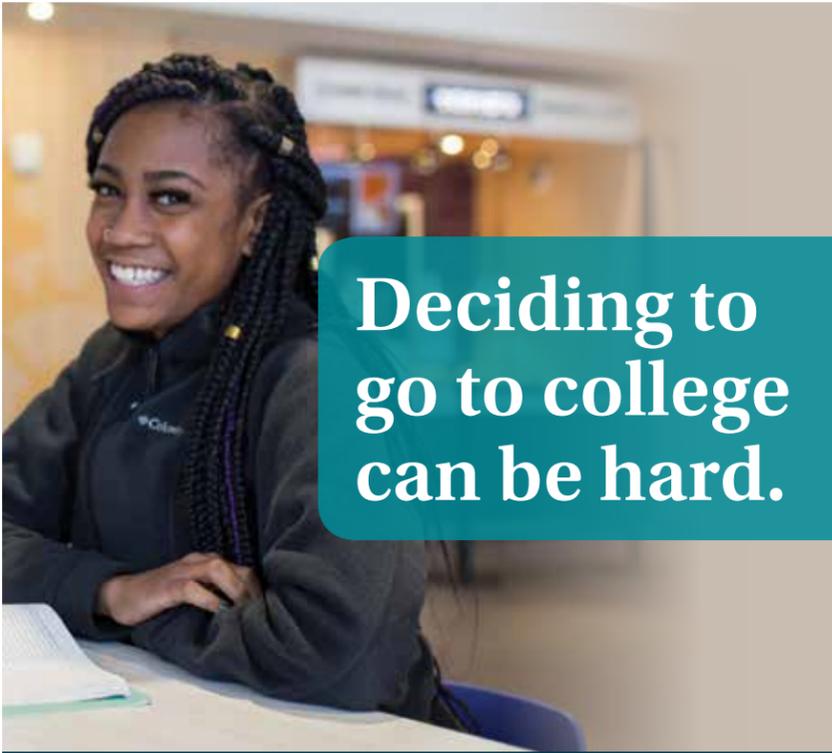
Dance Movement, another ongoing class, will take place on Fridays at 11:15 a.m., starting in mid-January. Instructor Leslie Keller encourages everyone who thinks they can't dance to give it a try. Participants will learn dance movement to improve strength, balance and flexibility while exploring the art of improvisation. Comfortable clothing is advised for this class, which is offered free of charge.

The Cleveland Heights SAC, located in the CH Community Center at 1 Monticello Blvd., offers programs for those 60 and older. A complete schedule 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, UH community development coordinator, at 216-932-7800, ext. 203, or pgrogan@universityheights.com. Membership is \$10 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 by e-mail at ajenkins@chobts.com.

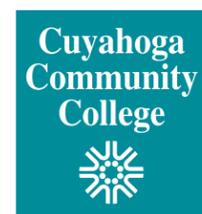


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District to host Jan. 9 community meeting on vouchers

Cathan Cavanaugh



Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby

On Jan. 9, CH-UH City School District will host a community meeting on the topic of EdChoice and how it affects school funding. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. at Heights High, and the public is invited.

At the meeting, the district will outline the adverse effects on public schools of the Ohio EdChoice Scholarship program, which

allows families living within the boundaries of designated schools to receive a voucher to attend a private school. It will also suggest actions to take, to work toward changes in how the state funds school districts; and provide information on the proposed 7.9-mill operating levy—set to be on the ballot on March 17—and school financing in general.

“People mistakenly believe the voucher program does not affect the CH-UH school district financially,” said Superintendent Liz Kirby, in a recent open letter. “Unless major changes are made soon, the EdChoice program will continue to

undermine excellent, well-rounded, high-performing public education institutions such as the Heights public schools and increase the frequency and millage of future operating levies.”

The amount for elementary and middle school vouchers is \$4,650 per student, and high school vouchers are \$6,000 per student. Due to a freeze in state funding for the next two years, the CH-UH district loses, from local funds, \$6,000 per new high school student and \$4,650 per new elementary school student using

EdChoice.

Approximately 1,300 students who live in the CH-UH district are taking scholarships to attend private schools. This amounted to an actual loss of \$4.2 million for Heights schools last fiscal year, and will amount to an estimated loss of \$6.8 million this fiscal year.

Cathan Cavanaugh is the supervisor of communications for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

Communion of Saints hosts centennial open house

Liz Fisher

Communion of Saints School, 2160 Stillman Road, invites the community to join in its centennial celebration by attending its Catholic Schools Week open house, “Celebrating 100 years of Catholic education in the Heights,” on Sunday, Jan. 26, noon to 2 p.m.

Visitors will have an opportunity to tour the school and learn about programs for students in preschool through eighth grade, its daily curriculum, and student achievements. Teachers, parents and current students will be on hand to answer questions. Formal preschool and kindergarten information sessions will be held 12:30–1 p.m., and private tours will be available during the open house, upon request.

The school welcomes students from all faith traditions, and from various communities, including Cleveland Heights, University



Heights, South Euclid, Lyndhurst, East Cleveland, Cleveland and Shaker Heights.

Communion of Saints Parish was established in 2010 with the merging of four parishes: Christ the King and Saint Philomena parishes in East Cleveland, and St. Ann and St. Louis parishes in Cleveland Heights. The school name, Communion of Saints, replaced the St. Ann name to better represent the four merged parishes.

Those who are unable to attend the open house, who would like information about the school or to schedule a tour, are invited to call the school office at 216-932-4177, or visit www.communionofsaintsschool.org.

Liz Fisher is the marketing specialist for Communion of Saints School.

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Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education Meeting highlights

NOVEMBER 25, 2019
 Board members present were President Jodi Sourini, Vice President James Posch, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, and Beverly Wright. Also present were Treasurer Scott Gainer and Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby. The meeting began at 7:10 p.m. and adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Ohio School Report Card performance, part III
 Felicia Gould, assistant superintendent of education services, and Robert Swaggard, director of curriculum and instruction, presented the third of four reports on the district's performance concerning the latest Ohio School Report Card. They reviewed the process the district is using to monitor its progress toward aligning the curriculum to state standards. The fourth session will also be on this topic.

Middle school equity analysis
 Superintendent Kirby presented a preliminary report on equity between the two middle schools. She apprised the board of several equity issues, including disparities in instrumental music programs, sports facilities, math class size and the number of students identified as gifted. The superintendent proposed both short- and long-term remedies to issues of equity.

LWV Observer: Robin Koslen.

DECEMBER 3, 2019
 Board members present were President Jodi Sourini, Vice President James Posch, Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, and Beverly Wright. The meeting was brought to order at 7 p.m. and was adjourned at 9 p.m.

Library board of trustees interviews and selection
 Seven individuals were interviewed for two positions; one position was for two years (the remainder of an unexpired term), and the other for the full seven-year term. The board found all candidates impressive, making the selection difficult. After discussion, they selected Patti Carlyle for the seven-year term and Gabe Crenshaw for the two-year term.

LWV Observer: Robin Koslen.

Expanded reports are available online at www.heightsobserver.org.

Young scientists thrive at Gearity's science lab

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

Students at Gearity Professional Development School in University Heights have the opportunity to become actual ecologists, meteorologists, paleontologists and engineers twice each week, when they visit the school's science lab. On Nov. 21, they embodied those professional roles in their capstone presentations. This thrice-yearly event enables students to show what they learned in science and English language arts during each trimester.

As parents and community members visited the classrooms, students in kindergarten through fifth grade presented their projects highlighting what they had learned in specific topic areas.

Kindergartners focused on their observations on weather. They had made their own rain gauges and windsocks, and then hypothesized about the best locations for these weather tools. They then conducted outdoor investigations to prove or disprove their predictions, and eventually took them home to place in their own yards.

First graders studied the sun as the main source of the earth's energy by placing colored paper outside to witness how the sunlight changed the paper's shade over time.

Second graders pretended to be



Demi Hill and Amiah Lackey, fifth-grade scientists at Gearity.



Kindergartners use their weather tools.

paleontologists conducting dinosaur research. They also created lap books to show how worms affect the soil in the school's garden and hoop house.

Third graders studied the life cycle of butterflies, creating digital journals of images and explanations of their life stages, from egg to larva to pupa to butterfly.

Fourth graders also studied dinosaurs, with a greater focus on fossils. Each student in Aime Banas' class had a block of dirt that contained an actual dinosaur fossil to excavate, record and research, to determine what part of a dinosaur it was, the type of dinosaur, and where it might have lived. They

added some history by reading about Mary Anning, the first female paleontologist.

Fifth graders examined how energy flows in an ecosystem. After investigating local food webs, each student selected one ecosystem, such as rain forest, desert, or tundra.

They created their own visual representations of symbiotic relationships, noting what happens when an invasive species or disease disrupts a typical food web. Using social studies and language arts, students created trifold brochures with details about religion, holidays, natural resources, and foods from various countries

throughout the world.

Every classroom at Gearity participated, according to Sean Sullivan, science and engineering teacher, who helped oversee the projects with Jackie Taylor, STEM coordinator. "[The kids] were really excited to show what they learned and to learn from each other," said Sullivan. "And it was nice for parents to see what a STEM school is really about."

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a former district teacher, and a freelance journalist under contract with the CH-UH City School District.



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CH-UH City School District makes AP District Honor Roll

Cathan Cavanaugh

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District is one of 250 school districts in the U.S. and Canada, and one of 10 school districts in Ohio, to earn a spot on

the College Board's 10th annual AP District Honor Roll.

To achieve the honor, Cleveland Heights High School had to, since 2017, increase the number of students participating in AP (Advanced Placement), while also

increasing or maintaining the percentage of students earning AP exam scores of 3 or higher. (The range of AP scores is 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, and 3 and above considered passing. Most colleges will give college credit for a score in the 3 to 5 range.)

According to the College Board, reaching these goals shows that the district is successfully identifying motivated, academically prepared students who are ready for AP.

"Equity is a major, defining factor in the work we do in CH-UH city schools, so this honor proves to me that we are on the right track in preparing all of our students for success," said Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby. "I'm so proud of the clear dedication our staff and students have to academic achievement."

National data from 2019 show that, among underrepresented minority students with a high degree

of readiness for AP, only about half are participating. The first step to getting more of these students to participate is to give them access.

"CH-UH is committed to expanding the availability of AP courses by making them equitably available to all prepared and motivated students, of all backgrounds," Kirby stated.

"With more students participating and succeeding in AP in this district, more students are getting a head start on college by earning college credit during high school," said Trevor Packer, senior vice president of AP and instruction at the College Board. "We are pleased to honor the teachers and administrators who have worked to clear a path for more students of all backgrounds to advance through AP."

For inclusion on the 10th annual AP District Honor Roll, districts must meet the following criteria:

- Increase participation/access to AP by at least 4 percent in large districts, at least 6 percent in medium districts, and at least 11 percent in small districts;
- Increase or maintain the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students taking exams and increase or maintain the percentage of these same underrepresented minority students scoring 3+ on at least one AP Exam;
- Improve or maintain performance levels when comparing the 2019 percentage of students scoring a 3 or higher to the 2017 percentage, unless the district has already attained a performance level at which more than 70 percent of its AP students earn a 3 or higher.

More information, and the complete 10th annual AP District Honor Roll can be found at: <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/awards/district-honor-roll>.

Cathan Cavanaugh is the supervisor of communications for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District.

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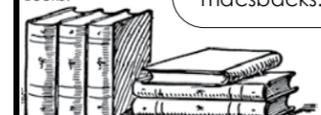
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Roxboro hosts spelling bee



Krista Hawthorne, Ruby Tugeau, Sophia Muller, Natalie Bier and Beth Woodside.

Beth Woodside

On Dec. 5, Roxboro Middle School hosted its 10th annual spelling bee. For the third year, Monticello Middle School students participated, making it an all-Heights Middle School Spelling Bee.

After 24 rounds of spelling, Roxboro eighth-grader Natalie Bier emerged as the champion, from a field of 22 spellers. Her winning word was cystic.

Bier will represent Roxboro Middle School at the Cleveland.com Cuyahoga County Spelling Bee on March 7. Nikolai Bell, the highest-ranking eighth-grade speller from Monticello, will represent that school at the county bee, which will be held in the auditorium of Cuyahoga Community College's Cleveland campus.

The Roxboro spellers who competed Dec. 5 were Justin Edwards, Van Dietrich, Alex Burke, Gabe Dodson, Luke Kalady, Sheridan Sweeney, Brandon Watson, Amelia King, Ruby Tugeau, Clara Lyford, Natalie Bier and Sophia Muller. The Monticello spellers were Jailynn Putnam, Chelsea Gipson, Clara

Walker, Paige Swoope, Jayden Chase, Kareina Evans-Scott, Michaela Kirkpatrick, Amora Harrison, Amira Killpatrick and Nikolai Bell.

Sophie Muller won second place, with Ruby Tugeau placing third, and Clara Lyford in fourth place.

Veteran bee pronouncer and Reaching Heights Executive Director Krista Hawthorne delivered the words to the spellers. Bee judges were Heights High English teachers Donna Feldman and Melinda Cales, and Heights High senior Rohan Bruce. (The 2014 Roxboro Spelling Bee champion, Bruce won second place in the 2016 county spelling bee).

Prizes for the top three spellers were generously donated by The Cleveland Orchestra, Mac's Backs - Books on Coventry, and Zagara's Marketplace. Encyclopaedia Britannica donated certificates to the top two spellers for a year's subscription to its online resource, Britannica Kids.

Cleveland Orchestra violinist Beth Woodside organized the event and held spelling clubs at Roxboro to help prepare the spellers. Woodside is on the faculty of The Music School Settlement, and is a Reaching Heights board member.

Robotics club seeks volunteers



2019 Heights Robotics team members Emma Hodges, Jacqueline Gold and Keshawn Madlock.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

The 40 students in the Heights High Robotics Team are a pretty capable bunch: They can design, program, build, and operate robotic units that thread a nine-inch object onto a pole, throw a ball at a hard plastic flag to make it spin, and park on a raised platform. But right now, they need your help.

Heights High will host its first VEX Robotics Competition on Saturday, Jan. 25, with 50 teams coming from, among other schools, Mahoning, Wooster, Hawken and Shaker. The club needs volunteers to do everything: selling concessions, directing traffic in the parking lot, helping teams set up for their next event, and more.

Greg Nachman, adviser of the club, and math and engineering teacher at the high school, is excited

to showcase both the renovated building and his students' talents, but it will take the time and energy of dozens of people.

Anyone is welcome to volunteer —high school and college students who need community service hours, district parents, and community residents. Middle school students can help reset the competition fields after each round.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/Heights-HighRobots> to choose a volunteer time slot between 7 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., depending on the task, with a minimum two-hour commitment.

The club is also seeking sponsorships to help offset the cost of running this tournament and attending others throughout the season. Details are available at <https://tinyurl.com/robotbrochure> or visit this GoFundMe www.gofundme.com/f/heights-high-robotics-20192020 if you or your company might be interested in supporting the team.

To learn what a VEX competition is all about, check out this two-minute video: <https://tinyurl.com/heightsrobo-video>.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a former district teacher, and a freelance journalist under contract with the CH-UH City School District.



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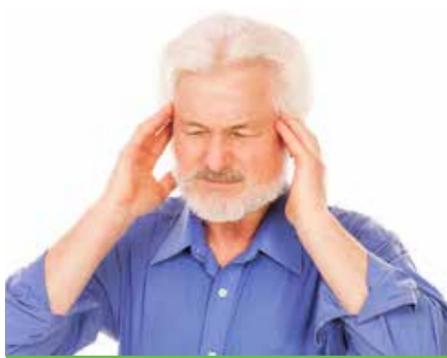
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Library launches new resource for child caregivers

Isabelle Rew

This winter, Heights Libraries will launch *Heights Little Learners*, a new e-newsletter, to provide early literacy resources for caregivers of children up to 6 years old.

“The library’s marketing team noticed that the audience engagement with our more generalized e-newsletter, *What’s Going on @ Heights Libraries*, was shrinking, while our targeted newsletters—covering topics like technology and reader’s advisory—were growing,” said Sheryl Banks, communications manager. “We want our patrons to feel excited about what we have to offer, so we decided it was time for a redesign.”

In October, the library sent out a survey to its e-newsletter subscribers to gauge which topics they want to learn more about. The survey results revealed an interest in receiving more information about resources the library can provide for young children.



Heights Little Learners is Heights Libraries’ new e-newsletter for caregivers of young children.

Banks assembled a team of children’s librarians to hone in on what the newsletter will look like and, most importantly, what it will cover.

“One thing we want to emphasize to parents is that, when getting your child ready to read, the single most important thing you can do is read with them!” said Katherine Assink, youth services librarian. “This activity exposes children to new vocabulary, teaches them how a book works and helps them develop a lifelong love of reading.”

Library staff acknowledge that reading regularly is easier said than done.

“We have found that many

parents struggle with finding time to read and keeping kids’ attention,” said Kornela Bogdanowicz, youth services librarian. “But it’s so important and needs to become a priority. We want to emphasize that reading doesn’t have to be a chore. The library is here to help with that.”

Heights Little Learners will provide engaging information about upcoming library programs and storytime schedules, early literacy tips, and book recommendations to help parents integrate literacy more seamlessly into their children’s lives. It will also describe special services specifically promoting early literacy, such as the 1,000 Books

Before Kindergarten program and the library’s play areas, all of which are free.

“Our hope is that we can make life a little easier for busy parents by giving them bits of information they can use at home, and encourage them to bring their ‘little learners’ to our buildings to enjoy all of our wonderful resources, too!” said Assink.

Heights Libraries is scheduled to release the e-newsletter on a regular basis starting in January. Sign up for all Heights Libraries e-newsletters at heightslibrary.org/how-do-i/sign-up-for-our-e-newsletters.

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

What’s going on at your library?

Coventry Village Library

1925 Coventry Road, 216-321-3400

Thursday, Jan. 9, 7 p.m.

Step Out of Time: Metta Meditation With Erica Steinweg. Metta meditation is a wonderful (and practical) way to acknowledge one’s fears and meet them with kindness. The presentation includes gentle yoga to help open the body and heart-center, as well as a guided practice.

Lee Road Library

2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Thursday, Jan. 30, 6 p.m.

Annual Teen Poetry Slam. Hosted by Heights Libraries, Lake Erie Ink and Heights High, this annual event is open to all high school students. Performers will compete before a panel of guest judges, and should have three or more poems ready for the competition. To register, send an e-mail to teen@heightslibrary.org.

Noble Neighborhood Library

2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Wednesday, Jan. 22, 7 p.m.

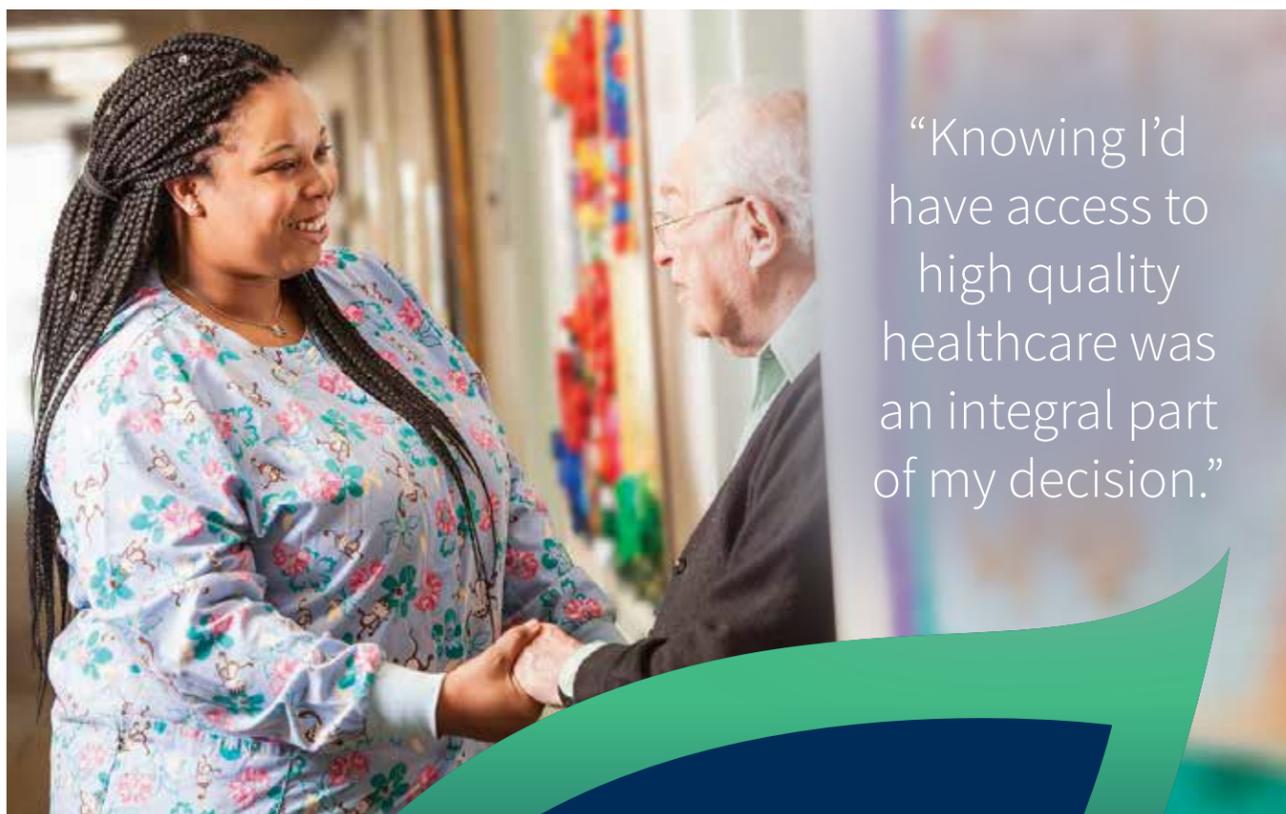
Trivia Night at Christopher’s Pub. Show how much you know, and make some new friends, at this event, to be held at Christopher’s Pub. Registration begins Jan. 8.

University Heights Library

13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Friday, Jan. 10, 5:30 p.m.

Family Fort Night. If you’ve ever imagined getting locked in the library after hours, here’s your chance! Bring your own pillows, blankets, sheets and anything else you need to build the perfect fort in which to read. For families with children ages 2–12. Registration required.



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Heights salon hosts free event for foster kids



Kevinnee Gilmore with Sunni Segines.

Sarah Wolf

“The thing about foster kids is they end up being like refugees in their own cities,” said Cleveland Heights resident Kevinnee Gilmore, founder of the nonprofit #FosterCare (www.hashtagfostercare.org). Starting at age 13, Gilmore spent five years in foster care, giving her direct, and unique, experience being a “kid in the system.”

Many foster children, Gilmore explained, struggle to find stability and a sense of normalcy in day-to-day experiences. “For so many kids in foster care, everyday activities can feel like luxuries,” Gilmore said.

Gilmore is committed to “getting foster youth a seat at the table.” On Thursday, Jan. 23, noon to 1:30 p.m., she’ll be a panelist—along with State Rep. Juanita Brent (District 12)—at a City Club Youth Forum, “The Impact of Foster Care’s Thousands of Ohio’s Children.” For information and tickets, visit www.cityclub.org.

Gilmore’s advocacy for children in foster care comprises events designed to bring them together, along

with their families.

In honor of National Adoption Month, Gilmore partnered with hair stylist Bianca “Sunni” Segines, owner of Cleveland Heights’ Sunni & Co. (2122 S. Taylor Road), to host “Love My Hair, Too”—also called the “Adopt My Hair-Athon”—on Nov. 17 at Segines’ salon.

A mother of five herself, Segines opened her salon on a Sunday—normally a day off—and was honored to have her salon—just about to celebrate its first full year of business in Cleveland Heights—host the event. “I was floating all day that day,” she said.

Adopted, kinship care (those in the care of relatives or close family friends), and foster kids from all ethnic backgrounds were welcomed to the event, which offered free hair care and styling, and manicures and pedicures.

The event brought together 27 young women from Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland. They shared their stories, connecting with other kids and families, as well as the Sunni & Co. stylists who volunteered their time and services, and other event volunteers.

“We watched them transform,” Gilmore said, noting that many of the young women entered Sunni & Co. guarded, and left with greater confidence and a stronger sense of community. “Being able to meet other kids like you makes you feel less alone,” Gilmore said.

That struggle for normalcy can be harder to find for foster children living with transracial families. “It’s everyday people who help foster kids,” Gilmore said. She’d noticed African-American children with white foster parents weren’t always getting the proper care for their hair. “It didn’t always go over

well when I’d say something to the white moms,” Gilmore said. “But I wanted them to know these children’s needs were different than their white children. Hair care is hygiene.”

Gilmore, who regularly collaborates with business owners to host events, hopes her work, and that of partners like Segines, will serve as a call to action to others, to support

foster youth in Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland, and beyond.

For more information on #FosterCare, and how to become involved, visit www.hashtagfostercare.org.

Sarah Wolf is an intern at FutureHeights, a resident of Cleveland Heights, and a graduate-level community practice student at MSASS/Case Western Reserve University.



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CH company seeks nominations for annual furnace giveaway

Joanne Burney

For the fourth consecutive year, Verne & Ellsworth Hann Inc. will donate a free furnace and installation to a deserving recipient. Chris Hann, co-owner of the Cleveland Heights-based heating, cooling and plumbing company, is asking for nominations from the Heights community and surrounding area.

“We created the Helping Hann free furnace giveaway as a way for our entire organization to give back to the community that has supported us for so many years,” Hann said.

This year’s winner will receive a new high-efficiency heating system and installation, with a total value of up to \$3,500. Verne & Ellsworth Hann co-owners and brothers, Bill and Chris Hann, will select a handful of finalists and then make personal visits to their homes. The winner will be announced via video on social media.

“Last year, it was our honor to install a new furnace for Willoughby resident Heather Kwedder,” said Chris Hann. “Heather faced many

challenges with her son’s ongoing health issues, and her unreliable old furnace was a constant worry. Her story, and those of past winners, is the reason we continue the tradition of the Helping Hann free furnace giveaway.”

Verne & Ellsworth Hann is committed to its customers and community. Located in Cleveland Heights for the past 66 years, Chris, Bill and their sister Patty Siegfried represent the family’s fourth generation in the trade; fifth-generation nephew Jason Franey manages the service department.

Nominations are being accepted through Feb. 28. A nomination form can be obtained at the company website (www.vebbrothers.com/helping-hann) or by calling at 216-932-9755.

Anyone who submits information to nominate someone will receive a \$200-off coupon on installation of a new heating or cooling system.

Joanne Burney is an employee at Verne & Ellsworth Hann Inc.

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Heights Youth Theatre presents winter musical

Pamela Fine

For more than six decades, Heights Youth Theatre (HYT) has offered young people the opportunity to grow socially and emotionally while gaining theatrical skills. Producing three to four complete musicals each year, HYT is currently rehearsing its next production.

Almost ready for opening night, “Once on This Island” is the story of Ti Moune, a fearless peasant girl in search of her place in the world, and ready to risk everything for love. Guided by the mighty island gods Love, Death, Water, and Earth, Ti Moune embarks on a remarkable journey to reunite with the man who has captured her heart. The play opens Friday, Jan. 17 at Monticello Middle School.

Cleveland Heights resident Eugene Sumlin directs the show. Stacy Bolton is music director and Alex Boyd, HYT alum, is stage manager. Cast members—55 actors in first through 12th grades—come from Cleveland Heights, University

Heights, Shaker Heights and surrounding communities.

“Once on This Island” is a heartwarming story that teaches that through all of life’s ups and downs, joys and pain, love will triumph. “It is the type of story that we need to hear today, and I am excited to bring it to the HYT stage,” said Sumlin. Bolton praised the show’s music, which “has rich harmonies, upbeat catchy rhythms, and lyrics that will surely stay with the audience long after the show ends. The cast is immensely talented and their love for this show is obvious.”

Performances are scheduled for Fridays, Jan. 17 and 24, at 7 p.m.; Saturdays, Jan. 18 and 25, at 2 p.m.; and Sundays, Jan. 19 and 26, at 2 p.m. All performances are in the auditorium at Monticello Middle School, 3665 Monticello Boulevard, in Cleveland Heights.

Tickets are \$10 general admission, and \$9 for seniors and children younger than 6. The box office opens 45 minutes prior to each show. For



COURTESY:HYT

more information, call 216-410-7500, or visit www.heightsyouththeatre.org.

HYT offers kids and families an unmatched opportunity to gain valuable experience in the theatrical arts. HYT’s goal is to make theater affordable and accessible to people of all incomes and backgrounds in a

nurturing environment that encourages social and emotional growth. For information about supporting theatrical arts in the Heights, visit www.heightsyouththeatre.org.

Pamela Fine is executive director of Heights Youth Theatre.

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‘Intimate Apparel’ kicks off Ensemble’s new year

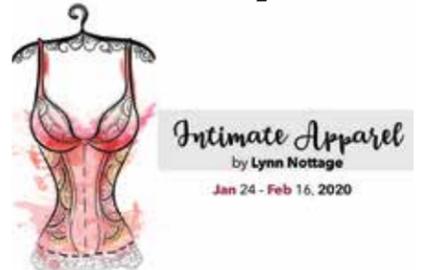
Celeste Cosentino

Cleveland Heights’ Ensemble Theatre begins 2020 with a continuation of its 40th anniversary season, themed “Making HER Story”—a season dedicated to female playwrights, female directors and female lead roles.

In its first production of the new year, Ensemble will present Lynn Nottage’s “Intimate Apparel,” beginning Jan. 24.

Nottage’s play is set in New York circa 1905—a time and place where rigid social divides exist along the lines of race, religion and class. At the same time, a burgeoning population of immigrants from abroad, and people from across the U.S., have moved to the city to seek their fortunes, bringing diversity, excitement and change. In the play, Esther Mills, a skilled African-American seamstress, navigates this changing, dangerous world with her needle and thread.

Sarah May, the director of Ensemble’s production, said, “It’s an honor to bring this beautiful, timely play to life on stage at Ensemble Theatre. Award-winning playwright Lynn Nottage has created a vivid portrait of one African-American woman who followed the great migration to the North. Through her talents as a seamstress, she touches the lives of wealthy clients and struggling immigrants, who, like those who wait at our borders, all landed in America to follow their dreams.”



DC Metro Theater Arts said of the play, “Intimate Apparel is, by turns, beautiful and tragic, hopeful and heartbreaking.” The play won the 2004 Steinberg New Play Award, and the 2004 Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Off-Broadway Play.

Ensemble’s cast of Cleveland-based actors includes Kimberly L. Brown, Zyrece Montgomery, Leilani Barret, Diana Frankhouser, Reva Golden and Craig Joseph.

Ensemble’s production of “Intimate Apparel” runs Jan. 24 through Feb. 16, at the theater, located at the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus, 2843 Washington Blvd.

Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. There will be two pay-what-you-can performances: Sunday, Jan. 26, and Sunday, Feb. 2, both at 2 p.m.

For tickets and information, visit www.ensembletheatre.org, call 216-21-2930, or e-mail tickets@ensembletheatre.org.

Celeste Cosentino is the executive artistic director of Ensemble Theatre and a member of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus board.

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Heights Arts turns 20 in 2020



Ragged, by Laurie Addis, is featured in the textiles exhibition *Point-Line-Pattern-Plane*.



Mr. Yo-Yo, by Spotlight artist Sean Jason Kelly.

Lauren Freeman

In 2000, local residents who were committed to the arts and their community combined those passions and founded Heights Arts, with a mission to inspire all ages to engage in the arts, tap into the potential of local artists, and make a positive impact on overall community life.

Thanks to the support of an ever-growing community, 20 years later, Heights Arts continues to uphold the same mission and values, in service to local musicians, poets and visual artists.

Heights Arts turns 20 in 2020. To kick off a yearlong celebration, the first exhibition of the new year, *Point-Line-Pattern-Plane*, opens Friday, Jan. 17, with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. Curated by fiber artist and Kent State University textile arts professor Janice Lessman-Moss, winner of a 2019 Cleveland Arts Prize, this exhibition highlights a wide range of expression and innovation achieved by regional artists using the distinctive materiality and processes associated with the medium of fiber.

Lessman-Moss said, "I was pleased to be invited by Heights Arts to curate an exhibition of work in textile media, to present work by renowned artist Hildur Jonsson, while reacquainting Northeast Ohio audiences [with] the weavings of Laurie Addis. Emerging textile artist Katlin Rothacher, and Elena Brebenel, a new colleague in interdisciplinary textiles at Kent State University, will provide additional perspectives that build on the legacy of the processes and histories of textiles." Other art-

ists in the show are Si-Yun Chang, Rebecca Cross, Andrea Myers, and Jessica Pinsky. *Point-Line-Pattern-Plane* will be on view through Sunday, March 1.

The first Spotlight exhibition of the year will feature multi-media artist Sean Jason Kelly. Kelly, who has participated in many exhibitions, community projects, and installations in the Cleveland area, and has worked as a tattoo artist for the past 15 years, uses a variety of media,

including watercolor, acrylic, pastel, and found objects. He is known for paintings, sculptures, drawings and site-specific installations, including five public art sculptures for Melt Bar and Grilled headquarters. Kelly's solo exhibition opens Friday, Jan. 31, and runs through Sunday, March 15.

For music appreciators, Heights Arts will host two free concerts in January. No Exit New Music Ensemble will perform on Jan. 18. On Jan. 25, in Heights Arts' first gallery concert of the season, Classical Revolution Cleveland will perform reimagined classical, jazz and ragtime works by composers such as Amy Beach, George Gershwin, Kurt Weill, Scott Joplin, and Django Reinhardt.

For more information on Heights Arts community programs and events, including house concerts, gallery performances and outreach, visit www.heightsarts.org.

Lauren Freeman is a marketing intern at Heights Arts.

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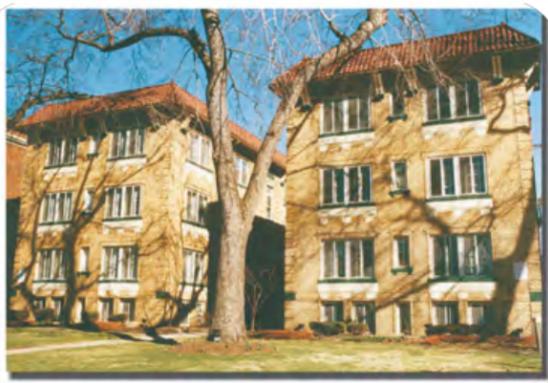
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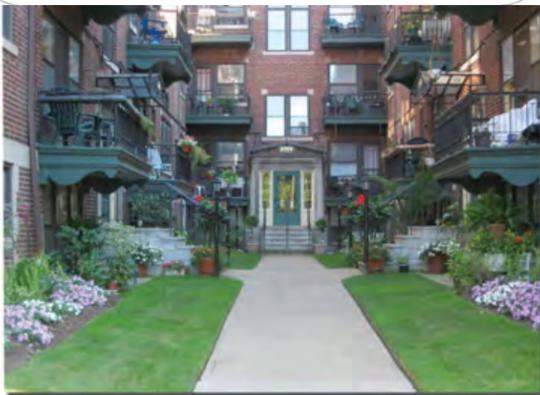
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'Skeleton Crew' in Cleveland premiere at Dobama Theatre

Colin Anderson

Dobama Theatre will present the Cleveland premiere of the Obie Award-winning "Skeleton Crew," Jan. 24 through Feb. 16.

Part of Dominique Morisseau's three-play cycle, "The Detroit Project," Dobama's production will be directed by Nina Domingue.

The play, which *The New York Times* called "a deeply moral and deeply American play . . . squarely in the tradition of Arthur Miller," is set in a struggling Detroit automotive plant during the peak of the 2008 recession. A few remaining workers are trying to figure out how to move forward if the plant goes under. Shanita has to decide how she'll support herself and her unborn child, Faye has to find a place to live, and Dez has to figure out how to make his ambitious dreams a reality. Power dynamics shift as their manager, Reggie, is torn between doing right by his work family and by his own. (The struggle is familiar to Clevelanders, with recent plant closures like that at Lordstown General Motors directly impacting the community.)

Morisseau's plays have been produced all over Cleveland this past year, including at Cleveland Play House and Karamu House. Dobama, which produced her play "Sunset Baby" in September 2018, is proud to produce another of her works.

This past October, the playwright spoke at The City Club of Cleveland about using art as a tool for social change, staking the claim that art can draw attention to problems that we might believe have already been solved. "The plays I write, they become important, even when I think I'm writing about the past," she said. "And I think that says more about society than it does about me."

Morisseau's "The Detroit Project" comprises "Skeleton Crew," "Paradise Blue," and "Detroit '67." She drew inspiration for all three plays from playwrights August Wilson and Pearl Clague, setting out to tell the stories of Black lives from impoverished post-industrial communities in a way that centers their humanity.

Growing up in Detroit, Morisseau

has a special affinity for bringing those stories to life. "[Detroit is] what I know and for me it is about humanizing a people that have been dehumanized in our media and social narrative," she stated.

An alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop, Morisseau has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival and Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center's National Playwrights Conference. She recently served as co-producer on the Showtime series "Shameless."

Her many awards include two Obie awards, a Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18, and a MacArthur Genius Grant. She is also the Tony-nominated book writer for the new Broadway musical "Ain't Too Proud - The Life and Times of the Temptations."

Dobama's production of "Skeleton Crew" features Lisa Louise Langford, Ananias J. Dixon, Mary-Francis Miller and Robert Hunter.

Performances are Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$32 to \$38, with senior, student and military discounts available.

On Sunday, Jan. 26, at 7:30 p.m., Dobama will offer a pay-as-you-can performance as part of its effort to remove economic barriers and make its productions accessible to everyone. Additionally, one hour prior to all performances, all remaining tickets will be available at the box office at the pay-what-you-can rate of \$1 or more.

Call the Dobama box office at 216-932-3396 or visit www.dobama.org for more information or to purchase tickets.

Colin Anderson is the general manager of Dobama Theatre and a graduate of Oberlin College. His training is in directing and dramatic literature.



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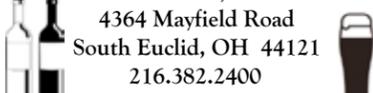


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January's cold reminder of school



SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

I write fairly often, in this column, about how much I disliked school. Some people may think I overdo it. Because how could anyone hate school that much? It might make you feel better to know that, well . . . I really did hate school that much—because, I mean, at least you know I'm being sincere. And some may think I'm setting a bad example for kids who read this column. Well, it might make you feel better to know that, well . . . kids don't read this column.

So, having gotten that out of the way, it's that time again. Because whenever it's January, which, for me, happens approximately once a year, I remember more than ever how much I hated school. That time frame spans the very first day of kindergarten to the day before the day I quit high school, on June 1 of my so-called "12th-grade" year (so-called because I didn't have enough credits to graduate that year, anyway).

Septembers were really bad, too, for, I think, obvious reasons: I had to return to this dreaded drudgery after three months of freedom. Plus, the weather was

still nice. Octobers weren't so good, either, because I could only look ahead to all these many more months of this. November held slight promise, with an upcoming break (including a lot of food) toward the end of the month. December was one of the better months, relatively, because of vacation for half the month. Plus, there was always a winter concert—band at Roosevelt Junior High and choir at Heights High—to look forward to participating in. And those musical organizations were the reasons I went to school. Well, those and the law.

But January was the worst. There were no more holiday breaks for four months; and it was the coldest part of the year, which I knew would be the case for the next few months—making my way to and from school in freezing temperatures, strong winds and snow, sleet, slush and ice. The outlook was just bleak.

On weekends, my friends would want to go ice skating at the frozen-over Cumberland Pool parking lot. I hated that, too—I didn't skate, so I'd stand or sit there freezing. Or sledding at Cain Park, down the big hill at the Taylor Road end. At least I'd get to have a fast ride, for about six seconds, a few times. More like two times, actually, because by then I'd be covered with snow, making me even more uncomfortable.

So, from the first day of kindergarten, I was waiting for the day I could, finally, quit school. And everyone knew it. Which is why my old friends all

thought it was hilarious when my kids started going to school and I began volunteering for everything in the schools.

When they were in Roxboro Elementary School and Ruffing Montessori, I was often the "room mother" in my kids' classes. And I often worked on the schools' fundraisers. When they were in Roxboro and Ruffing's middle schools, I came in and lectured to classes on topics ranging from Colonial cooking to life in the late '60s, and worked on fundraisers, and put together one school's newsletter, and so on.

In their eight consecutive Heights High years, I volunteered for everything I could—lecturing to journalism and social studies classes, becoming co-president of the Band and Orchestra Parents Organization, helping to launch the Vocal Arts Parents Organization, running the concession stand at all the swim meets, and many more things. At the end of my son's first year at Heights, my mother, at his orchestra concert, said to me, "You've been in this building more this year than you were in your last year of school." It was literally true.

My friends thought it was funny, but I wasn't doing it because I was suddenly imbued with school spirit. I was also there to advocate for my own kids, which you need to do.



Kids (and adults) still sled down Cain Park's big hill. And I still avoid doing that. It was hard enough for me just to get out of my car and take this picture.

And I was there to try to identify and possibly help kids who were like me; like the way I had been in school. That's why I got involved in the music groups. And it's why I also found many opportunities to mentor kids. And why I helped create a scholarship award for kids like me: talented musicians or artists whose priorities were not necessarily academic.

And if there were ever any problems with my own kids, I could go right in and talk to the principal and, more easily, straighten things out. Another time I was with my mother at Heights, Jim Cipolletti came up and said hello to me. I introduced them and my mother said, "Hm. Just like when you were in high school: I see the principal still knows your name."

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 musician and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop-music history.



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