University Square poised for rebuild

Mike Cook

University Square’s long-awaited and much-needed makeover could begin as soon as this summer.

“We are on the verge of doing what once seemed impossible,” University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said. “The partnership led by Kowit & Company Real Estate Group is the right local developer for the redevelopment at University Square. They share our vision of something bigger, something better, something beautiful, something worthy of this city, worthy of this community, worthy of University Heights.”

In January, UH City Council approved new Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to allow the redevelopment of University Square. The redevelopment plan was made possible through cooperation with the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, the Cuyahoga County government, the county prosecutor’s office, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority, and bond holders of the original 2001 University Square development.

A development agreement and

Seeking participants and hosts for dinners about race

Joel Moss

On Saturday, April 25, and Sunday, April 26, a special discussion will be taking place around dinner tables in Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

As part of the advance planning for “Heights Dinners: Conversations About Race,” organizers are currently seeking participants—hosts, facilitators and guests—for the dinners, which will be held in private homes and other locations in the two cities.

Heights Tree People prepare for spring

Jewel Moulthrop

Thirty-some years ago, Bill Hanavan planted a tree in his yard on Yorkshire Road, and fell in love. He couldn’t stop looking at trees, buying trees, and planting trees. In Kalamazoo, Mich., where Bill still looks at, buys, and plants trees—free of charge—for anyone who wants one.

A notice in Nextdoor, the social networking service for neighbors, elicited some interest, and FutureHeights members can receive a $1 discount off ticket prices by using a special discount code. Members should contact FutureHeights at 216-320-1423 or info@futureheights.org to receive the code.

The 44th Cleveland International Film Festival (CIFF) will return to its Heights roots in April 2020. With generous support from PNC Bank, CIFF East will take place at the Cedar Lee Theatre, the second weekend of the festival, starting on the evening of Friday, April 3, followed by two full days of programming on Saturday, April 4, and Sunday, April 5. There will be 18 screenings at the Cedar Lee throughout the weekend, comprising features, documentaries, shorts and family films.

For CIFF East screening information, visit www.clevelandfilm.org. Program guides can be found at the Cedar Lee Theatre, Cedar Lee district merchants.

Cedar Lee district welcomes CIFF East

Kristen Romito

Cedar Lee Theatre owner Jonathan Forman founded CIFF, the annual festival of films from around the world, in 1977. That year, the festival screened eight films over eight weeks at the Cedar Lee Theatre.

With generous support from PNC Bank, CIFF East will take place at the Cedar Lee Theatre the second weekend of the festival, starting on the evening of Friday, April 3, followed by two full days of programming on Saturday, April 4, and Sunday, April 5. There will be 18 screenings at the Cedar Lee throughout the weekend, comprising features, documentaries, shorts and family films.

By the end of its 44th season, CIFF will have screened nearly 1,400 films, including nearly 200 world premieres.


“Our goal is to raise awareness of our communities’ challenges with race, racism and equity, and to begin generating ideas for positive change while building community,” said Eric Dillenbeck, executive director of HCC, the lead organizer of the event. “We recognize a need to come together continued on page 12
About the Observer
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• 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 a Member” at the left. For questions about article length, etc., click on “Become an Observer” at the left. For questions about writing style, article length, etc., click on “Member Center” at the left.

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To the Editor:

So long, farewell, and goodbye to you!

After nearly 40 years as a children’s specialty retailer—25 of them in Cleveland Heights—the time has come to say goodbye. Pinwheel Kids, at 3409 Fairmount Blvd. will close at the end of March so I can kick off my retirement.

I feel lucky to have called Cleveland Heights my second home for over two decades. Being on “main street” in this vibrant neighborhood has been so gratifying. The loyalty and enthusiasm of the Cleveland Heights community for its small businesses is exceptional. Few things are more fun than the energy generated when friends run into friends at the store.

Many thanks to everyone who appreciated our merchandise and who delighted in discovering the perfect gift for a little friend. Happily, a collection of favorite Pinwheel items will be available at Jubilee! Gifts at the Heights at its new location in the loft at Eastwood Furniture, at the corner of Fairmount and Taylor.

Please stop in to say goodbye and enjoy bargain shopping until March 28. It’s been a blast.

Janet Nelson.

To the Editor:

The following letter was sent to members of the CHI Board of Zoning Appeals on Feb. 19:

Dear Members of the CHI Board of Zoning Appeals,

FutureHeights has reviewed the proposed Integrity Realty Group project at 2335 Overlook Road and 2345-61 Euclid Heights Blvd., and offers its support of the developer’s request for variances to Code Sections 1123.08, 1161.11, and 1213.07.

We are pleased that Integrity plans to retain the historic buildings and stone wall on the site. We are also pleased with the developer’s efforts to address and incorporate neighboring property owners’ concerns into the plans. We believe the project respects the scale of the adjacent apartment and carriage house buildings, and that the reductions in parking, paving, and building distances will not prevent this project from benefiting the neighborhood and community.

Please note that the development proposal includes a decrease in parking, a decrease in the scale of the adjacent apartment and carriage house buildings, and that the reductions in parking, paving, and building distances will not prevent this project from benefiting the neighborhood and community.

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To the Editor:

Which pocket will the money come from? For a family of two adults and two children, with a house valued at $150,000 and income of $75,000, the school board’s tax increase of $414 will take a big chunk out of their disposable income.

I went to Taxformcalculator.com and to the liberal Economic Policy Institute for some estimates of a family budget in Cleveland Heights: • Take-home pay after a 10-percent 401(k) contribution and all taxes: $58,560. • Property tax: $6,414 • Housing: $9,239 • Transportation: $13,047 • Health care: $10,476 • Food: $9,077 • Personal care; household supplies, including furnishings and equipment, household operations, housekeeping supplies, and telephone services; reading materials, and school supplies: $7,389

That leaves $3,218 in disposable income for college savings and quality-of-life expenses, such as entertainment, travel, and occasional restaurant meal, tutors, dance/piano lessons, gifts, charity, and a family vacation.

What should this family give up so that a few dozen CHI-UH administrators can take in annual salary and benefits in excess of $150,000? 

Robert Shwab
Cleveland Heights
Heights Observer March 1, 2020

This column is about how Cleveland Heights needs to revise its process for filling unexpected vacancies on CH City Council. Shortly after finishing it, we learned that such a vacancy may arise soon.

We received a tip that Council Member Melissa Yasinow is planning to move out of the community. As of Feb. 25, her Washington Boulevard house was showcased on real-estate website Zillow with a notation that it was scheduled to go on the market Feb. 27. Meanwhile, the Chagrin Falls website Zillow with a notation that a house was showcased on real-estate Feb. 25, her Washington Boulevard house was to move out of the community. As of Feb. 13, council called for applications by March 13 to fill the 60-day limit for filling council vacancies, if they members must resign, or inform council that they will not retain her council seat. The city charter does not specify how far ahead council seats are to be filled, but she would not directly confirm nor deny it.

When we contacted her directly, Yasinow said she was upset about being confronted with the information, and it can be subject to other types of manipulation, such as timing resignations to coincide with certain dates on the political calendar.

The proposed consequence for failing to meet the 90-day limit will be: The vacancy will be filled by the voters at the next primary or general election the CRC calculated that 120 days would allow candidates time to circulated petitions and meet Board of Elections filing requirements. CH City Council had every right to dismiss one of the few substantive changes to the 1921 Cleveland Heights City Charter proposed by the CRC. But we find their stated rationale, that 90 days are insufficient, unconvincing.

The recent appointment process in Cleveland Heights seems to impel councils to finish on time. If it was scheduled to go on the market Feb. 27, the Chagrin Falls CRC had exhaustively discussed the council-appointment process. As commission members knew, many citizens consider this practice undemocratic and subject to gaming. It gives appointed council members the advantage of incumbency if they subsequently run for election; it allows council to choose friends or political allies over better-qualified applicants; and it can be subject to other types of manipulation, such as timing resignations to coincide with certain dates on the political calendar.

The proposed consequence for failing to meet the 90-day limit was: The vacancy would be filled by the voters at the next primary or general election scheduled at least 120 days after the missed deadline. The CRC calculated that 120 days would allow candidates time to circulate petitions and meet Board of Elections filing requirements. CH City Council had every right to dismiss one of the few substantive changes to the 1921 Cleveland Heights City Charter proposed by the CRC. But we find their stated rationale, that 90 days are insufficient, unconvincing. Shaker Heights, Lakewood and Euclid have 60-day limits; Brunswick, Mentor and University Heights councils are given 30 days. The original Cleveland Heights charter places no time limit on filling vacancies by appointment. Our council preferred that.

We are tired of our city’s inability to efficiently complete tasks that other communities accomplish with ease—and we have plenty of company. That fatigue could be viewed as a major factor in November’s 64 percent “yes” vote to change CH’s form of government from council-manager to mayor/council. (Note: The Issue 26 ballot initiative could not address council vacancies or other issues due to a state rule that limits citizen ballot initiatives to a single subject.)

What happens in other cities if council fails to fill a vacancy within the specified time frame? Somebody else chooses the new member. In the Cleveland Heights CRC’s proposal, it would have been the voters. In many other city charters, including that of University Heights, the mayor makes the appointment if council misses its deadline. But the threat of someone else choosing seems to impel councils to finish on time. Amazing.

The recent appointment process in University Heights worked as follows. After Mark Wiseman resigned on Jan. 13, council called for applications by Jan. 24, and 26 residents applied. In executive session on Jan. 29, the six sitting council members selected five finalists. On Feb. 4 they interviewed each finalist for 20 minutes. On Feb. 8, Cleveland.com reported that Saundra Berry, a longtime resident of the Cedar-Taylor neighborhood, had been chosen. Berry was sworn in on Feb. 12—29 days after Wiseman vacated the seat. Congratulations to Ms. Berry—and also to University Heights City Council on its timely completion of a relatively straightforward, if not always easy, task.

Cleveland Heights City Council’s rejection of a firm time frame for appointments is symptomatic of its resistance to change. Now we have a partially reconstituted council, with new leadership. Perhaps it will be willing to take a fresh look at some of the prerogatives and practices—in a word, the culture—handed down over the past 100 years.

As for Yasinow, if indeed she intends to move out of Cleveland Heights, she should resign immediately, and allow the six remaining council members to get on with the business of replacing her—we hope without delay.

Deborah Van Kleeck and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Rautenberg served on the Cleveland Heights Charter Review Commission 2018-19. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.
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In support of our public schools
To the Editor:

I am a homeowner, mother and teacher living and working in Cleveland Heights. Living here was a no-brainer for me; it’s an inclusive, walkable, artistic community with historic homes, independent businesses and access to all of Cleveland’s cultural assets. When I was lucky enough to land a student-teaching placement at Noble Elementary School in my 20s, I knew this was where I wanted to put down roots.

Over the next decade I taught at both private and public schools before landing my dream job, teaching studio art at Heights High.

The fall after my daughter was born, my husband and I brought her along as we toured the brand-new Heights High. I will never forget walking those hallways as my husband whispered to the baby girl he wore on his chest, “This is going to be your school.”

My family decided to live here for many reasons, but none are as important as my belief in our strong public schools. I walk into my classroom each day with a single goal: to be worthy of the level of education and sense of community that I want my own child to experience. I want her to have access to all the amazing programming that drew me to the Heights; rigorous academics, and music and arts availability that are unsurpassed.

I will always support my schools and the future of our community.

Laura Skehan
Cleveland Heights

The value of teachers’ work
Ari Klein

The complexity of teaching in public schools today is difficult to explain to retired colleagues or friends who are not in public systems. Much has changed in the last 30 years.

Today’s teachers have so much to learn beyond curriculum and teaching techniques. When I began my career, I was given a textbook and a course of study as my guides. Now there are teaching materials and supports, pacing guides, programs for attendance, grading, and parent contact logs, among many other teaching and classroom management tools.

There are board policies, state and federal laws regarding students with disabilities; a student code of conduct, with its own implementation guidelines; and a rhyhage employee code of conduct that we are responsible for understanding.

With today’s accountability standards, teachers must be aware of every student who has documented behavior, and the specific needs. Learning how to access and fill out the proper forms is also always changing, and time consuming.

There are procedures for everything—from a level 1 lockdown to any sort of emergency you can think of. Teachers must know which words are acceptable when addressing students and which to avoid using, which may not always be obvious. Teachers must use student data to analyze, prioritize and individualize instruction. The list goes on and on. Any one of these items could take a long time to master.

On top of all this, teachers are expected to motivate students to be engaged in their coursework.

Moreover, we are all required to continue taking graduate-level courses and to participate in professional development.

What is the economic value of our teachers?

A TEACHER’S VOICE

Ari Klein is a lifelong community member and teacher at Cleveland Heights High School and president of the teachers union.

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by
Johnna Adams

“...heart-stopping...the show has pathos and suspense in bucketloads...the show raises profound questions about parenting and education and documents the gut-wrenching force of maternal loyalty.” —Washingtonian
This is no time for despair

Susie Koser

I’m a hopeful person. I believe deeply in democracy and I am devoted to the contribution our public institutions, especially our public schools, make to society and human advancement. But lately I’ve felt a lot more despair than hope.

When it comes to lawmaking, Ohio legislators seem to prefer sneak- ing their pet ideas into closed-door budget negotiations. When it comes to education, the legislature has imposed policy after policy focused more on destroying our public schools than elevating them. The policies advance a narrative of failure, not success, and justify disinvestment and flight rather than support and participation.

This bleak landscape makes me weary.

On Feb. 10, State Rep. John Patterson, a four-term Democrat from Ashtabula, spoke at a public forum at Heights High about bi-partisan legislation that he and his best friend, Lima Republican State Rep. Bob Cupp, have worked on for more than two years, to “get right” Ohio’s system for funding public schools.

I am grateful to Patterson for restoring both my confidence in elected officials and my hope that the legislative process can advance public policy that is informed by facts and serves the common good. As a policy wonk, I’m interested in both the process and the substance. This effort hit the target on both. I came away with a flicker of hope that we might even get a new funding system for public education that is adequate and equitable.

Bill Phllis, Ohio’s leading advocate for school-funding reform, set the stage. He offered the long view of the funding problem and the legislature’s constitutional obligation to fund a public system, not private education.

To make the funding system constitutional, it must increase the state’s investment in the public system and reduce school districts’ reliance on local property taxes. He was adamant that this is the moment to solve the problem, and that House Bill 305, the Patterson-Patterson proposal, is the solution we need.

Moving back and forth across the stage, Patterson, a retired high-school teacher, described the contents of the bill and the process used to develop each component. He stopped frequently to inquire, “Are you with me?” The legislation would establish the amount of money that should be invested in the education of every public-school student, and the formula for distributing state funds to local districts.

Patterson explained that the working group that developed the proposal included practitioners and finance experts. They addressed several key variables, including the actual cost of providing a quality education and operating a school district; the unique needs, special costs, and circumstances of the state’s 612 school districts; and a fair assessment of the capacity of each community to share in funding its public schools. The proposal includes a basic funding amount plus multiple add-ons for special costs.

Drafters of the plan wanted to respect the roles of local boards of education, which will decide how to spend the funding, and the interests of the taxpayers, who will pay for it all. It directly addresses over-reliance on property taxes, something that harms every community.

The presentation detailed a careful, well-informed process that respected information, reality and complexity, and it was not sugar coated. Implementing the proposal will be costly, and it will be a challenge to build the necessary political will. The proposal was convincing and sound.

There was no wringing of hands or partisan blaming. The ultimate solution resides with us, and our job is to press for adoption.

Dispair will not get us a better funding system. Thanks to leadership by a likable, down-to-earth legislator who is not deterred by the noise around the funding problem, we have a solid proposal on the table. This is no time for despair and the disengagement it produces.

Good legislators need engaged constituents and advocates. That’s us.

Susie Koser 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.

Vote ‘no’ to keep the Heights affordable

To the Editor:

My family has been in the Heights for four generations. Both my husband and I are alumni. I have volunteered as a tutor in the elementary schools, and was campaign treasurer for two former school board members. That said, I am writing to ask people to vote “no” on the operating levy.

Understanding our community is primarily residential, we still have had an unprecedented number of levies and increases in spending in recent years—despite large decreases in school enrollment. Roughly 40 percent of our school-aged children opt out of the public schools, yet our spending is amongst the highest in Ohio. I know there have been calls for the district to have a State Performance Audit to address concerns, and I echo this sentiment.

There has been a lack of transparency. The refusal to allow any questions at the school levy presentation, as well as neglecting to answer the majority of submitted written questions even one month later, is cause for concern.

On Jan. 31, the (state) legislature voted to provide an additional $3 million in funding while reworking the EdChoice funding formula for the April 1 deadline.

Burdening taxpayers with an $8.8-million permanent levy for a short-term budget problem, as well as many outstanding questions, requires a “no” vote on Issue 26.

Susan Jhirad

Cleveland Heights

City councils should consider impact of school levy

To the Editor:

If passed, the proposed school levy increase would give the Heights the highest property tax rate in Ohio. That is quite a severe burden when one considers the large number of low-and middle-income taxpayers here. Has any organization or elected leader in the Heights studied the impact on the community? How will this affect population, tax delinquencies, vacancies, home ownership, the quality of housing, and local businesses? The long-term trend of all of these is negative.

Where are our city councils? Has any city found success in being #1 for property tax rates? The school board, [teachers] union, and all others supporting this levy are not concerned with these questions.

The cities of Cleveland Heights and University Heights should be considering the needs and future of the wider community. Instead of wasting money on college loan and municipal broadband studies, the cities should commission an economic impact study on this school levy.

One day our cities will need to come to taxpayers for additional funds to support some vital improvement or services, but we will be tapped out by the school district.

Bonnie Dolzer

Cleveland Heights

School spending, not vouchers, is the problem

To the Editor:

On March 17, please vote “No” on Issue 26. The problem is school spending, not school vouchers, and here’s why: Cleveland Heights already owns the title of highest-tax burden city in the state of Ohio. We currently give more money to the schools than almost any other school district in Ohio—and we are not wealthy! This monstrous school levy adds another $150,000 house tax bill of a $1,070,000 house. This is not sustainable.

And let me say something about Cleveland Heights and why this is so morally wrong. We are an aging city located next to Cleveland and East Cleveland. Our houses are all 100 years old and new families are not moving into our community. We have had a slow but steady decline in population over the past 15 years, and this trend is not going to reverse. This is why it is so morally wrong to burden the taxpayers yet again with more money—that we do not have. The right thing to do for the school system would be to tighten its belt and control its own outrageous spending!

It is not a voucher problem, it is a spending problem. The city of Cleveland Heights no longer has the income base to sustain yet another school levy. For the sake of the community, please Vote “No” on Issue 26.

Joe Miller

Cleveland Heights
Dan McNeil

Voting against Issue 26 doesn’t mean that we don’t support our schools, nor that we don’t love our community. Voting against Issue 26 at this time will help ensure a bright future for the Heights. The CH-UH Board of Education (BOE) prefers to ask for more money before making a substantial effort to cut expenses. Furthermore, the state of Ohio has yet to determine the future of the voucher program for 2020, and to request a tax increase at this time is entirely premature.

The BOE threatens that vouchers are robbing the public system to pay for the various school alternatives. The reality is that the impact of vouchers is minimal compared to poor budgeting and overspending by the BOE. [In its] own publications, the BOE cites it has cut $750,000 from its annual budget. Do the math: this is 0.5 percent of the budget—one half of one percent! Not a very earnest reduction in spending.

The district continues to overspend on services and an expensive teachers’ union with heavy contracts, benefits and pension plans. The BOE needs to reconsider heavy administrative costs and overpriced services, consolidate elementary schools, sell assets, and re-negotiate benefit packages. And, when necessary, jobs must relocate—the same efforts that individuals make when faced with a budget challenge. Personally, I’ve changed jobs four times in nine years due to downsizing—it’s a fact in America; why should a teachers union be exempt?

The CH-UH BOE perpetuates an unsustainable, failed strategy of raising taxes. Our community has proven its support of our schools by approving 10 school levies in the past 19 years—tax levies that never expire. If approved, Issue 26, combined with the other 10 levies, [will] cost homeowners $1200 per $100,000 of property value. That’s an impactful amount of money to every homeowner in the Heights.

Why do we choose to live in the Heights? Because of unique homes at an affordable price that lie along tree-lined streets of safe, walkable neighborhoods. Another tax increase will make Cleveland Heights the highest-taxed city in Ohio, and discourage new arrivals while driving current residents out of their homes. Without clarity on the state’s position on vouchers, approval of Issue 26 would be premature. Voting “no” on Issue 26 encourages the BOE to remain within its budget and ensures the future vibrancy of our unique community.

Dan McNeil is a 25-year resident of Cleveland Heights, who has lived at four different addresses. He is a community volunteer, married father of two, works in healthcare, and is apolitical.

School district comparisons should consider many factors

To the Editor:

Attorney Geoff Johnson’s letter [in the January issue of the Heights Observer] about excessive educational costs in Cleveland Heights is neither informative nor convincing. He needs to do his homework. He compared the total [district] budget of [CH-UH] to other cities, [and] fails to consider the many other factors he needs to consider in order to understand why costs are different from one city to another.

To name a few . . . how about teacher pay? School district comparisons should consider many factors including characteristics? How about infrastructure? How about administrative costs? How about quality of teachers? How about teacher pay? How about the price per pupil cost? How about population characteristics? How about living costs doesn’t help get to the answers nor [to] an understanding.

Gerald Seidel
Cleveland Heights

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Dan McNeil

Issue 26 is symptom of larger problem

Dan McNeil is a 25-year resident of Cleveland Heights, who has lived at four different addresses. He is a community volunteer, married father of two, works in healthcare, and is apolitical.

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Gerald Seidel
Cleveland Heights
Smart state policy would bring equality in education and taxation

Greg Donley

Here comes another school levy. Here come the same letters and arguments we’ve heard over the past 20 or 30 years. And here comes the aftermath of the vote, with a small majority of votes cast, and a large minority discouraged but determined to try again. This same drama has played out over and over for decades, with the local acr...
Public education and citizenship

Michael Knoblauch

Public education creates citizens. A public education is the most powerful, positive and transformative relationship a person will have with any government activity. It is the beacon heartbeating for every community. The public education heartbeat of Cleveland Heights and University Heights is weak. This weakness is not from a lack of money, inadequate buildings, or poor teaching. It weakened over years, the consequence of the community’s diverging perception of its reality with the reality of many students in CH-UH schools.

Put another way, tax dollars collected and spending per student do not match the community’s perceived reality of expected outcomes, state test scores, and other subjective and dubious evaluation criteria. We are in a spiraling trap without a way out; costs continue to rise and community ambivalence toward the schools continues. The perception has become "the schools are bad," "we won’t send our children to Heights schools," "we won’t vote for a tax levy." Students still attend Heights schools; advance, graduate, go to college, enter the workforce—and too many don’t achieve their potential.

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census data report that more than 90 percent of all public schools are in Cleveland Heights and University Heights attended a public school. We must ask ourselves, "Why the hugely significant disparity between national public-school participation and CH-UH public school participation, and how can we increase the number who attend our schools?"

Change and improvement are possible. It starts with setting meaningful, achievable goals. Reach a 75 percent school participation rate in 10 years; increase the graduation rate; aim to have all students participate in extracurricular activities; establish yearly mentoring engagements; and more. To meet these goals the school district must lead—developing and implementing supplemental community-based programs; partnering with community groups and individuals, as program managers, tutors, mentors, or advisors working with students, individually or in groups. A modest number of such programs exist; we need more.

We are resource rich, but too few of our personal and institutional resources are engaged with CH-UH schools. Many churches and temples have outreach or social justice programs focused on education and families. They would be credible partners. They need to be asked.

The city governments of Cleveland Heights and University Heights must be active partners in this program, creating a real partnership between the cities and the school system. The infrequent joint meetings are insufficient.

Open Doors Academy is an extraordinarily successful community-based school for only 44 percent of three adult children who are graduates of Citizenship for Great Design, and father of three adult children who are graduates of Heights High.

A 40 plus year resident of Cleveland Heights, Michael Knoblauch is a former board member of FutureHeights, sponsor of Citizens for Great Design, and father of three adult children who are graduates of Heights High.

Chandre Ford

When my son was ready for kindergarten, I looked at the school report card and, like many, decided that I would never send my son to Heights schools. After a long search, I enrolled him in a charter school where we had one problem after another. I felt like his teacher had written him off after just two months in class. She only listed problems without ever giving solutions. I felt like I was failing my son—the worst feeling in the world.

After another year of poor (or nonexistent!) communication and the school constantly switching my son’s classroom, I was fed up! They made me feel like he was unable to learn, and I just didn’t believe that.

I finally called CH-UH and explained my situation through tears. My only wish was for him to continue with his public schools. But I received replies and on his first day I met not only his teacher and principal but also the office staff, nurse, and social worker. The social worker and I discussed my concerns, which she passed on to his teacher, who discussed them with me the next day and offered a clear plan.

Two weeks later, my son told me that at the other school he felt like he was always in trouble, but at this school he feels smart. He learned more in four months at Boulevard than he had in the previous year and a half at Boulevard.

Boulevard is everything I wanted for my child: a diverse learning environment with teachers who are genuinely invested in their students; and a firm but gentle leader who listens to both students and parents. I know that my concerns will never fall on deaf ears. My only regret is listening to the negativity and not sending my son to a CH-UH school sooner.

We are truly blessed to be Heights Tigers!

Chandre Ford is a Cleveland Heights resident, proud parent of a Boulevard Elementary School first-grader, and active member of the Boulevard PTA.

Parent wishes she’d used Heights school sooner

Opinions continue on page 21.
Saundra Berry sworn in as UH City Council member

Judge J.J. Costello swears in Saundra Berry as a new member of UH City Council on Feb. 12.

Saundra Berry was sworn in as the newest member of University Heights City Council at a special meeting on Feb. 12, filling the seat vacated by former council member Mark Wiseman, who resigned on Jan. 13.

Since 2007, Berry has served as Clerk of Courts at the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. She previously worked at the Ohio Department of Education as director of Cleveland scholarship and tutoring.

Berry brings auditing experience to council, as she served as an auditor for the Cleveland Municipal School District 1983–99. A former math teacher, Berry is a certified public accountant.

Berry earned a master’s in business administration from Atlanta University, and earned her bachelor’s degree in mathematics from Central State University.

A deacon at Antioch Baptist Church, Berry is the former president of the Wiley Middle School Parent Teacher Association. She has also worked for the campaign committees of U.S. Reps. Marcia Fudge and Stephanie Tubbs Jones.

UH City Charter gives council 30 days to fill a council vacancy; if council is unable to decide, the mayor becomes responsible for the appointment.

In the immediate wake of Wiseman’s resignation, University Heights City Council announced that it would be accepting letters of interest and resumes through Jan. 24, from residents interested in serving on council. From a total of 26 applicants, council members selected five finalists in executive session on Jan. 29, and interviewed them on Feb. 4 and 5. On Feb. 6, UH City Council announced it had appointed Berry to fill the vacant council seat.

Various UH council members and the mayor spoke at the Feb. 12 meeting, in advance of Berry’s swearing in. In his remarks, Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan recognized council’s role in appointing Berry.

“This was, of course, wholly council’s appointment, per the charter, as it should be,” said Brennan. “The only reason the mayor would make the appointment is if council was unable to decide. Even though we had 26 excellent applicants, it does say a lot that, obviously, one rose to the top, and understandably so.”

Addressing Berry, Brennan added, “I’m excited that you’ll be joining city council—I’d be as happy if it were my choice.”

In introducing CH Municipal Court Judge J.J. Costello, to conduct the swearing in ceremony, Brennan cited the “personal and professional connection” between Costello and Berry, who work together at CH Municipal Court.

Prior to the meeting’s adjournment, Brennan invited Berry to speak to those in attendance, and her fellow low council members. Berry said, “I just thank all of you for having confidence in me. I really feel a part of this council—you’ve all been so gracious.” She thanked her church, her family and friends, and the people she works with who came to the ceremony. She then made a motion to adjourn the special meeting.

Berry’s appointment is for an abbreviated term of approximately two years, until the end of December 2021. If interested in continuing to serve on council, Berry will have to run for election on Nov. 2, 2021.

Wiseman resigned from UH City Council upon his appointment as a magistrate to Cleveland Municipal Court’s Housing Division.

Video of the Feb. 12 special meeting can be viewed on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oRNX68jvRt&t=8s).

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and is a Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer.
Brennan declares UH ‘back on the map’

Mike Cook

University Heights Mayor Michael Brennan reported on Feb. 11, in his second State of the City address, that University Heights is “back on the map.”

Brennan began his speech by relaying a discussion he had with resident Ari Jaffe, prior to the 2017 election, in which Jaffe asked Brennan if he was considering merging University Heights with a neighboring city. Paraphrasing the conversation, Brennan said Jaffe felt at the time that University Heights was “adrift, without direction, without purpose, without identity.”

In just two years, Brennan said, there’s now an energy in the city. “I didn’t do it alone,” Brennan said. “We did it, working together—the mayor’s office, city council, the good men and women who come to work every day for our city. Citizens like him [Jaffe], who step up and serve our community. And the residents who expect good things, and deserve good things.”

Brennan described University Heights as strong, and growing stronger. “We have found our identity, we are back on the map, and we’re building something special here in University Heights,” he said.

Brennan reported that construction is set to begin in 2020 on redevelopment at University Square, and on new infill housing and new townhomes.

Phase I of the University Square rebuild will comprise approximately 203 market-rate apartments, and 5,000 square feet of new retail, some of which might be live/work space. “As Phase I is completed,” Brennan said, “we will work together on Phase II, and for what is worthy of this high-profile center of our community.”

Brennan praised city council, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, and county officials for working together with the original bondholders and Kowit & Company Real Estate Group [the developer] on the project.

Brennan credited the City Beautiful CIC for coming to terms with Kneze Builders to construct three infill homes on vacant lots in the city. The homes will have architectural characteristics consistent with current homes in University Heights, but with modern construction, open floor plans, and today’s amenities.

Brennan said the new townhome development, planned for the north end of Cedar-Taylor, will be marketed toward young professionals and empty nesters, and will feature luxury finishes and rooftop views of downtown Cleveland.

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Brennan praised the city’s police and fire departments. “In their first full calendar year in their respective positions, Chief Dustin Rogers and Chief Robert Perko built upon their departments past successes, and are well positioned to continue to do the hard and important work to protect the safety of everyone in University Heights—not just those who live here, but those who work here, go to school here, and those who shop and visit,” Brennan said.

Brennan also congratulated UH Building Commissioner James McReynolds on his upcoming retirement, and Housing and Community Development Director Patrick Grogan-Myers on his new position with the city of Maple Heights.

Under UH Finance Director Dennis Kennedy, Brennan said the city has revised both its investment and reserve policy. “One of the reasons we brought in an expert like Dennis Kennedy,” Brennan said, “was to have a sure hand to show us the way financially and make good long-term decisions.”

Brennan concluded by contrasting University Heights with what’s happening in Washington, D.C. “I don’t have to tell you, this country is tearing itself apart,” he said. “We have seen our national office hold meetings of which we thought the ‘coarse’ in discourse. “I resolve to continue to be the change. I want to see in our country—positive, progressive, responsive, sensitive, open, and strong,” Brennan vowed. “I could not be prouder to hold the honor of being your mayor and leading this city, and all it represents.”

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.
Kowit explained there is a $1,400 to $1,900 per month. apartment units, leasing at rates of
will be rebuilt as approximately 200
between the stores along Cedar Road
Macy's will remain, and the space in
at a recent council meeting. Target and
Brad Kowit of Kowit & Company
letter to UH City Hall.

is also welcome on this issue, and all
Service
(monthly newsletter). Feedback
already sparked inquiries from several
development at University Square have

Drucker said the plans for rede-

to serve the needs of the community,
this type is not only desirable in order
owners deserved "so much more."
She noted, "A redevelopment project of
ness owners deserved "so much more."
UH Vice Mayor Michele Weiss
said the redevelopment will benefit
local taxpayers. "The potential income
from new tenants will enable the city
to move forward with other initiatives
that we simply do not have funding
for," she said.

Jodi Sourini, CH-UH school board
president, said she is happy
the project keeps what works at Uni-
sity Square. "Keeping Target and
Macy's was a key issue," Sourini said.
"I'm pleased we were able to work
with the city to find a way to redevelop
University Square."

Construction could begin as early
as this summer. "Our goal is to finish
up our due diligence [and] finish up
the development agreement [with
the city] this year, and in the summer
break ground and start building,"
Kowit said. "It's probably a 14-month
process from start to finish."

Kowit said Phase II planning will

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Lee, Meadowbrook, and Slaby roads; in lots 5, 6, 16, and 17; and in the Cedar Lee district’s municipal parking deck; from 9 a.m., Friday, April 3, through 9 a.m., Monday, April 6.

CIFF44 will be held March 25 through April 5 at Tower City Cinemas. More than 600 screenings will take place during the 12 days of the festival, and 400 guest filmmakers from around the world will visit Cleveland during the festival. For more information visit www.clevelandfilm.org.

Festival tickets go on sale to CIFF members on Friday, March 6, at 11 a.m., and to the public on Friday, March 13, at 11 a.m. They can be purchased online, by phone, or in person at the CIFF Box Office in the lobby of Tower City Cinemas. Day-of-show tickets, when available, can be purchased at the theater.

The 44th Cleveland International Film Festival will take place during the 12 days of Lent, March 13 through March 25. More than 600 screenings are scheduled at Tower City Cinemas, 2450 Arlingto

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Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights
JANUARY 21, 2020
Council members present were Mary Stein, Kahlil Seren, Mary Dunbar, and Heights Career Tech programs, and Mayor Stein shared the Cleveland Heights High School levy. The Cleveland Heights does not wade into ballot issues. Two other residents who expressed concern and frustration over this property.

City manager’s report
City Manager Briley referred, and council accepted, three project bids: 2020 sewer rehabilitation and ADA curb-ramp replacement, 2020 surface-water treatment program, and Shannon Road waterline replacement. Financing revenue bonds Council Member Yasinov provided the first reading of ordinances related to TOH financing for the continued maintenance of the city’s roads (such as Exeter Road). He went on to state that the roads have needed very little maintenance over their lifetime of 100 years, but that now it is a time. The city manager responded that there are no eminent plans, and the city must pause and come up with an approach. They will agree with rates in the spring.

Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights
JANUARY 21, 2020
Council members present were Mary Dunbar, Malindy Joy Hart, Donna Russell, Kahlil Seren (vice mayor), Jason Stein (mayor), Michael N. Unger, and Melissa Yasino. The meeting lasted from 7:44 p.m. to 8:59 p.m.

Public comments
Top of the Hill: Several residents complained about high property taxes, remodeling projects at this home, which they called a "disaster property." They questioned the qualifications of the contractors, and the permits of materials and inspections. Richard Wong, planning director, and Sussana Nier-Jones, vice city manager, responded to all complaints. The city is continuing to meet with the owners and contractors, and assured the neighbors that the porches, doors and windows will be removed soon.

Elected mayor: Mayor Friedson asked about work on the transition to an elected mayor. City Manager Briley responded that staff and council are beginning to study the issues. Ordinances, operations, salary, ethics concerns, and the balance of power are all in discussion.

Tree canopy: Laura Marks of Heights Tree People spoke about the Tree Commission’s goals and objectives. More than 600 screenings will take place during the 12 days of Lent, March 13 through March 25. More than 600 screenings are scheduled at Tower City Cinemas, 2450 Arlington Road. The festival includes new films, a tribute to Jerry Lewis, and the annual Top of the Hill competition.

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Two CH residents join United Way board

Savannah Heck

United Way of Greater Cleveland has named two Cleveland Heights residents to its Board of Directors—Andrew “Randy” Paine, and Vanessa Whiting.

Paine, president of Key Institutional Bank, serves on the board of the KeyBank Foundation. He previously served as chairman of the board of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, chairman of KeyBank’s corporatewide United Way campaign, on the board of visitors for DePaul University, and on the board of directors for Special Olympics India, and Meals on Wheels in Indianapolis.

Whiting, president of A.E.S Management Corp., is an attorney with extensive experience in real estate and small business enterprise law, focused on affordable housing as well as community and economic development. She is chair of the MetroHealth Board of Trustees, and chairs its Legal and Government Relations and Governance committees. She also serves on the boards of the Tri-C Foundation, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, and the Greater Cleveland Partnership. Whiting co-chairs the Karamu House Capital and Sustaining Campaign, and is a Life Member of the NAACP.

“We are thrilled to welcome United Way of Greater Cleveland’s new directors to the board,” said Augie Napoli, United Way of Greater Cleveland’s president and CEO. “United Way is fueled by the volunteerism of accomplished and dedicated community leaders like these.”

Koonce named to Boys & Girls Clubs of NE Ohio leadership post

Ken Wood

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio (BGCNEO) has named Robert Koonce chief development officer. Koonce, who lives—and grew up—in Cleveland Heights, brings more than 13 years of nonprofit fundraising experience to his new role.

Koonce previously headed development for Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC), beginning in 2015. In his new role, Koonce will oversee all fundraising, development operations and communications for BGCNEO, an organization created last year by the merger of clubs in Cleveland, Akron, Lorain County and Erie County. BGCNEO serves more than 8,600 kids at 39 locations, providing safe, fun, after-school places for kids ages 6-18, focusing on healthy lifestyles, academic success and character.

“Robert has done an outstanding job of building strong relationships with our donors and connecting them to our mission,” said Ron Soeder, BGCNEO’s interim president and CEO.

Koonce, who earned his undergraduate degree in classics at Case Western Reserve University and a master’s in theology from St. Joseph’s College of Maine, has worked in development at University Hospitals, Western Reserve Land Conservancy and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. At BGCC, he helped build a development program that enabled the organization to expand to 14 clubs serving 900 kids per day.

Koonce also is president of the Board of Trustees for Home Repair Resource Center, is a trustee for Lake Erie Ink, and is board secretary of the Ko K Yo Foundation, which builds schools in rural Ethiopia.

Ken Wood is a former Sun News writer and is a member of the MetroNews Network for Special Olympics Indiana, and Meals on Wheels in Indianapolis.

Koonce chief development officer.

Vanessa Whiting
Free talk series aims to bring nature home

Peggy Spaeth

Early spring is the perfect time to think about what to plant in our yards. These days, we know that the choices we make impact nature as never before. We have a declining tree canopy, declining insect and bird populations, and a global climate emergency.

An upcoming series of free talks, Bringing Nature Home, is intended to help attendees take positive actions at the ground level. The speakers, presented by Friends of Lower Lake and the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership (DBWP), will journey from the tree canopy to the shrub layer, to the ground layer for a holistic look at what makes up healthy habitat in public and private green spaces. The series’ tagline, “It’s About Time,” reflects the urgency of restoring urban habitat to good health, as well as how the sequence of plant life supports insects and birds throughout the growing season. Personal choices can make a difference, and this series of talks is intended to provide a guide.

On Saturday, March 7, Courtney Blashka, director of conservation and community forestry at Holden Forest and Gardens, will address declining tree canopy and talk about the overstory. Blashka’s talk is at the Cleveland Heights Community Center, rooms 1A-1B, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. At the end of this event, attendees will have an opportunity to meet the Heights Tree People, who can help them select and plant a (free!) tree in their own yards this spring.

On Saturday, March 14, John Barber, an experienced birder, will explain how to create a healthy bird habitat one’s own yard. Imitating how nature feeds the birds can save money on birdseed, as well as increase species diversity. Barber will be speaking at the University Heights Library from 1 to 2:30 p.m. On Saturday, March 21, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., at the Shaker Heights Library, Stefanie Verish will present an array of native plants that attract birds, butterflies and other pollinators. A Cleveland Metroparks naturalist, Verish will discuss native alternatives to conventional, and sometimes harmful, shrubs, such as Japanese barberry, a popular prickly shrub with bright red berries introduced to the United States in the late 19th century. A common plant at garden centers, Japanese barberry grows unchecked, even by deer, and has invaded natural areas, outcompeting native shrubs that feed insects and birds. According to www.habitatmatters.org, “research shows that a barberry’s dense foliage creates a perfect, humid climate for blacklegged ticks that carry Lyme disease—a fact that also creates a public health risk.”

In time for spring planting, and in advance of the annual plant sale at the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, Nick Mikash, natural resources specialist, will discuss planting the right plant in the right place on Saturday, April 4, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., at the Nature Center. Learn how to create a pollinator path on your street, like the one Bradford Road residents created on theirs. (The annual plant sale at the Nature Center will be on Saturday, May 9.)

DBWP, the Friends of Lower Lake, and the Nature Center all work closely with local municipalities. Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, University Heights, and Cleveland, for example, all have sustainability goals. But they uniformly say that the residents of their communities are the biggest drivers of adopting sustainable practices and policies. The more residents demonstrate and demand leadership to meet climate goals, the faster municipalities will work to restore earth’s systems and communities.

For more information and to register for one or more of these talks, go to www.doanbrookpartnership.org.

Peggy Spaeth is co-chair, with John Barber, of Friends of Lower Lake.

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www.mcgregorpace.org
Gardeners invited to participate in Noble market

Brenda H. May

As backyard and community garden growers order seeds and otherwise plan their gardens this winter, Noble Gardeners’ Market (NGM) urges them to consider growing extra to sell at its market this summer.

NGM will assemble on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m. to noon, Aug. 1 through Sept. 19. The market site is a mini-park at the corner of Noble and Roanoke roads in Cleveland Heights, one block north of Monticello Boulevard. Sellers are welcome to participate on any or all of the market days, free of charge.

NGM welcomes folks who sell fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers that they grow in backyards and community gardens. Sellers do not need to be Cleveland Heights residents, but they may not be market farmers. (NGM encourages people to support local farmers at the numerous farmers’ markets in the area, and in grocery stores that source locally.) They also need not commit to coming every Saturday.

Sellers will be asked to sign in, to declare where they grew their fruits, vegetables and flowers. Sellers are not charged for space, but must provide their own chair, and a table or ground cloth for displaying their products. Sellers must also be able to make change for customers. Water and electricity are not available at the market site.

Only fresh produce, flowers and plants may be sold, as the market is not licensed for selling processed food.

Last year was NGM’s first full August to September season, with 19 sellers participating, though never all on the same Saturday. Buyers learned to talk to the sellers who had the items they most desired, to find out when they next would be available, and arrived early for unique items, such as shiitake mushrooms, heirloom tomatoes or hot peppers, as these often sold out.

Tomatoes, peppers, summer squash and garlic sold well and were the most abundant items at the 2019 market. Buyers were pleasantly surprised to find specialty items and asked for more. Berries, carrots, beans, corn and potatoes were among the buyers’ requests.

Growers are encouraged to consider planting a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. As this is a community-based gardeners’ market, potential sellers can be assured that no backyard grower will have bushels of produce to sell; last year some had only a half dozen tomatoes or peppers. It isn’t the volume of produce, it’s the community aspect that makes this market so special.

Buyers were also delighted to find cut flowers in bouquets large and small. Perennials and other garden plants were other sought-after items, and buyers were grateful to talk with sellers about planting conditions and blooming schedules. Some sellers brought photos, which helped buyers imagine blooms that were not in season. Houseplants were also among the products sellers offered.

Perhaps the most delightful feature of NGM is the opportunity to form friendships around mutual interests—growing and cooking with fresh fruits and vegetables, and enjoying flowers and plants. As one participant said, “People came to the market for veggies, but stayed for the conversations.”

For more information visit www.nobleneighbors.com, or e-mail nobleneighbors@gmail.com.

Brenda H. May is one of the leaders of Noble Neighbors.
COMMUNITY NEWS

Stephens’ campaign distributes reusable bags as ban takes effect

If you see Cuyahoga County Council Member Cheryl Stephens or her supporters—Team Cheryl Stephens—knocking on doors, it is probably to deliver reusable shopping bags.

Thanks to an initiative from the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District (CCSWD), Stephens has committed to giving out sturdy, reusable plastic tote bags to anyone in her district who makes a request via www.teamcheryl.org/bags.

Each colorful, eco-friendly bag, made of recycled plastic, is estimated to replace 700 disposable bags over its lifespan. They will be distributed as long as the supply lasts.

Cuyahoga County Council passed a single-use plastic bag ban, effective Jan. 1. However, to help ease the transition, the ban won’t be enforced until July 1. During the six-month grace period, retailers won’t be fined. [For complete information on which kind of bags are banned, and which are exempt, visit www.cuyahogarecycles.org.]

CCSWD purchased 25,000 reusable bags, and made them available to members of county council to distribute to their constituents beginning in mid-January. It also made them available to Cuyahoga County nonprofit organizations.

Stephens considers this home-delivered bag campaign an outreach of gratitude for all of the residents who called and e-mailed, voicing their support for the Cuyahoga County plastic bag ban.

Stephens admits she understands reservations expressed by some retailers and residents, but believes “we need to make decisions today to take care of the future,” and said she hopes to work with grocers and retailers to support them while also finding other ways to make the community more sustainable.

“This isn’t a test,” said Stephens. “It is a way to save our lake and to have less trash and debris on our streets and yards. We have seen that other communities and states have done this successfully. And now Cuyahoga County is a leader in Northeast Ohio.”

Sustainability has always been a core issue for Stephens, who is running for reelection to Cuyahoga County Council, and faces a challenger on the March 17 Democratic primary ballot.

She may be best known, however, for her lifelong commitment to housing and economic development. As vice-chair of county council’s community development committee, she is working with county staff to negotiate with banks to meet the needs of the communities they serve. This includes requirements for community reinvestment, loans to families in low-to-moderate-income census tracts, counseling for small businesses, and specialized loan pools for those businesses.

Reflecting on the year since she first took office, Stephens is eager to continue serving District 10, comprising Bratenahl, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland and University Heights.

“When we start initiatives, they are not just for the core city, but also for first-ring suburbs,” said Stephens.

Pam Turos is a member of Team Cheryl Stephens, which comprises supporters who believe in moving Cuyahoga County District 10 forward.

Pam Turos

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Pam Turos
Church of the Redeemer advocates for inclusion

Mary Ann Kerr

Church of the Redeemer UMC invites the community to a luncheon on inclusion on March 29, 12:30 p.m., in Fellowship Hall. Marcha E. Banks, the keynote speaker, will address the topic “Trying Again to Include Everyone: A Preview of the 2020 United Methodist General Conference.” After her talk, there will be time for questions and discussion.

In 2019, the United Methodist Church (UMC) voted, by a slim margin, to assert the church’s prohibition against same-sex weddings and gay clergy. UMC has been in turmoil since that vote, as its progressive members have rebelled against the decision. As a result of that vote, ministers have been brought to trial and have lost their credentials—at great expense to them, the church and the community.

The Church of the Redeemer has been especially affected by this decision. Its congregation made a public statement 25 years ago, welcoming and affirming members of the LGBTQ community and all other persons, without exception. Therefore, the church’s congregation has been apprehensive about the decisions made by UMC at last year’s Special General Conference.

Banks was a delegate at the 2016 and 2019 general conferences, and will be a delegate again this year. Her service to the UMC was recognized with the 2014 CORR-a-geous Leadership Lauty Award, the 2016 Bishop James S. Thomas Leadership Award, and the 2017 Black Methodists for Church Renewal Chairman’s Honoree. She is a retired clinical and research neuropsychologist, and a former professor at The College of Wooster and Kent State University.

For more information about the March 29 luncheon, call the Church of the Redeemer, (216)-932-2065). The church is located at 420 South Taylor Road, in Cleveland Heights.

Mary Ann Kerr has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for 46 years. She and her husband, Douglas, have been members of Church of the Redeemer UMC for almost as long.

Noble Road Presbyterian Church presents ‘Senior Scams’ forum

Judith Beeler

Scams target people by phone, computer, mail and knocks on the door. Becoming informed is the best way to combat scams.

Noble Road Presbyterian Church has invited Danielle Musil, consumer affairs specialist from the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs, to present a community forum, “Senior Scams.”

While seniors are identified as one of the most vulnerable groups to be targeted by scammers, the tips presented will be for all ages, and all are invited to attend the forum.

At the event, planned for Saturday, March 14, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Musil will describe some of the current scams, and identify cues that will help you know when to stop and ask questions to avoid getting scammed. There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion.

The program will take place at Noble Road Presbyterian Church, 2760 Noble Road, and include a light lunch, followed by Musil’s presentation. Since “Pi Day” (3.14) is March 14, pie will be served for dessert.

Parking for those with limited mobility will be on Kirkwood Road. Other attendees are asked to park in the lot on Navahoe and Noble Roads. For more information about the program, call 216-932-0660.

Judith Beeler has lived in Cleveland Heights since 1991, and is a member of Noble Road Presbyterian Church.

HRRC announces March classes

David Brock

With spring around the corner, Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC) is ramping up its workshop offerings.

Up first is a cabinet-refinishing class on Thursday, March 7. New or renewed cabinets are one of the best ways to spruce up a home, and if you can do it yourself, you’ll save a lot of money. This workshop will lead you through the ins and outs of cabinet refinishing, including the necessary prep work, what types of paint products you should use, and how much sanding will be necessary. Participants will get experience using power sanders and painting cabinets.

On Mondays, March 9 and 16, HRRC will offer a two-part woodworking 101 series. The goal is for each participant to build a stepstool of two-by-fours. During the process, they will work with tools such as miter saws, routers and nail guns.

On Tuesday, March 31, those looking to create or expand a garden can take a class designed for first-time gardeners. An experienced Ashtabula County gardener will be on hand to lead the discussion and answer questions. He will cover how to establish a garden bed and start seeding, and will also provide tips on organic gardening.

All three workshops will be held at HRRC, 2520 Noble Road. Fees are $25 for the cabinet-refinishing workshop, $60 for the woodworking series, and $45 for the gardening class. All programs begin at 7 p.m. Cleveland Heights residents receive a 25 percent discount, and income-based discounts are available to residents of all cities.

To learn more about HRRC, visit www.hrrc-ch.org, or call 216-581-6100, ext. 22, or e-mail dbrock@hrrc-ch.org.

David Brock is the education and outreach coordinator for HRRC.
Nonprofit provides paid youth employees to businesses here

Missy Toms

Do your business need extra help this summer? Heights businesses that partner with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) give young people a chance to gain skills and develop good work habits.

Each summer, YOU, a nonprofit workforce development organization, employs 1,500 youths, ages 14–19, from economically distressed areas in Cuyahoga County. YOU provides the wages; employers in the Greater Cleveland community, including Cleveland Heights and University Heights, provide meaningful work experiences. A job coach, who visits two to three times a week, is assigned to each work site.

YOU works with a wide array of partners—nonprofits, government organizations, and private sector businesses—to provide meaningful work experiences for its young participants. During the summer of 2019, a Cleveland Heights church, Imani Temple Ministries, hosted eight youths. They were assigned duties such as maintenance, light housekeeping, and food bank setup. Imani’s Maintenance Director Terrance Ogletree said he enjoyed the experience, and would hire them, given the opportunity.

“Overall the experience was a good one. We had the chance to connect with youth and provide guidance and opportunity to a group of young people who needed it,” said Ogletree. “I met the youth where they were and shared my personal story, which was relatable to the youth.”

Ogletree’s advice to employers looking to partner with YOU is this: Keep an open mind and remember they are just kids. “They’re typical teens. They need a little guidance. This is a chance for you, as an employer, to give back to your community,” he said.

To learn more, or to register as a YOU summer employer, visit www.youthopportunities.org/employ-youth.

Missy S. Toms is vice president of development and communications for Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

CH Senior Center News

Amy Jenkins

In 2017, the Cleveland Heights Senior Activity Center (SAC) introduced Communities Assisting Residential Elders (CARE)—a membership program for adults, 60 and older, intended to assist with tasks in and around their homes.

This innovative concept was formed through the collaborative efforts of the Community Partnership on Aging, and senior service agencies for the cities of Cleveland Heights, Maple Heights and Solon. As with any start up, there was much work to be done—recruiting volunteers, registering members, and creating program recognition in the communities served.

Today, CARE continues to grow, and has evolved into a popular and successful program that, when they learn about it, most seniors and their families want to join.

For the older adult, CARE helps with tasks that may seem overwhelming, impacting their safety and overall well-being. Like most homeowners, older adults want to maintain their yards and home exteriors; CARE supports them in making this goal a reality. Other members might request assistance with interior projects, such as replacing light bulbs and smoke-detector batteries. Some CARE members are happy to have the volunteers complete the task, and enjoy the results, while other CARE members participate right alongside the volunteers, enjoying the socializing and activity.

CARE’s diverse and dedicated volunteers include individuals, couples, faith-based groups, co-workers, students, seniors, families and friends, offering a variety of skills. Some volunteer for one-day yard projects, while others have been with CARE since the beginning, and volunteer year-round.

One volunteer provides technical assistance when members have challenges with their cell phones, computers and other devices. A volunteer couple enjoys working together on interior projects, such as organization and window care. Another regularly leads local groups and organizations in tackling yard-care projects.

Thanks to support from the Cuyahoga County Division of Senior Adult Services, the Cleveland Foundation, PNC, the Care Source Foundation, the Legacy Village Fund, local Rotary and AARP chapters, local businesses and private donations, CARE has been able to keep the annual membership fee at $200. For those who are income-eligible, CARE pays the membership fee.

In January, CARE launched a new website, www.careneo.org. There, seniors and others can find information on membership and volunteering. Those seeking to support elder neighbors can contact CARE online or by phone (216-970-4399).

Amy Jenkins is supervisor of 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@clvhts.com.
Rox Middle School presents ‘Annie Jr.’

Musical theater returns to the newly renovated Roxboro Middle School on March 5 and 6, when “Annie Jr.” will have a two-night run, featuring performances by 28 middle school students. An additional 17 students comprise the production’s stage crew.

Andrew Susick, Roxboro Middle School’s new vocal music teacher, is the show’s director. In his 15th year as a music educator, Susick also leads all of Roxboro Middle School’s choirs. Asked why the community should come out and see this play, Susick responded, “The story of ‘Annie’ shares an important message about the true nature of family. Annie’s cheerful outlook on life and plucky spirit demonstrate how a family is made up of those who you surround yourself with and care for, regardless of where you are born or where you live. Our Roxboro Middle School students, teachers, parents and community have all come together as a family to put on a show that you won’t want to miss!”

Actors performing lead roles in “Annie Jr.” are Emily Barr (Annie), Henry Dyck (Oliver Warbucks), Helena Duffy (Miss Hannigan), Jordan Evans (Grace), Finn Titas (Rooster), Juliet Duffy (Lily), Gabriel Dodson (Drake), and, as the orphans, Laurel Buescher (Pepper), Ruby Tugueau (Duffy), Gwen Kinsella (Judy), Sophie Petersal (Tessie), Sofia Pehovic (Kate), and Nora Lubbers (Molly).

Performances will take place on Thursday, March 5, and Friday, March 6, at Roxboro Middle School (1400 Roxboro Road). Doors will open at 6:30 p.m., and performances will start promptly at 7 p.m. Tickets, $5 per seat, will be sold at the door both nights.

Susick previously assisted in the direction of productions of “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Sound of Music,” and “The Little Mermaid.” Susick is also choir director at St. Luke the Evangelist Antiochian Orthodox Church in Bainbridge, and a member of the University Heights Symphonic Band. He plays the trombone.

Nicolle Tugeau is a Heights High graduate (’92) and mother to three children in the CH-UH school district. She is a proud PTA parent and owner of a boutique literary agency representing children’s book authors and illustrators.

Kirby to deliver State of our Schools address on March 4

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District Superintendent Kirby will deliver the 2020 State of our Schools Address on March 4, at Cleveland Heights High School.

At the event, which will run from 6 to 8 p.m., each CH-UH public school and several clubs will display their accomplishments and strengths in a walk-through showcase. In addition, sections of the high school building will be open for self-guided tours.

“I’m looking forward to sharing the district’s accomplishments over the past year, as well as the major new initiatives taking shape,” said Kirby. “This event will also be a great chance for our community to meet our wonderful students and staff, and learn all about what makes their neighborhood schools so strong.”

Kirby’s speech will be broadcast live, at 7 p.m., via the district’s YouTube channel.

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

Heights students delve into history of slavery and the Holocaust

Xavier, an upperclassman, said he was impressed with how Jewish people took the Star of David, a symbol that was intended to shame them, and turned it into a symbol of pride. The students discussed how other cultures have managed to take back terms or images designed to insult or belittle them, and claim them as their own.

Stein emphasized that the diaries students were reading were written in the moment, at a time when the extent of the horrors of the Holocaust were not yet fully known. This sense of suspense and growing dread struck a chord with another student, Michael, who said, “It felt like there was a bomb under the table waiting to go off, but only I knew it was there.”

Stein told Williams’ freshmen about Holocaust deniers, explaining that, as students, they needed to learn and share the truth. “I never say ‘Jews died’ in the Holocaust, because people die every day for all sorts of reasons. I only say ‘Jews were killed.’”

Feldman considered the experience invaluable for her students, especially because, this semester, her college composition curriculum revolves around issues of social justice. “This really got the ball rolling and gave them something to think about,” she said.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher

Students at Heights High can take a wide range of elective classes. They can focus on their passions, such as music or art, or on their future careers, such as engineering or Web design. Or, they can expand their worldview by taking African American history or a course on the Holocaust. Mark Sack, who teaches the Holocaust course, wanted to share what his students learn with the rest of the school. He recently had an opportunity to do so, thanks to a grant from the @akiva program of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland.

The @akiva scholars-in-residence program brings authors, actors, artists, and thinkers from across the country to meet with Cleveland-area teens. The program sponsored a mid-January visit to Heights High from Susan Stein, acclaimed educator, actress, playwright, and teaching artist. She met with Donna Feldman’s College Credit Plus creative writing and college composition courses, Nate Williams’ honors world history class, and the Minority Student Achievement Network.

Stein introduced students to firsthand accounts of both the Holocaust and slavery, opening the door to numerous questions, comments, and observations. Many of the teens were excited to read diary entries from people other than Anne Frank, in what Stein refers to as “history that has previously been hidden from us.”
What happens if the school tax levy fails on March 17?

Maureen Lynn

[If the tax levy fails on March 17] for all of us who do support public education, the CH-UH school board will still have $500 million plus high school building debt, and a budget surplus of $40 million to educate the roughly 5,000 students who come to school. (We have 20 percent chronic absenteeism.)

After adjustments in state formula funding (including EdChoice scholarships), the school board will still spend $20,000 per pupil, compared to $15,000 at “similar districts,” and to the $12,000 state-wide average. District salaries for teachers, administrators and staff will still be at the top of the range in almost all categories, and fringe benefits will still add 49 percent on top of salaries.

The CH-UH City School District will still rank in the top 1 percent of the highest tax rates in Ohio, and [have] the highest tax burden of any district in the state, or “similar districts,” as measured by the Ohio Department of Education.

I asked a levy supporter, “Is there a limit to what the union/school board will spend?” The reply was, “the voters decide that.” Indeed, it is our responsibility to consider the impact on the Heights and the wider community.

Here is a sampling of what concerned residents are saying:

“I have never voted against a levy in the 30 years but the school district seems to see the residents as a limitless supply of tax dollars.”

“Many people that will vote No are not against the school or specifically against the increase but more what people can afford.”

“I’m a liberal Democrat...age 71...working a very physical, nearly full-time job...to pay my CH property tax.”

“My wife and I are both teachers but were specifically warned by a real estate agent not to buy in CH because of the taxes.”

We are a middle-income community and an inner-ring suburb. In the last decade, we have experienced lower population, fewer home owners and families, declining student enrollment, more short-term renters, and stagnant home values. When the next economic rainy day comes, the tapped-out Heights taxpayer may come up short of funds to support vital services and needed improvements.

What message does a “No” vote on Issue 26 send to the community?

The proposed tax levy would increase the annual property tax on a $100,000 house to $6,114. For our fixed-income seniors, for families who want to stay here, for newcomers who want to live here, for longtime homeowners who need money for house repairs, for local businesses that survive on local dollars, a “No” vote is a welcome message of hope.

We continue to be very generous with our public schools, but it is time to re-balance our priorities to the wider community and “Keep the Heights affordable.”

Maureen Lynn and her family moved from Pennylvania to Cleveland Heights in 2011. She is treasurer of Tiger Nation 4 Lower Taxes (www.tigernation4low-taxes.com), a PAC whose goal is to keep the Heights affordable.

School levy threatens Tiger Nation

Lois Lichtenstein

Voting for Issue 26, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights 7.9 mill school levy, will put our Tiger Nation on the list of endangered species.

In years past, it was unthink-able for anyone in my family to vote against a school levy. My husband spent his career teaching at Cleveland Heights elementary school principal. I was the Beachwood Schools communications coordinator for two decades. My sister taught at Shaker High. Our four children are Heights High graduates, and one became a school psychologist. We believed, and still do, in public education.

But this levy, if passed, would make our tax rate Ohio’s highest. The community can’t afford it.

• Our actual dollars spent per pupil, $21,222, is already fifth highest among six school districts in Ohio.

• School enrollment of 5,299 declined 14 percent since 2011, yet the school board is seeking $8.8 million with this levy, to reduce its operating budget.

• Shaker offers a diverse student body comes a diverse set of challenges. There is always room for improvement. It is our job as residents of this fine community to support our schools and our children.

• We support them by volunteering. I can’t tell you the number of adults I see, with no children in the schools, who give their time, energy and knowledge to aid in our students’ success. We also support our schools through funding. The method by which the state of Ohio funds the public schools is broken. The Supreme Court of Ohio has said so on numerous occasions. The fact that its broken doesn’t alter the fact that the schools need our help.

• Cleveland Heights must help a community thrive and prosper. Our continued support of our local public schools is one of the surest ways to ensure we have a strong vibrant community so that my grandchildren can someday be both proud to say their great-grandfather and great-grandmother graduated from the CH-UH school district.

Jeffrey and Susan Quill are Cleveland Heights residents, wrote in a recent Heights Observer...”...we lack the income base to support our property taxes at current tax levels. Raising them further will de-stroy the Heights.” Citing the median Cleveland Heights household income of $65,937, he warns that, with a 2.5 percent annual budget growth, our property tax property tax increases over the next 3 to 5 years will be even greater than the social services.

With delinquency rates rising, Johnson stated, “It means we are destroying our taxpayer base.”

While the board complains that vouchers are a financial drain, levy opponents like Johnson state that even if [one removes] vouchers from the picture, the district is still spending $72 million more than Shaker Heights, $71 million more than Solon, $93 million more than Strongsville, and $88 million more than Euclid.

The school board has placed seven operating levies and a 5.7 mill school improvement bond issue on the ballot since 2000. Jodi Sourini, school board president, said on Cleveland.com that the levy is a “huge ask of district voters,” but “we have to for the sake of our children.”

What about the seniors in our community without the excellent health care benefits the board af-fords its administrators and teachers? What about the anxiety and stress many residents are likely to suffer not knowing where the money will come from to pay their taxes and mortgage, and keep their homes.

No one wants to deny children a good education, but the costs have become so extreme that the only way to be fair to everyone calls for compromise. This community has supported the school system beyond the point it can afford. The school board needs to face reality: this district must get its spending in line with the other districts that are of similar size and comparable problems. Other-wise, our schools and community are heading for disaster.

Lois Lichtenstein spent the first half of her 40-year career as a Sun Press reporter and the latter half as Beachwood Schools communications coordinator. After retiring she returned to the Sun Press as a freelance reporter, covering the CH-UH school board during summers, from 2002 to 2008.

We support CH-UH schools and the levy

Jeffrey and Susan Quill

We wanted to share our thoughts on the CH-UH school district, having lived in the Heights for over 25 years. I [Jeff] grew up in Shaker Heights and Susan traces her Heights’ roots back to the class of ’36 when her grandfather, Eric Knudson, graduated from Heights High.

We could have sent our children to our district’s three private schools. We chose public.

Our children have flourished in the CH-UH school district; the opportunities have been boundless. The diversity of the environment has been wonderful in providing our children a window into other cultures, religions and social groups. The educational experiences have been even greater than the social ones.

The dedicated administrators, teachers and staff numerous times led us humble: from music teach-ers to all children of their own, who routinely stay well into the evening to help students prepare and rehearse; to U.S. history teachers that challenge our students to think critically. The district must get its spending in line with the other districts that are of similar size and comparable problems. Other-wise, our schools and community are heading for disaster.

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Heights Libraries’ spring series embraces the arts

Create and Connect ♥
Hearts Has heART

Isabelle Rew

This spring, Heights Libraries invites people of all ages to engage with the arts through its new program series, “Create and Connect: Heights Has HEART.” Inspired by art and artists in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights community, the library will host a wide range of programs where participants can come together to experience visual art, drama, film, literature, music and dance.

“Our community is very arts-oriented. We have our own art galleries, arts organizations and theater companies, and we’re located close to some of the greatest cultural institutions in the country, like Cain Park, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Art and MOCA,” said Maggie Kinney, special projects manager.

“On top of that,” she continued, “many of our residents work for these organizations, so we have artists and creative people all around us, including our own staff. It just seemed to me it was about time to pull all of these things together and give them the spotlight they deserve.”

Several programs have been curated specifically for those interested in creating art themselves. On Tuesday, March 24, at 2 p.m., at the University Heights branch, children ages 8 and older can learn to make their own movies using the magic of stop-motion animation. Teens will be invited to draw models and compete in fun mini challenges in Teen Figure Drawing, on Tuesday, March 31, at 6 p.m., at the Lee Road branch. On Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m., adults can create one-of-a-kind art pieces from exotic plant prints in DIY Botanical Print, at the Noble Neighborhood branch.

Other programs will feature artistic takes on the library’s typical offerings, such as a jazz-themed storytime for children, on Wednesday, April 29, at 11 a.m., at the Lee Road branch; a Power of the Arts-inspired trivia night on Tuesday, March 10, at 7 p.m., at Christopher’s Pub, and a special Create and Connect edition of the Art Study Group, to be held Wednesday, April 22, at 7 p.m., at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

“We hope people at any level to create art, we acknowledge that the hands-on experience isn’t for everyone,” Kinney said. “That’s why we made sure to offer plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy the arts from a safe, yet enjoyable, distance.”

The series will culminate in a performance of “Caliban Ascendant,” a ballet interpretation of Shakespeare’s “The Tempest,” performed by the Cleveland Chamber Collective and Inlet Dance at Ensemble Theatre in June.

“Art and creativity are crucial parts of the human experience,” Kinney noted. “They help us understand one another in a very basic, profound way that creates empathy through the direct experience of emotion and beauty. And the library can offer that experience to anyone who walks through our doors.”

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, March 19, 7 p.m.
An Evening with Lisa Koops. Join Koops in a discussion of her book Parenting Musically, which portrays the “musicking” of eight diverse local families and how they use music in their everyday lives. A book signing will follow the talk.

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

Fridays, March 20, April 3, and April 17, 3 p.m.
Diversity Through the Arts. The Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio is offering this series for students in grades K-5. Hands-on art projects will focus on inclusion, identity and diversity, and explore collaboration and creativity. Registration begins March 6.

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

Tuesday, March 24, 6 p.m.
Create and Connect: Funny Figure Drawing. School-aged children and their families are invited to try out various art supplies and practice drawing models in silly costumes. Supplies will be provided. Registration begins March 10.

University Heights Library
13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Monday, March 2, 6:30 p.m.
Cleveland Goes to the Movies: This series features movies set in, filmed in, and about Cleveland. The March 2 screening will be American Splendor (2003, 101 mins., R), a biographical comedy-drama film about Harvey Pekar, the author of the American Splendor comic book series.
Ironically, while women “ascribed into social norms. Thus, the program women who were labeled as not fitting particularly on the criminalization of spiritual maladies. The program focuses on the stigmatization. The wish for an ordered descriptions, the desire for an ordered day issues of othering, bullying and vered & Reviled has been crafted to doing what brings you joy and living life to the fullest. Judson is Bringing Community to Life with our beautiful locations, wide range of educational, cultural and social opportunities and 5-star rated healthcare.

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Shari Nacson

Burning River Baroque continues its eighth season with a series of thought-provoking performances, beginning Wednesday, March 18. Witches: Revered & Reviled has been crafted to connect baroque music to present day issues of othering, bullying and stigmatization.

According to musical program's description, the wish for an ordered society “frequently led to the persecution of individuals who were accused of straying outside the established conventional boundaries of 'acceptable' behavior.” The program focuses particularly on the criminalization of women who were labeled as not fitting into social norms.

Ironically, while women “ascribed with supernatural abilities” were severely Outcast and punished, they were also viewed as a resource to help those who suffered from mental and spiritual maladies. Thus, the program looks closely at reverence, as well as repulsion, through the stories of Circe, the Witch of Endor, and the Furies in a broad range of national styles and traditions of the 17th century.

Audience members will also be treated to the premiere of a newly commissioned piece by composer Alexis Bacon. Guest artists include Kristine Caswelch, soprano; William Marshall, baritone; Sarah Elizabeth Craanor, violinist; Stephanie Zimmerman, violinist; and Jamie Gallupe, cellist.

The week starts with outreach workshops and performances at the Renee Jones Empowerment Center and Bard High School Early College, both in Cleveland. Musical performances, open to the public, will take place on Wednesday, March 18, at 7 p.m., at Blank Canvas CLE (1744 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights); Saturday, March 21, at 3 p.m., at Buckland Museum of Magic and Witchcraft (1237 Broadview Road, Cleveland); and Sunday, March 22, at 2 p.m., at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland (4600 Shaker Boulevard, Shaker Heights).

All public performances have a $10 to $20 suggested donation.

Founded in 2012, Burning River Baroque has been praised by a Boston Musical Intelligence critic as “an exceptional performance of critical thought and musical performance in a welcoming and engaging atmosphere. One attendee described the experience as “not classical music as a privileged escape from reality, but classical music as a way to engage with and reframe current reality.”

Visit www.burningriverbaroque.org to learn more.

Mostly a mom, Shari Nacson is a freelance editor, social worker, and nonprofit consultant who makes her home in Cleveland Heights. More than anything, Nacson is inspired by kids and adults who build connections through kindness.

Spring show opens at White Gallery

Robin Outcalt

The White Gallery in St. Paul’s Church announces the opening of its Spring Show, which runs through May 31, and features the work of five Cleveland-area artists.

In her photographs, Andrea Dawson focuses on subjects from nature, and imbues her images with a sense of serenity. Two painters, while both utilizing brushes and paints, will display very different types of finished work in the exhibition. Sam Roth will show his soft, abstract, acrylic paintings on canvas, while Emmalyn Tringali, employing oil on canvas, will bring to St. Paul’s her new series of vivid landscapes.

Rounding out this group show are two artists who create unique sculptural and decorative objects. Mona Kolesar manipulates acrylic and bent wood to make free-standing sculptures, and wall art. Blown-glass pieces in a range of exquisite colors, created by Shayna Roth Pentecost, will further adorn the gallery.

The nonprofit White Gallery is located inside of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, at the intersection of Coventry Road and Fairmount Boulevard. The gallery is open on weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Saturdays and Sundays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For information, call 216-932-5815.

Robin M. Outcalt is the co-chair of the White Gallery, at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, in Cleveland Heights.
Heights Arts announces March exhibitions and concert

Lauren Freeman

Heights Arts, the multidisciplinary arts organization in Cleveland Heights, will celebrate the creativity of its musical and visual artist members throughout the month of March.

On Friday, March 6, Heights Arts will host the opening of its second Members Show, in which about 40 Heights Arts artist members will exhibit their work.

Most Heights Arts exhibitions are curated by guest curators or its Exhibition Community Team, which comprises community volunteers with connections and expertise in the visual arts community. This team has been responsible for 20 years of the highest quality exhibitions featuring the region’s emerging and well-established artists.

Greg Donley, Heights Arts’ Exhibition Community Team leader, describes how the Members Show is different: “One of the founding goals of Heights Arts was to provide an exhibition venue where artists who live in the Heights could display their art and encounter the work of others. Our members show exemplifies that mission in the most open way—no curators, no jury, just works created by our members and presented in our public gallery setting. Come see what your neighbors have been up to!”

On Friday, March 20, self-taught artist member Stephen Calhoun opens his show in the Spotlight gallery, using mixed-process photography and generative art in his most recent work, centering on geometric symmetry.

Red Campion will perform the third Heights Arts gallery concert of the season, on March 14, at 7 p.m. The gallery concert series features musical artist members in free performances, connecting confirmed or new classical music enthusiasts to local ensembles, and making the programs accessible to everyone.

Established in 2009, Red Campion is an ensemble comprising four singers and one pianist, highlighting the glories of the voice and vocal literature. The ensemble’s artists are Lara Troyer, soprano; Denise Milner-Howell, mezzo-soprano; Timothy Culver, tenor; Brian Keith Johnson, baritone; and Judith Ryder, pianist.

“Red Campion has never performed in Cleveland Heights,” said Troyer, “but two of our members live in Cleveland Heights, and we are very excited about performing in our own backyard! Clearly the arts are a huge part of life in Cleveland Heights, and we want to be a part of the arts scene and bring live vocal music to our community.”

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

Lauren Freeman is a marketing intern at Heights Arts.

WRC sings Mozart’s ‘Great’ Mass at Gesu

David Gilson

The Western Reserve Chorale (WRC), a chorus of more than 100 voices from across Northeast Ohio, will share the incomparable mastery of Mozart in concert on March 22.

It is a vexing truth that both of Mozart’s two towering choral works were both left unfinished. While the Requiem was not completed due to the composer’s untimely death, less is known as to why the Mass in C minor was not completed.

With its magnificent and mighty choruses, sensuous or- nate solos, and large orchestral and solo instrumental segments, the Mass in C minor is considered Mozart’s “Great” Mass. It was unlike any church music of its time, and stood apart from the restrictions of its era’s “enlightened” commission- ers of church music. It represents an example of Mozart creating, in his own voice, a work of substantial grandeur in the nature of Bach’s Mass in B minor or the larger works of Handel.

WRC will be joined by sopra- nos Marian Vogel and Lara Troyer, tenor Brian Skoog and baritone Dylan Glenn in presenting this glo- rious work for chorus and orchestra. The concert is at 3 p.m., Sunday, March 22, at Church of the Gesu, 2470 Mirimar Blvd., in University Heights.

David Gilson is the artistic director of the Western Reserve Chorale, director of music at Church of the Saviour, and associate dean for student affairs at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

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Heights Libraries offers a large collection of digital media, including books, magazines, comics, music, movies, and television shows. Visit heightslibraries.org/digital-collection and start exploring!
Pulitzer finalist gets Cleveland premiere at Dobama Theatre

Colin Anderson
Dobama Theatre will present the Cleveland premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-finalist “Dance Nation,” March 6–29.

In the play, by Clare Barron, an army of preteen competitive dancers from Liverpool, Ohio, are plotting to take over the world. If their new routine is good enough, they'll claw their way to the top at the Boogie Down Grand Prix in Tampa Bay.

Partly inspired by the reality TV show “Dance Moms,” the play is about ambition, growing up, and how to be oneself in the heat of it all. It explores the exhilaration and terror of being a kid through the story of a group of 13-year-old dance troupe members, as portrayed by adult actors.

“I don't remember exactly how I came to [the decision to cast adults] only that it was always part of the play,” said playwright Barron in an interview with Broadway Blog. “I think in part I was tired of the casting convention of hiring petite 25-year-olds to play 13, 15, etc. Thirteen-year-olds are very different than 15-year-olds... I was more interested in people of all ages who had the creature spirit of a 13-year-old than people in their 20s. And I was interested in how those people and their bodies moved regardless of any virtuosic talent.”

The theme of “creature spirit” carries through “Dance Nation,” which focuses on the animal side of adolescence. With adults embodying each dancer, the audience is able to see both the adults these teens will become, and how their teen selves carry over into adulthood. The dancers are confronted with their own changing bodies, budding sexuality, competition, and violence. Through it all, they are a community of women figuring out what it means to raise their voices—an overarching theme in all of Barron’s work.

“I’d say that for me writing is all about fighting repression and saying things out loud that you feel in private but are too ashamed to admit,” explained Barron. The playwright’s own sense of impostor syndrome, which followed the success of her first play, “You Got Older,” inspired her to write “Dance Nation.” “In a way this play and all my plays are about letting something out,” Barron said.

“As a writer, the tricky part is knowing when that purge is life-affirming and when it’s destructive.”

Barron is a playwright and performer from Wenatchee, Wa. In addition to being a Pulitzer Prize finalist, “Dance Nation” received the 2017 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and The Relentless Award, established in honor of Philip Seymour Hoffman. Barron is the recipient of a Whiting Award for Drama, the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award at The Vineyard, and the Page 73 Fellowship.


Performances are Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are $21 to $28; senior, student and military discounts are available.

In an effort to remove economic barriers and make Dobama’s performances accessible to everyone, the first Sunday of every production is a 7:30 p.m. pay-as-you-can performance. For “Dance Nation,” that performance is March 8.

For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit www.dobama.org, or call the box office at 216-932-3396.

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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COURTESY DOBAMA THEATRE
Soprano Angela Zawada in recital at First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland, will present a recital of classical works at 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 8, in the Gothic sanctuary of the church at 3630 Fairmount Blvd.

The program will feature works by Handel, Mozart, Schumann, Fauré and Samuel Barber, spanning several musical periods and languages. Vision of night and dreams trace a path through the program from "O Sleep" from Handel's oratorio "Semele," to Fauré's "Apres un reve" ("After A Dream") to Barber's "Sure on this Shining Night." The program also features fiery pieces, such as Fauré's "Fleur jetee," with its virtuosic piano score, performed by Adam Whiting, a Cleveland School of the Arts faculty member.

As a soprano soloist at the church, Zawada has performed solos from works by Handel, Mendelssohn and Saint-Saëns, and participated in theater productions of "Les Miserables" and "Evita," presented by the Happy Ending Lyric Players, the church's resident performing arts company, now in its 44th season.

Zawada holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and a Master of Music degree from Roosevelt University. A recent addition to the music scene in Cleveland, she was active in the opera scene in the Chicago area, with such companies as Chicago's Folks Operetta, Sinfonietta Bel Canto, Katydids Productions, Main Street Opera and Lingerie Lyrique. Zawada was a founding member of, and a performer with, Chicago's VOX Collective, which specializes in performances of art song literature. She is currently studying with Richard Anderson in Cleveland.

The recital is free and open to the public. Voluntary donations will support the music and fine arts program at First Baptist.

G. Michael Skerritt is a retired engineer and a member of the First Baptist Church. Music and theater are his avocations.

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MARGE GEIGER
is board member and singer for Choral Arts Society of Cleveland, and English professor at Tri-C East Campus, a Cleveland Heights resident for 30 years, and a patron of many Cleveland Heights businesses. She is married to Joe Geiger, a retired Cleveland Heights High School English teacher.

Choral Arts presents world premiere Mass

Marge Geiger

So, just who is George Bristow? Choral Arts Cleveland and its director, Brian Bailey, invite you to find out as it brings to life the Bristow Mass in C as it brings to life the 19th-century American composer as it brings to life the composition. Supported in part by the citizens of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, the evening begins at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 13, with a talk on Bristow and American classical music, followed by the choral performance. The venue is Fairmount Presbyterian Church, 2757 Fairmount Blvd., in Cleveland Heights.

The Mass in C (1884–85) is filled with lush romantic phrasings that segue into joyously spirited, energetic and robust movements. Its expressive text setting infuses the Kyrie, which had been typeset, with such works alongside more familiar choral repertoire. The commitment is, in part, a result of listening to audiences who have frequently told Choral Arts singers that they enjoy being introduced to new pieces and new ways of seeing and hearing choral music. Concert audiences have fully supported Choral Arts in exploring these paths, and have asked the membership and its director to do more of that kind of work.

Bailey is in his second year with Choral Arts, having filled the director position upon the retirement of former director Martin Kessler. Bailey has been director of choirs at Cleveland State University since 2009, where he conducts the CSU Chorale and University Chorus, coordinates the voice area, and teaches aural skills and conducting.

The Bristow Mass will be performed with the organ accompanied fleshed out by Bailey in his 2010 thesis. Soloists for the performance are Anna White, soprano; Kimberly Lauridsen, mezzo; Tyler Young, tenor; and Jelani Watkins, bass. The concert is a free-will donation event, open to the public. For more details, visit www.choralartsleveland.org.

Angela Zawada

Angela Zawada, the Chancel Choir soprano soloist of the First Baptist

G. Michael Skerritt

Angela Zawada

COURTESY FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Choral Artscleveland.org

Kimberly Lauridsen, mezzo; Tyler Young, tenor; and Jelani Watkins, bass. The concert is a free-will donation event, open to the public. For more details, visit www.choralartsleveland.org.

Marge Geiger is a board member and singer for Choral Arts Society of Cleveland, an English professor at Tri-C East Campus, a Cleveland Heights resident for 30 years, and a patron of many Cleveland Heights businesses. She is married to Joe Geiger, a retired Cleveland Heights High School English teacher.

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Start right here . . . in your own community

I said, “Wait. I have to do this five times? In one day?”

I did it four more times. Then I went home and immediately fell asleep.

It’s not as if I didn’t have respect for what teachers do before that day, but I really understood it after that.

A popular teacher, Robert Swaggard taught for many years at Roxboro and then at Heights High. And he has served as Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the CH-UH Board of Education since 2013. The Heights system has many such dedicated teachers and administrators.

Even when I hated school and skipped school and didn’t do much school work, I still had respect for (most of) my teachers. I didn’t blame them for my not wanting to be there. I just didn’t want to be there. And I really liked many of them and often engaged them in conversation, outside of class. And one teacher in particular, Clair McElfresh, my choir director at Heights High, inspired me to the point that I believe he actually saved my life. I told him that, too, about 10 years ago.

Here’s the thing: I went to hear Pete Seeger speak at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in the 1990s. Pete was a hero of mine (and millions of others), an outspoken and tireless activist for justice and equality for more than 70 years. After being interviewed for a while at the Rock Hall, he opened the session up to questions from the audience. A woman asked, “With so much going on in the world, where do we start? What can we do?”

Pete said, “You start right in your own community. And you do whatever you can to help someone or some organization. And it will spread out from there.”

I took that to heart and started volunteering all over the place, including in the Heights schools, in a variety of ways—doing, as Pete said, what I could do.

In the 1960s and ’70s, I thought that I was going to make a difference in the world as a musician, a singer-songwriter—become famous and disseminate ideas to the world that would help people, somehow. That didn’t happen, exactly.

My son, I think, has never tried or wanted to become world-famous, like I did. But I believe he’s the one in the family who is accomplishing what I set out to do—both he and his wife, my daughter-in-law. He’s the coach of the Heights High Swimming Team and she’s a teacher at Heights. They’re the ones who are guiding and inspiring kids—they along with their fellow teachers and coaches at Heights. And at every good school in the country. They are helping to plant the seeds for the future—doing what they can do, and letting it spread out from there.

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.

Our Heights Schools are UNDER ATTACK

“After what the State of Ohio has done to our funding, passing Issue 26 is a choice between THRIVING or BARELY SURVIVING.”

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Superintendent, CH-UH Schools

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