

East Village

Magazine



Photograph by Jan Worth-Nelson



Everyone named on this page has made contributions to honor Gary and to assure that his legacy will continue. Thank you.

Mary Ann Adams

Maryanne & Jerry Caughlin

Connor & Jessica Coyne

Krista E. M. Galley

Margaret & Basil Hart

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Flint Farmers' Market

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Mayor Dane Walling &

Dr. Carrie Walling

Dean T. Yeotis

In our hearts

Gary Custer

1942-2015

*"He asked little and gave fully
to preserve our neighborhoods."*

Ed, Casey, Nic, & Andy Custer



*"You lived a life on your terms.
Not many people can claim that
victory. We'll miss you, friend."*

John Dempsey & Margo Lakin



*"Gary inspired me to translate the
pictures in my head into words on
the page. I am forever grateful."*

Kara Kvasnicka



*"Thanks to Gary Custer for 38 years
of the East Village Magazine."*

Paul & Nancy Rozycki



"So sorry for our loss and YOURS!"

Ingrid Halling & Robert Thomas



"You will be missed."

Greg & Diane Brown



"In memory of Gary Custer."

Peter Levine & Marion Day

*"What a beautiful difference one
single life made. With deepest
sympathy to Gary's family and in
Gary's memory and honor. With
love, hope and admiration."*

Jane Bingham



*"Gary and East Village helped
to shape so many of us. I will
forever be in his debt."*

Doug Shook



*"We have more than 38 years of
fond memories of a man who
will not be forgotten by us or
our children."*

Cookie & Don Wascha



"In memory of Gary."

Bella Kritz & Ernst Doebeli



"Long live EVM!"

Gordon Young/Vern McFarlane



East Village

Magazine

Vol. LIII No. 1 February 2015

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Typography by Jean Shipley, 2301 S. Irish Rd., Davison, Mich. 48423. Printing by Riegle Press Inc., 1282 N. Gale Rd., Davison, Mich. 48423.

The *East Village Magazine* is a program of the Village Information Center Inc., a nonprofit corporation. We welcome material from readers, but all submissions become the property of the publication and if published will be edited to conform to the editorial style and policies of the publication. All inquiries about the publication should be mailed to *East Village Magazine*, Village Information Center, 720 E. Second St., Flint, Mich. 48503. Distribution is the second Saturday of each month. Display advertising rates are \$34.50 a column-inch plus any other costs. Unclassified ads are \$2.50 a printed line or part of a printed line. Rates subject to change without notice. The deadline for advertising is 10 days before each publication date.

Editorial *On loss and change*

By Jan Worth-Nelson

There was a moment in the last sorrowful weeks of losing Gary Custer when we knew we had to move on. As we confronted what it was going to take to carry on without him, we discovered things that both intimidated and delighted us. Some of his methods, played out in that firetrap cave on Second Street, were as arcane and confounding as medieval alchemy. As a fuller picture emerged, I felt myself shift from mourning to loving what he loved. Together the EVM staff are figuring out what needs to stay the same and what might need to change – respectful changes that feel right and proper.

The physical life of the magazine

For me, the shift out of mourning began when four of us marched into Riegle Press, the Davison company that has printed *East Village Magazine* for years. In the cavernous print shop, what assailed me most was the smell of ink. It's an intoxicating smell, pungent and a little sweet.

And the symbol is compelling, even in a digital age: ink as an essential oil of speech—what we call “free speech,” in all its exhilarating, earnest and embattled implications. Gary was devoted to this, as are the rest of his staff.

And then there's the paper: if you're reading a hard copy, touch what you're holding. It's a fine paper called Velvet White. The logo and body type are Times, a venerable “serif” font. We discovered the headline font to be Futura, a no-nonsense “sans serif” type. A photojournalism major in college, Gary had a definite aesthetic. He loved clean, unadorned lines and the clarity and crispness of black and white. The rest of us love it, too.

This is all to say, we have decided to continue the hard-copy life of EVM while maintaining the online site, eastvillagemagazine.org, and beefing up our social media presence. We are shifting to more modern computers and software, but the look will stay the same.

The journalism underpinning us

Gary loved hard local news. His enterprise through the years drew the personal and subjective perspectives of “back page” columnists like Teddy Robertson and me, Kara Kvasnicka before me, Mary Ellen

Raleigh before her, the opinion pieces of Paul Rozycki and Jack Minore, and the poems of Grayce Scholt. He encouraged us and enjoyed us. But his first love was always the news reporting that filled the inside pages. He never wanted the magazine to be all “features,” all “soft.” He distrusted the whole notion of “interesting ledes,” the first paragraph of a story. He wanted a factual, no-nonsense summary of what happened. Subject-verb-object, he told his reporters. Subject-verb-object.

The persona of the editor

I will never be Gary. He was a noted (and beloved) curmudgeon; I, while certainly capable of righteous indignation, often ameliorate too soon. To say the least, he resisted change; I am a bit more pliable. In his later years, he was an extraordinary recluse; I must get out and mix it up in person. He liked to keep words simple, a classic “KISS” guy; I dangerously love the adverb and enjoy a vast vocabulary. He was deeply wrapped up in Flint; I have to be convinced of why some elements of local malarkey merit our valuable ink.

But this complicated city deserves good writing and excellent reporting. I love the colorful audacity and sheer persistence of Gary's life work. And the current staff, as Gary himself recently noted, is one of the best in the magazine's history.

And so...

So, we continue his commitment to news about our neighborhoods. At least for now. Nothing, we all know, nothing lasts forever. We are grateful to the C.S. Mott Foundation for its grant to support us. We are thankful to all who have offered donations and votes of confidence—especially since Gary died.

To keep this adventure going, we will need your continued readership, your views, and your help to identify the stories we need to tell. Thank you to all the volunteers who are hanging in with us. And thank you to all of you, our neighbors, for your patience as we proceed.

Jan Worth-Nelson
Editor



Photograph by Gary P. Custer

R.I.P. Gary P. Custer

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Photograph by Nathaniel Mosher

Beating the winter blues: In the New Orleans spirit, five families in the College Cultural neighborhood mounted a Flint-style Carnival which will end on Mardi Gras. They named their “crew” FLOOR, the Flint Order of Orpheus, and strung beads for passersby to pick up free. In French and English, they invited their neighbors to “let the good times roll.” Orpheus journeyed into the underworld to rescue his dead wife, only to lose her again. “The absurdity of loss, after great struggles and redemption, is somehow appropriate for a carnival celebration in the Vehicle City,” said Connor Coyne, FLOOR organizer.

Opinion *Hearts and roses or heartbreak and thorns?*

By Paul Rozycki

Usually the first column of the year is a time to look back at the last year and look forward to the next. With East Village Magazine’s first issue of 2015 being published on Valentine’s Day, maybe it’s time to review the past year and the new year with a slightly different spin.

Valentine’s Day is, of course, a day of love, hearts and roses. But love can have its dark side and the day can also be a time of heartbreak and thorns. What recent events deserve a Hearts and Roses Award? And what are the things that deserve a Heartbreak and Thorns trophy? (And which deserve a little bit of both?)

Several events deserve hearts and roses, either because they made our lives better in the past or they have the potential to do so in the future.

The vote on the new charter commission probably deserves a Hearts and Roses Award. Not because any particular change in the city charter will solve all of Flint’s problems, but because the process begins to look to the future of a very different

Flint—one that can be much better than it is now. Those who have chosen to run for the charter commission also deserve the award. It will be hard work for the next year or more, and the rewards may not always be apparent.

The second Hearts and Roses Award should go to the three new college leaders who have arrived in the Flint community in the last year – Susan Borrego, UM-Flint’s new chancellor; Wendy Hemingway, Baker College’s president; and Beverly Walker-Griffiea, Mott Community College’s new president.

The new vision of Flint will be formed by our institutions of higher education and these three new leaders can be expected to be major players in that effort. (Though he came to Flint a few years earlier, Kettering’s President Robert McMahan is also deserving of the award, and has already done much for the city.)

Hearts and roses are also due to those who choose to run for office and take a leadership position during difficult times.

This year Mayor Dayne Walling is facing re-election, and though it’s not certain who his opponents will be, thanks are in order for all those who choose to tackle what is often a thankless and difficult job. The same is true for the newly appointed city council members, Kerry Nelson and Herbert Winfrey, who will also face the voters in November.

And certainly a Hearts and Roses Award is in order for the four retiring Michigan members of Congress who gave us 133 years of service — Senator Carl Levin, Congressmen John Dingell, Dave Camp and Mike Rogers. They deserve our thanks.

But Valentine’s Day isn’t always about hearts and flowers – sometimes it can be heartbreak and thorns.

Perhaps most deserving of the Heartbreak and Thorns Award is the state legislature’s action, or inaction, on fixing the roads in Michigan. Instead of tackling the issue head-on and making a decision to raise revenue, they punted the ball to the voters in next

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Higher ed leaders tout role in area progress

By Ashley O'Brien

How can area higher education institutions contribute to the community's revitalization?

The answers, according to top college and university leaders at a recent forum on the topic, range from providing skilled workers for the labor force to inspiring students into community service to repairing blighted areas to staging intermural soccer matches at Atwood Stadium.

Participants on the panel, sponsored at Baker College by the Flint Public Affairs Forum, included Robert McMahan, president of Kettering University; Wendy Hemingway, president of Baker College; Beverly Walker-Griffiea, president of Mott Community College, and Vahid Lotfi, senior vice provost of UM-Flint.

UM-Flint's new chancellor, Susan Borrego, was called away on family matters.

According to Flint Mayor Dayne Walling, forum moderator, the success of the area's four institutions is one of the most visible signs of the improving economy... He repeated the much-celebrated statistic that there are 30,000 students enrolled locally.

Noting that 97 percent of Baker College's graduates are employed, Hemingway asserted that training a workforce was the single most important goal of Baker College because a skilled workforce brings business to the community.

McMahan agreed.

"The first question businesses ask when coming into an area is about the quality of

the community colleges, because they are looking for the whole spectrum of skills, not just top skills. This is a good way to attract businesses to Flint."

He added Flint is unique because its four institutions of higher education are complementary, not competitive. Mott's Walker-Griffiea noted that the college has bought several blighted areas near the campus and turned them into green spaces.

Both Walker-Griffiea and McMahan pointed to student service days as a major contribution. "Serving humanity is an integral part of the fabric of their professions, and therefore needs to be part of the environment of their education," McMahan said.

Walker-Griffiea, one of the area's newest higher ed leaders, recalled how in her interview process students specifically talked about their service and its importance to the community.

While higher ed institutions are doing good work, panelists also recognized areas that need more attention.

According to McMahan, Flint's universities have failed to get students from different institutions together. "We haven't figured out how to connect the institutions in anything other than perfunctory ways. What would really help downtown is to create spaces for students from different colleges to mix and mingle."

McMahan added that he had already

invited Chancellor Borrego for students from UM-Flint and Kettering to have a soccer match. The match would take place at Atwood Stadium after Kettering finishes renovations.

The diverse perspectives came with a warning not to expect too much. UM-Flint's Lotfi asserted, "Sometimes the notion is that the university is the savior of Flint, and that is a tall order. We can certainly come to the table, but it is much bigger than something the university can accomplish by itself."

Lotfi called on the higher education institutions to help convince the world that Flint is a beautiful city.

The issue of Flint's image was made clear in the beginning of the forum when Walker-Griffiea described coming to Flint during her interview process.

"When I first came to Flint, I expected a dark place," she said. "The news doesn't paint a nice picture. So when I went to the interview I was shocked. It wasn't dark. In fact, it was very bright."

Everyone agreed that change had to come from the people of Flint, but are optimistic that it will happen.

"We always overestimate the progress in the short term and underestimate it in the long term," McMahan said. "In ten years, I think Flint is going to be an amazing place to live."



... Working

(Continued from Page 12.)

invited me into the cluttered office of East Village Magazine, set a cup of coffee in front of me, and started telling me about how to write news.

At first I just nodded respectfully; I'd taken some volunteer journalism courses in Chicago and New York, and they had each involved orientation activities. But as Gary went on, it felt more and more like he was weaving stories into his instructions.

He would talk about the clarity of the inverted pyramid approach to reportage as an ethically mandated strategy to put the most demanding, the most urgent information in front of a reader's eyes as quickly as possible.

At this point he dropped a stack of old

East Village Magazines before me and struck it with his thumb for emphasis.

The old problems are the new problems, Gary stressed. Citizen journalism is a little like Sisyphus pushing that boulder up the same hill each day for eternity. It was challenging and thankless work, but it was something I should definitely attempt.

He had a gruff, abrupt, almost hypnotic way of speaking. He spoke with conviction and energy and had a comprehensive knowledge of his field. For two hours he spoke and I listened, and it was well after dark by the time I left that office.

Kara Kvasnicka:

From my 21 years as a magazine staff writer and close friend to Gary, I could easily fill a book with his sage advice to me and shrewd observations about life in general.

One of his most memorable remarks to

me concerned taking pictures. An award-winning photojournalist who made his brother's gorgeous black-and-white photographs the magazine's main calling card, Gary nonetheless insisted, "The best pictures are those you take with the naked eye and store in your head." How true, I realize, now especially, as I page through my mental photo album to recall all the wonderful moments Gary and I shared, professionally and personally.

I am forever grateful to him for the invaluable insights which helped shape my life and the opportunity to translate some of the pictures from my head into stories in his magazine.



... Thorns

(Continued from Page 5.)

May's election. In many ways the proposal isn't a bad idea, but a leader should make a decision and be willing to take the heat. The lawmakers (even those not facing re-election) passed the buck. The campaign for and against the roads bill will probably burn up \$20-40 million and still might fail, leaving the state and its roads with no fallback plan for 2015.

The lawmakers should also get a second award for their failure to update Michigan's civil rights act — the Elliott-Larsen Act, to include the LGBT community. It shouldn't have been a partisan issue. Most of the Republican business community supported it as did most Democrats. But when push came to shove, the lawmakers blinked and nothing happened.

It's probably all too easy to give the Heartbreak and Thorns Award to Flint's water problems. Just as we were slipping (slightly) off the national radar as the murder capital of the nation, now Flint is known as the place where you pay an arm and a leg for the water, but can't drink it (unless you check with your doctor first).

And some events are a little of both— hearts and heartbreak and roses and

thorns. The next year may tell us which is more appropriate.

The Flint schools' decline seems to continue as deficits mount, schools close, furnaces break down, water pipes burst and students leave. Credit should be given to Isaiah Oliver and the school board as they wrestle with an avalanche of problems. But some days it must seem like they are trying to stop the tide with a teaspoon. Will the Flint schools avoid a state takeover in 2015?

The next step in Flint's long line of emergency managers may also be a bit of both. As Darnell Earley leaves and Jerry Ambrose takes over as emergency manager, the city should begin its transition to genuine self government. The long succession of emergency managers has certainly been a very thorny process. Ambrose will be the 12th emergency manager or mayor Flint has had in the last 13 years. Flint's new

city administrator Natasha Henderson also should be a key player as a transition team takes over in the spring. We'll see if Henderson, Ambrose and the transition advisory board produce any roses in the years to come for Flint.

Finally, the biggest heartbreak of all is the passing of Gary Custer — founding father and editor of the East Village Magazine for the last 38 years. Though many knew him better than I did, and longer that I did, his loss is felt by all who are part of the East Village Magazine and the Flint community. He will be greatly missed.

Paul Rozycki is the author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College.

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Flint's water debacle: murky mix of science and stink

By Nic Custer

Editor's Note: Ferreting out the "truth" about Flint's water – the cost, the quality, the safety – has proven challenging to almost everyone in recent months. In all the back-and-forth, the realities of what residents face has been a mix of garbled science, actual science, politics, public relations, skepticism, and a range of alarming developments that seem to be connected, like brown, odiferous water and rashes on children.

What do we actually know? The January meeting of the College and Cultural Neighborhood Association was almost entirely devoted to water, and EVM reporter Nic Custer was there listening for answers.

At the January CCNA meeting, two city officials attempted to assure residents the water is safe and the city is addressing the many concerns being raised.

Mayor Dayne Walling told the group that safe water is the city's absolute highest priority. He said the city will begin testing more frequently and disclosing those results to restore public confidence.

"The city has to take customers seriously, which we haven't done a good job of over the years," Walling said.

The TTHM violation

In 2014, the city of Flint violated the Safe Drinking Water Act's limit on the amount of disinfection byproduct in the water. Cities are not allowed to have levels of total trihalomethanes (TTHM) higher than 0.08 milligrams per liter (mg/L). Flint exceeded this limit at multiple "testing" locations. These testing sites are chosen because they are near main water transmission lines across the city.

According to a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) investigation, levels of TTHM were above the limit at six of eight testing sites May 21 and at all eight sites August 21.

The highest level reported, 0.196 mg/L, occurred during the August testing at the 2500 block of Flushing Road. By the time a third test was conducted Nov. 20, all of the locations except for Flushing Road had returned to levels significantly below the legal limit.

The MDEQ investigated the elevated levels of TTHM and issued a report Dec. 1. They told the city to notify customers of the violation before January 10, 2015. This violation will continue until the annual average amount of TTHM is below the limit at all testing sites.

An explanation of why it happened

Howard Croft, director of the Department of Public Works and a CCNA neighborhood resident himself, said the elevated TTHM levels are a result of treating the fecal coliform issues the city had this past summer.

The previous Detroit Water and Sewerage Department-supplied water from Lake Huron was treated and then traveled at least 80 miles to reach Flint. By the time it arrived, the chemicals used to treat it stabilized and the water could stay in Flint's 600 miles of distribution pipes for between two and four weeks.

The Flint River water, especially when temperatures are fluctuating in the summer, is harder to treat and cannot stay in the system three or four weeks because the chemical reaction, which needs time to stabilize, is happening locally. As a result, some areas had a total coliform, which is an environment that allows harmful bacteria to grow. This necessitated boil-water advisories for residents.

Opened hydrants and chlorine

To treat the emergency, hydrants were opened to flush clean water through the system. This solution still couldn't get rid of the low residual level of bacteria.

When flushing the system doesn't work, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allows cities to use more chlorine to eliminate low residual levels of bacteria as a public safety measure. The city attempted this technique without success, as a broken valve was discovered near the treatment plant. Out of 10,000 valves in the system, after that single valve was replaced, almost all the residuals cleared up.

The area on Flushing Road that still has low residual levels probably has a similar broken valve. Croft said it is an area of focus for the city this winter.

Questions on safety, cost, infrastructure

Residents voiced many concerns about health, safety and cost. Responding to health concerns, Croft said the EPA contends TTHM is a risk only over a very long time span. He said the incremental risk of health effects from TTHM could impact 3 or 4 people out of 10,000 if they drink two liters, or just over eight cups, of water with elevated disinfectant levels every day for 70 years.

This roughly equates to consuming more than 51,000 liters, or about 13,475 gallons,

over a lifetime. He said this is an estimate of who may be affected because there are no studies where people ingested the elevated levels over that time span.

Regarding rashes, Croft said the EPA advised residents to take their cases to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) if a doctor has confirmed health problems are a result of the water. The CDC will then come to Flint for further tests to confirm the results. He said he knows of no documented cases where a pet has died from drinking the water.

The city has tried to decrease the use of chlorine using an ozoner instead, which disinfects the water more safely. Croft said the city's ozoner is among the newest treatment technologies available. However, during the past months, the ozoner was not operating at maximum capacity and a specialist had to be brought in. In the future, the city will be able to use less chlorine.

Other chemicals are used to reduce the hardness of the water. River water is harder than lake water. The goal of the chemicals is to decrease the hardness, and it takes more for river water than lake water.

Croft said that the use of fluoride could be changed through action at the city government level.

The water could also be tested at citizens' request for other pollutants such as prescription drugs.

"We're in the water-treatment business for the first time in fifty years. And I think these are good questions that I would want to see come forward. We want all of the public's input on the issue," Croft said.

That critical move from Detroit

The move away from Detroit's water was necessary to keep prices from going up 22 percent, Croft said. To run the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA), the Flint water treatment plant still needed to be upgraded. By using the river for water, Flint was able to make the \$6 million to \$13 million upgrades that were required without incurring debt.

Further addressing the cost issue, Croft said water and sewer are enterprise funds, which are designed to be supported by the users on the system, not to turn a profit.

Because the city is not paying for already treated water like it was from Detroit, the main costs for the water itself is in the chemicals used to treat it. Only 15 to 20 percent of consumers' water bill costs are for the water itself. The other

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... Water

(Continued from Page 8.)

fees pay for the distribution system and overhead including retiree costs. There are five retirees drawing pensions for every one working today, Walling added. The city pays \$20 million per year to cover all of its retiree health care costs.

The city will begin offering tours of the water treatment plant to regain public confidence. Croft said he can't taste the difference between bottled water and the quality of water produced at the plant. He said taste and discoloration issues arise from the pipes that the water travels through before making it to customers. He also clarified that General Motors is still primarily using Flint water. The

\$400,000 in water revenue, which the city is projected to lose annually, is only 10 percent of a \$4 million bill for water used in other parts of operations.

GM has one specific engine part that has an iron component. The chloride in the water was interacting with that iron component. The city made an agreement with GM to allow their manufacturing process to purchase Detroit water. When the new KWA pipeline is operational, GM has agreed to resume buying city water, according to Croft.

A promise of no false promises

"What you don't hear me saying up here is false promises that we are going to lower

rates," Walling said. "What we did say with Karegnondi is we are going to stabilize rates and you still have inflation in the world and there will still be minor adjustments but I certainly am committed to not having to go back to 20 or 25 percent increases because we now have a clear plan that connects us to the future."

Part of the longer term plan is to right size the system as pipes are replaced. For example, so called "green neighborhoods," which used to be dense residential areas and now only have a few houses per block, don't require the same large water mains and number of services lines that they did decades ago.

Walling acknowledged there is an unfair burden put on city residents. The city has an oversized system of separate distribution and sewer pipes which it has not maintained over the last fifty years. He said the city could choose not to invest in infrastructure and lower people's bills around 7 percent, but it wouldn't solve the problem. He said the city needs a strong capital improvements plan and outside funds from the state and federal governments.

"We would like state and federal assistance with the cost of the six-year CIP. Grants will do it fastest, low-interest loans and bonds through the state and federal governments will do it faster, zero interest will do it faster than that," Walling said.

He said the city can pay for the infrastructure slowly over time but it would be ideal to receive outside grants or become bond eligible through a partnership with the state like Detroit was able to do to refinance its long-term debt as part of the municipal bankruptcy.

Quick fixes unlikely

Replacing the city's entire water infrastructure will take 30–50 years and will start this spring by replacing two of seven miles of main distribution pipe along Dupont Avenue, the most vulnerable parts of the system. It will be the first pipe replacement in decades.

Requests for proposals were sent out by the city for a consultant who has worked with treating river water and EPA violations. The consultant will be hired at least until the KWA is operational and will be able to answer questions about expanding testing and make recommendations on how to get the highest quality water.

Another request for proposals will seek bids on a project to replace 20,000 meters of water pipes at the end of their lifespan.


Croft can be contacted about water concerns or to report water theft at hcroft@cityofflint.com.



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EXPECT ENGAGE EXPERIENCE **MORE**

Social justice for kids brings “Urban Spirit” to Woodside Church

By Ashley O’Brien

A program to activate social justice awareness in middle school students is coming to Flint for the first time this summer.

Called SoJust, the four-day camp scheduled for Aug 2-5 is the brainchild of Rev. Dr. Deborah Conrad of Woodside Church.

She said the program aims to start students thinking about social justice through scripture, craft projects, community activities, praying and singing. It is designed for students completing grades five through seven.

SoJust is part of Urban Spirit, an organization Conrad founded before she came to Flint last February. The Woodside congregation, long committed to socially progressive activism, guaranteed she’d be able to continue her Urban Spirit work when they selected her to be the new pastor last February.

Conrad said Urban Spirit appealed to the Woodside congregation as a new way to live out social transformation, consistent with Woodside’s mission.

Urban Spirit is best known for conducting weeklong poverty simulations. For a fee, groups or individuals travel to Louisville,

Kentucky, to live in poverty for a week. Participants sleep on concrete and skip meals. While participants work for minimum wage and try to meet their needs, they also participate in scriptural activities. Between 30 and 100 people participate each year.

Conrad says Flint makes an excellent host for Urban Spirit. The programs require exploring the community, so it needs “a diverse community that is accessible to folks, that doesn’t hide its problems or pretends there aren’t any.”

“Flint is a community with a lot to teach. There are a lot of problems in Flint and a lot of creative people working on them, so there are conversations going on here.” Conrad says. She adds she sees creative community partners that engage people in new ways. Last spring, for example, interns at Woodside worked with Salem Housing and the Flint Art Project.

The poverty simulation and other programs are staying in Kentucky for the moment, Conrad said.

She said Urban Spirit attracts people from all walks of life, multiple denominations and

religions, public and private universities.

There have been participants from as far as Hawaii. Some participants come from diverse communities, others from homogeneous ones.

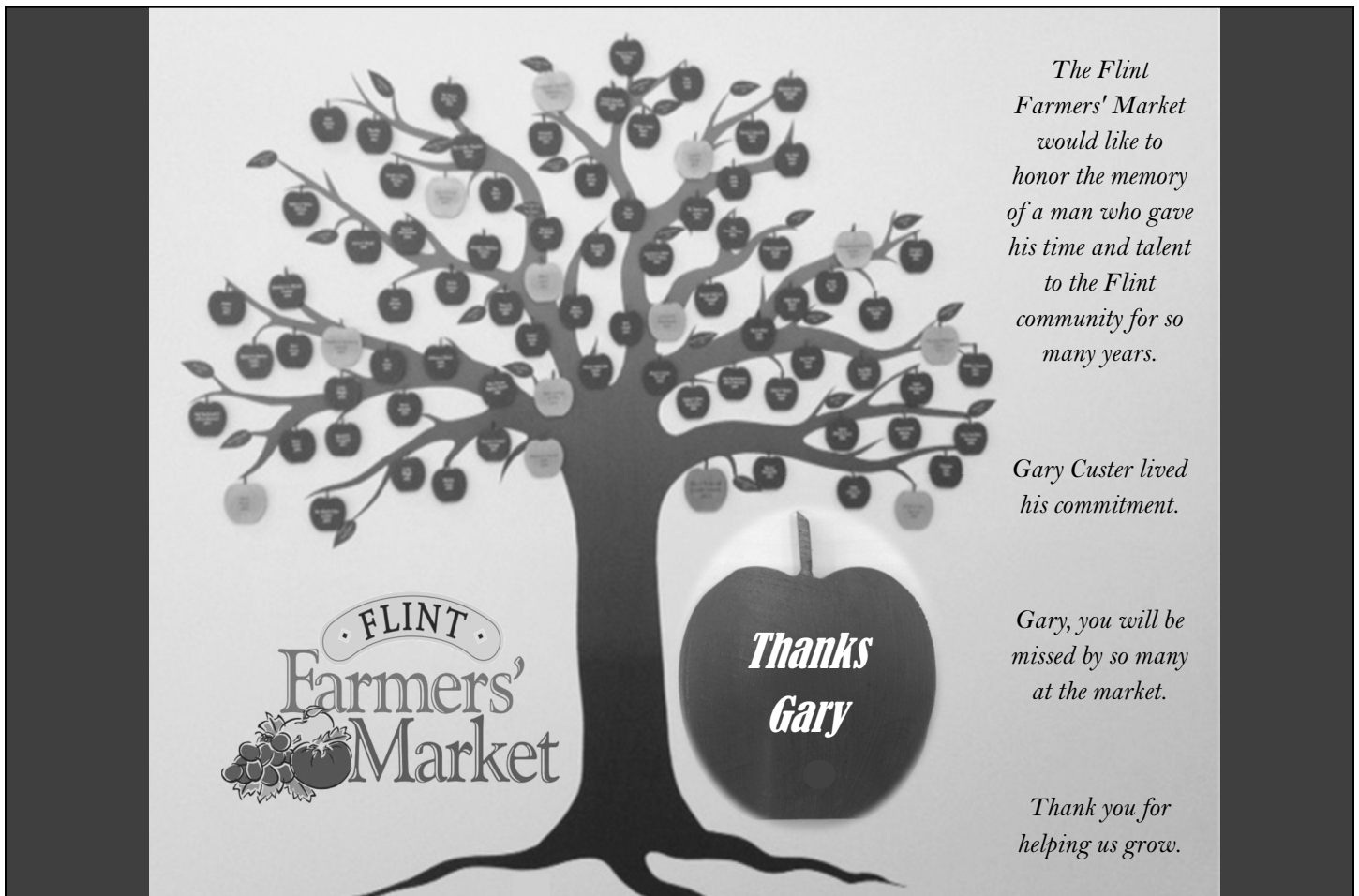
The primary lesson for people who go for the poverty simulation, she stated, is to understand that poor people are fighting enormous odds just to go from day to day.

“American people have an enormous addiction to poor people,” Conrad said. “The American way of life depends on people working for low wages.”

“We blame people a lot for making bad choices, but we won’t admit to ourselves that we set up a system that doesn’t allow any good choices.”

Conrad noted that with Woodside’s long history of supporting social justice causes, the church hopes to claim an identity as a teaching parish. That means it aims to teach people how to live out their faith instead of “converting” them.

“I think people at Woodside get it,” Conrad said. “Faith isn’t something you contain.”



Video game museum to offer a “labor of love”

By Nic Custer

With the success of Flint Institute of Arts and Sloan Museum’s video game exhibits, Luke Truesdail, 34, thinks Flint is ready for its own permanent video game museum.

He and his business partner Danny Hogan, who together run an EBay enterprise, have been amassing a collection for the last three years and recently purchased a Corunna Road building that will house 1985, a video game museum and classic arcade.

Truesdail purchased the 5,000 sq. ft. former All American Auto Sales building, 3210 Corunna Road at Stocker Avenue, from the Genesee County Land Bank. He and a group of volunteers have removed the plate glass windows facing Corunna and stripped the interior walls down to the studs.

They named the museum “1985” because that is the year Nintendo (NES) was released in North America and the first year Truesdail played a video game.

Walking through the bare-bones structure, Truesdail explained how he envisions the future museum will look. He said the upstairs will showcase the history of video games.

“There’s going to be a lot more history than what people would expect to find from the video game industry,” he said. His collection spans all of Nintendo’s history back to 1896, when it was a playing card company.

His many plans for the space include brand-by-brand rooms, a theater where

people can play the games, and an art gallery.

Truesdail has been collecting art from around the world, including several pieces featured in Gallery 1988, a pop art gallery in Los Angeles. He spoke with many of the artists about the mission of 1985 and several have offered donations. He plans to issue a pamphlet listing artists’ contact information for ordering prints or commissions directly from the artist. There also will be a small gift shop.

The museum’s lower level will contain the Time Warp, a free “old-school arcade” and a small café called the Next Level. Truesdail also plans to build an apartment downstairs for his family.

“We’re interested in anything that connects people to the roots of the games because the stories and responses people have to the video games hasn’t changed. It’s the most interactive way you can be there with technology,” he added.

Truesdail’s own substantial collection of video games takes up two buildings behind his current home. He is trying to figure out how much of the collection he will have room for at the museum. He states he has invested \$30,000 on the collection.

Among the most unique items are an off-white, battery-powered Nintendo Color TV Game 6 system, a rare original Pacman arcade machine, and the original film reel of a 1984 Donkey Kong cartoon, that Truesdail believes is the only existing copy.

He expects the renovations will cost \$40,000, all of which he and his partner are providing out of their own pockets. While the museum doesn’t need monetary donations, 1985 will accept any video game donations including broken items. He said that with enough broken controllers, for example, he can build a working one.

“A lot of stuff is valuable to us, working or not,” Truesdail said. “You might have something sitting in your closet that seems like garbage that we would love to preserve and let generations of people be able to see.”

He hopes to open the museum by this summer but says realistically he needs volunteer help to do so.

The museum will have a low admission fee, Truesdail said, because he wants it to remain accessible. He said this project isn’t about making lots of money – it is a labor of love.

Visit:

www.facebook.com/1985videogamemuseum
mandarcade for more information or call (810) 308-4329 to donate.

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Greater Flint Arts Council is celebrating community arts and culture with the **Share Art Flint Mini Grants program**. Apply for a grant and tell us how you want to address community issues in creative new ways through the power of arts and culture.

We want new ideas from individual artists, emerging organizations and creative arts and culture educators, including those who don’t usually apply for grants.

Deadline for grant submission is March 31, 2015 • 5:00 pm

Get details at shareartflint.org and join us at one of these grant workshops:

February 18, 2015 – 5:30 PM
Haskell Community Center
2201 Forest Hill Avenue
Flint, MI 48504

March 5, 2015 – 5:30 PM
Greater Flint Arts Council
816 S. Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48502

For more information call 810.238.ARTS (2787)
or, email suzanne@greaterflintartscouncil.org.

Greater Flint Arts Council Mini Grants are made possible by a grant from the Ruth Mott Foundation.


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APPLEWOOD



Village Life

Working for Gary – exhilarating, exasperating, unforgettable

By Jan Worth-Nelson, et.al.

The amazing thing about writing for Gary Custer is that we all did it for free. For 38 years, Custer attracted the work of dozens of writers who put out for him as if it were the *New York Times*. And we did it because he made us believe we could. He assumed we shared his demanding standards and inviolable ethics. It was intoxicating. I fought with him all the time. And I had more fun writing for him than any other editor in my life. Here is how four other writers – three present and one past – remember his powerful effects.

Teddy Robertson:

When I retired from teaching, people said, “Now you can travel and relax. Enjoy life.”

Gary said, “Good. Now you can write.” I told Gary that I wanted to write personal essays for my blog. He said, “Send them to me first.”

Every few weeks Gary would shoot me a cryptic email. It was usually something like, “Anything for our discerning readers?”

I’d kick it back with a metaphor like, “Got a couple of pots on the back burner. One is almost ready.” Gary was never sucked into imagery. “Stir and send,” he’d reply. Gary’s nudge for the amateur writer was more like an elbow to the ribs.

“Just write,” he said.

An old-school newspaper man, Gary wielded his blue pencil over titles, definite articles, verbs, and paragraphing.

My titles disappeared. Gary replaced them with a phrase he would extract from the body of the essay. He dropped definite and indefinite articles. Gary’s titles were curt and telegraphic.

Gary favored short paragraphs – punchy, you might call them. “Subject, verb, object,” he’d say. Trained in the topic sentence and development tradition, when I’d first see my writing online, it struck me like a kid with a bad haircut.

Over the five years I wrote for Gary, however, I capitulated. What he edited reads better than what I submitted.

After an essay went online, Gary would send another cryptic email. “Good essay” or “very good,” he would write. And then he would add, “Any corrections?” Gary’s amalgam of professional exactitude and making nice.

I would sigh – and bow to Gary’s blue pencil with gratitude. He made me a better writer.

Danielle Ward:

When I first met Gary, I told him I wanted to become an editor. He launched into describing the ins and outs of journalism. When he finished, he asked me if I still wanted to be a writer. I told him no, that I wanted to edit. He said, “Oh, you really want to edit?”

After joining the EVM team, Gary and I would work on the magazine in shifts — me by day and Gary by night. Even though we were seldom face to face, the electronic connection we shared was often humorous and full of back-and-forth banter.

Gary embraced me and helped my skills blossom. He encouraged me when I was unsure of my abilities, and always made sure I did things by the book. I learned how to eliminate fluff and say what’s necessary in a simple and straight-forward way. Gary became my go-to person for “all things editing.” He was even instrumental in naming my editing business and making sure I was properly advertised.

Not only will Gary’s wisdom and expertise leave a lasting imprint, but his belief in me will be forever treasured.

Connor Coyne:

I’ll never forget the cold, January evening in 2013 when Gary Custer

In The Vestibule

By Grayce Scholt

In the crowded vestibule at church
they tell me it’s my mother laid out there
stuffed inside a box on puffy satin
ivory white that I should see:
a mask with painted lips,
rouged cheeks and Marcelled hair?
A neighbor said, “She looks so natural,
It’s just as if...”

I look. But where?
Why don’t they know
she is not there?
She’s standing at her spotless
Detroit Jewel putting
white potatoes in a pan and
striking an Ohio Blue-Tip
to make the burner glow.
How can they know her meatloaf
in the oven’s waiting
like the rest of us who know
that when he comes from work at five
we’ll sit together at her table,
say our thanks for this
our food and fill our stomach,
hearts with what she’s
done again, done again--
mashed potatoes, meatloaf,
tender beans she planted
in the spring and gathered,
rinsed away the garden dirt,
and fed us
life.

I wrote this poem intending to send it to Gary for the January edition. But first, I would have asked him, as I often did, if he thought it was appropriate – too sentimental or too sad or too something. I knew he would have responded with a comment, usually positive, but always enlightening. So I don’t know what he would have thought of this poem – originally intended as a tribute to my mother who died all too unappreciated when I was young.

But I’m hoping it may serve as one kind of tribute to Gary. For 38 years he fed this community, not with mashed potatoes and meatloaf, but with information, encouragement, and a genuine concern for the welfare of the entire city.

His indomitable spirit and his special kind of love will be sorely missed.

Grayce Scholt is a retired English professor from Mott College. Her book of poetry, *Bang! Go All the Porch Swings*, is available online from Amazon and from Pages Bookstore in downtown Flint. A personal narrative of the poet’s life in Europe in the early 1950s, *Only You*, is available from the author at gscholt09@comcast.net. The author’s new book of poems, *Night Song*, is available at Pages Bookstore, from Friesen Press (www.friesenpress.com) and Amazon.

(Continued on Page 6.)