A black and white photograph of a brick building with arched windows. In the foreground, there is a large, gnarled tree branch with many small, light-colored flowers. The text 'East Village Magazine' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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Magazine

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

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Commentary

The power of words and a presidential visit

By Nic Custer

Author's Note: This essay is the result of my role as a Flint citizen and not while acting as a journalist. It is in that spirit and in that voice that I am offering this piece to share my experience with the community.

In the age of constant communication, a letter is a powerful tool. A letter written by an eight-year-old Flint resident imploring the president to see Flint for himself led to the commander-in-chief's early May visit and speech at Northwestern High School.

Similarly, an email I sent to the White House in early January seeking federal assistance led to response letters from the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Health and Human Services at the end of February.

I would have been fine if my presidential correspondence ended there, knowing that someone had heard my concerns but thankfully, it didn't. That letter resulted in an invitation to join a neighborhood roundtable with President Barack Obama during his visit to Flint.

The roundtable was made up of nine individuals including change makers, activists and letter writers, who met with the president inside the school's library. The group was composed of a college student, a woman's center director, a pastor, a water distribution coordinator, a plumber, a pediatrician, two parents and myself.

As soon as the president entered, he tried to make us feel comfortable, immediately removing his suit coat and creating a more informal, conversational atmosphere. He shook each person's hand and gave us a half-hug before inviting us all to sit.

Much of the meeting involved the president listening to our experiences during the crisis and our concerns about long-term health impacts, psychological impacts and the lack of progress in replacing infrastructure. He addressed many of the points he made later during his speech about short-term and long-term solutions as well as acknowledging the limitations of

his remaining tenure in office.

President Obama spoke about how Flint deserves to be set up for success beyond the water crisis, including an appropriately staffed city government and rebuilding the local economy.

While the conversation lasted for about an hour, it seemed to breeze by within a matter of minutes. It included moments of disarming humor like when someone said they were thankful for his actions and the president responded with a wry "Thanks, Obama!" The most important take away I had was that the fix will take time but things are moving forward.

In the meantime, residents should not despair. More than ever, they need to encourage their children to achieve great things and believe that they can do anything they put their minds to. He reiterated this point in his speech later, saying even a child from a single-parent home, like himself, could be president, and the kids in Flint should keep striving for greatness.

The meeting ended with the group symbolically drinking glasses of filtered tap water alongside the president. This moment was reminiscent of the clinked glasses that accompanied the Flint River switchover, but it felt different. There was a sense that people at the highest levels are watching out for Flint and that the city will once again rewrite the narrative of what its future can be.

Even though no major new funding announcements were made, I saw that our president deeply cares about the citizens of Flint, that he understands our anger, grief and guilt. His message back to the city is that during the slow road to recovery we need to focus that energy in productive ways toward supporting our children's aspirations and, now more than ever, we need to believe in the audacity of hope.

Nic Custer, East Village Magazine managing editor, can be reached at NicEastvillage@gmail.com.

Cover: Spring blooms



Photo of the Month

“Demolition means progress”

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Community alliances strengthening prospects for Central Park

By Lori Nelson Savage

Community collaborations – in neighborhood improvement, beautification, and safety – were the focus of the April meeting of the Central Park Neighborhood Association.

Norma Sain, executive director of the Court Street Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation, asserted that strong partnerships have formed between the CPNA, the Flint Cultural Center Corporation, Genesee County Land Bank, UM-Flint, Mott Community College, the City of Flint and other service and community agencies.

She predicted, along with Mott Community College Safety Officer Thomas Durant and Crystal Dillard, campus coordinator from the FCCC, that because of these alliances neighborhood concerns will be addressed, improved, corrected and solved.

Sain spoke about the blight in the neighborhood and the community’s ideas to remove it. Several homes have been cited by the group and reported to city and county agencies. Sain added that “21 properties in the neighborhood have changed hands in the last nine months.” The Central Park neighborhood is approximately 65 percent rentals, nearly always at capacity, she said. The group’s blight committee are closely watching eight homes, she said.

Resident and former CPNA president Ed Custer mentioned some neighborhood beautification opportunities – Spring Clean-up on April 30; Love your City on

May 4, and other opportunities on May 11 and June 6. Water bottles can be put at the curb in clear plastic bags weekly by residents who are registered for recycling. Custer said that the beautification committee will focus on picking up street trash and cleaning the cul-de-sacs.

Sain said that according to Betty Wideman, transportation manager for the City of Flint, the city has funds designated to replace crumbling sidewalks. City officials have contacted the Genesee Conservation District to look at sidewalks that are crumbling due to trees. Sain reported the city intends to have the trees removed or reroute the sidewalk so that it goes around the tree, repairing the sidewalk to prevent trip hazards, with work under way this month.

A paint project is under way, according to Sain, with estimates being solicited. Eight to ten homes in Central Park are on the list so far. Painting will begin on July 1.

Sain mentioned that the City of Flint and the Cultural Center agreed they will replace the lights in the 19 shadowbox fixtures from the expressway to the Board of Education building.

Sain said the CPNA has a good relationship with UM-Flint and Mott Community College security, both of whom drive through the neighborhood regularly. According to Dillard, the FCCC has recently hired a full-time secu-

rity officer to drive around the campus Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. She noted each building in the cultural center campus has its own security officers. All three officers said that the Central Park neighborhood has a very low crime rate.

CPNA’s June 9 meeting will be held outside at 606 Crapo Street as the group’s first “mobile meeting.” Residents are requested to bring lawn chairs.

Staff writer Lori Nelson Savage can be reached at lorinelsonsavage@gmail.com



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At 100, Applewood Estate celebrates by welcoming community

By Jan Worth-Nelson

In 1916, the Charles Stewart Mott family of Flint clearly were “one percenters” as we’d call them today, and the life they shaped for themselves when they built their estate that year at the foot of Kearsley Street reflects a passion for healthy home-grown food, architectural beauty and self-sufficiency.

As the city the Motts influenced so deeply struggles its way out of the latest crises, Applewood Estate celebrates its centennial with substantial peeks at an era before lead pipes and emergency financial managers.

Encountering such artifacts of 20th century wealth at a lush green edge of downtown Flint comes with ambivalence about the inequalities that have always existed in Flint: there have always been rich people running the show in the city, the Motts arguably among the most charitable. But there’s also timely relief that the city can encompass this reserve of exquisitely preserved beauty along with its swathes of demolition and decline.

It’s significant that opening up the estate as a refuge and retreat for the eye and spirit of the community corresponds with this embattled Flint year. The centennial comes as the Ruth Mott Foundation, which owns and manages Applewood, also has announced new commitments of investment and energies to the needs of the north end of the city.

Starting May 5 with the unveiling of a historic marker, the 34-acre estate and its 21-room residence opened for free tours and access to areas not previously available to the general public.

The grounds and home will be open Thursday to Sunday through Oct. 30. Guided house tours are available 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., with reservations suggested, especially for groups of six or more or for special needs, by calling 810-396-3110.

An official 100th birthday party cel-



Photograph courtesy Ruth Mott Foundation archives

C.S. Mott herds the geese, 1936



Photograph by Jan Worth-Nelson

Mott dining room



Photograph by Jan Worth-Nelson

Applewood garden

bration is set for June 23.

In addition to the Mott family home, visitors will be welcomed into the gardens, barn and chicken coop. Mott’s garage, home to the auto pioneer’s beloved cars, is now lined with interactive exhibits.

According to Kristin Longley, direc-

tor of communications for the Ruth Mott Foundation, “C.S. Mott had many cars, but he really loved his Corvairs.”

She said the Motts bought a new Corvair every year they were produced.

“In fact,” she said, “he loved it so much that he bought one for Sloan Museum because he wanted it to be preserved. The Corvair and the Motts are expected to be featured in an upcoming exhibit at Sloan currently scheduled to open in May.”

Another “fun Applewood fact,” Longley offered, is that in 1933, a photo shoot to introduce the new, sleek 1934 Buicks was staged at Applewood, and there were other photo shoots for new-model cars there over the years.

The estate clearly was designed to combine practicality and beauty, incorporating flower and vegetable gardens and a farming operation that once had dairy cows, horses, pigs and poultry.

The landscape design, Applewood staff explain, incorporated an old apple orchard already on the site. The orchard continues in healthy condition and still yields apples every fall.

Visitors may find spooky and entertaining aspects of the reopened premises in interactive portraits that “come to life.” In Mott’s study, for example, visitors on the press day were startled when an eerily digital portrait of C.S. himself started speaking.

The actor looks remarkably like the auto pioneer, including his hallmark mustache, as he cheerily performs a series of quotes in Mott’s own words.

Ruth Rawlings Mott was the last of C.S. Mott’s three wives. She lived in the estate until her death in 1999.

Jan Worth-Nelson is the editor of East Village Magazine. She can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

View from a grass-roots table: people cooperate to cope

By Teddy Robertson

We sit in a rectangle of tables, old manila file folders halved and then creased so we can write our names and prop them up in front of us.

I've found my way to the basement of the Unitarian Universalist church for the meeting of a group called Communication/Publication. It's something to do with water and print media. Jan [Worth-Nelson, EVM editor] has asked me to find out what's going on. Is there a role for *East Village Magazine* here?

I am clueless, but diligent. Ready for an hour and a half meeting on a cold Monday afternoon in late March.

Around the table are some 25 people from non-profits, grassroots organizations, churches; many greet each other and chat – it's clear that they've been working together for some time.

Jamie-Lee Venable, tall and strong-voiced, in a Live United tee shirt convenes what I now understand is the Communication Workgroup, one of six workgroups that together form Flint Water Crisis Community Partners. All around the table people introduce themselves, and say whether they represent an organization. In fact, just being a Flint resident or concerned citizen suffices – the group is open to all.

Every meeting begins this way, I learn later. Every meeting someone new comes.

I've styled myself as an observer from *East Village Magazine*, glad to seem useful. And I live in Flint.

Scanning the manila cards scrawled with first names and organizations, I decipher the initials: EPA, HHS, ARC/LWV, and AARP are clear to me. Some I am learning: CBOP (Community Based Organization Partners) and CAC (Communication Access Center) – services for the Deaf. Two signers are here.

Present too are Salvation Army, Genesee County Health Department, Michigan Works, the Genesee County Medical Society, Save the Children (they target the over 5000 children not in Head Start), Valley Area Agency on Aging, and two uniformed National Guard officers – presumably from the Mayor's office. They listen, sometimes answer questions.

The Unitarian minister, Deane, contributes her pastoral insight and experience with clergy who advocate for the people of Flint.

A few people strike me as old hands at community organizing: Joe King from Flint Neighborhoods United, Jane Richardson from Salem Housing and the paper, Flint: Our Community Our Voice, and Jane O'Dell from the Flint's

Community Resolution Center.

A regional organization, Crossing Water, is here in the person of Michael Hood, acerbic and outspoken. Devoted to disaster relief for vulnerable communities, Crossing Water coordinates with social services and mobilizes teams of volunteers who go house to house, install, fix or change filters. Check if young children (under 6 years) or pregnant or nursing mothers are in the home. The reports from the front are discouraging.

But after a winter of blaming and castigation, suspicion and aspersion, MSNBC exposés, presidential candidate slogans, and Congressional hearings, I am cheered to sit in a group where local staff from EPA, Health and Human Services, and the Genesee County Health Department respond supportively to questions, text queries to their superiors, and take notes to get more information from their offices.

And it's clear from the discussion that answers do come back. These folks see one another every Monday; they evince the ease of people going at a common problem for a couple of months together.

As a veteran of decades of academic committees, I can see the picture emerging. First order of business is a review of "open issues." Who has answers for the list from last time?

The Communication group works steadily through questions about organ and blood donation (various reasons why lead transmission through blood transfusions would be low; organs also low since majority of lead is stored in blood and bone rather than organs), the effect of heat on plastic water bottles (EPA doesn't anticipate problems since the kind of plastic is stable), getting a flow chart that shows the official entities involved in Flint water recovery efforts (Jamie-Lee is getting this; word is that a unified document is in the works but will take months). The community needs a single source of information; this is a traumatized population.

Discussion moves to today's concerns. First voice at the table comes from the Genesee County Medical Society about problems with calling 2-1-1 to report skin rash issues and get to free screening with dermatologists; why is there a 40-60% no show rate?

The deaf community representative notes that those using the "relay" ID complain that they are often denied service (a problem in general with doctors). Someone mentions that a lead screening

program was also put in place right away and it's not being used.

Then there's the media and conflicting information. Water Defense (Mark Ruffalo's group) hasn't shared their data on why not to bathe in the water with EPA. The EPA stance remains the same: except for young children, bathing is okay. Both EPA and CDC continue to test.

What about people with pacemakers and metal implants? It goes on the list.

Back to the media and how to hold them responsible for accuracy? Corrections after the fact are useless. What about a press conference with media? (This is voted down). Sometimes the headline is inflammatory while the whole article body is not. Local radio does the same. Media expand the context of misinformation while the real news is that there is conflicting information.

Then there's the issue of uniformed National Guard at the points of distribution for water – the PODs. Some populations (such as the undocumented) are wary of uniformed presence. Fire stations are phasing out in favor of community PODs, C-Pods, one in every ward in the city. More education – verbal information and flyers – can take place at C-PODS.

I check the time; the hour and a half is nearly up and the group has not yet broken out into its two task groups to work on the website and print publication. The

(Continued on Page 7.)

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(Continued from Page 6.)

issues that have come forth today have swamped the meeting.

Although it's too late to work today, the two task groups report: website people have made progress and a shell is ready. It's a measure of our computerized society that the website seems an easier task than the print challenge – up-to-date material in simple language for a range of different groups unlikely to use the internet (senior citizens, homebound, illiterate, vision impaired, homeless, undocumented, and non-English speaking are some of the 19 categories).

The print people also have a list of 50 trusted sources to communicate print information. How to cover printing costs, especially high because color graphics are needed. EPA has produced an effective flyer with simple language and graphics, but it bears the EPA logo. So the next question is who are the people these populations trust? Who are the individuals and organizations who can get reliable information to people on the other side of the digital divide, mistrustful, wary of endless conflicting information, worn down by changing conditions?

I am a print person, happy to find myself among those struggling with paper and text and distribution. It's five p.m. and people are packing up. The publications task group is frustrated. They assure me that today's meeting was an exception; next Monday the breakout into the two groups will happen first.

For me, for now, I take home what one participant leaned over to me and said as today's session ended, "you come to one meeting and you are no longer observer; it is your meeting now."

Note:

This was the first of a series of meetings of the Communication Workgroup of Community Partners that Teddy Robertson attended on March 21, 2016. She has continued to attend their Monday meetings. The website has now been launched; find it at <http://flintcares.com>. The publications task group has developed a print flyer using simple language and graphics called "The Bottom Line." Information comes from the website where accuracy is vetted; content of "The Bottom Line" will change according to current need. First issue deals with water resource sites and using and changing home filters. Next issues will deal with nutrition and Legionella.

EVM columnist Teddy Robertson can be reached at teddyrob@umflint.edu.

It's not the City Charter – it's the people

By Paul Rozycki

After several weeks of high profile hearings, criminal charges, and the governor guzzling Flint's water, perhaps the greatest risk for the average citizen has been the danger of being poked in the eye by someone pointing a finger at someone else as the Flint Water Crisis unfolds. Whatever the resolution of the criminal charges, studies and investigations, others are looking to Flint's future with a different spyglass. The Flint Charter Review Commission is doing just that.

About a year ago, before the water issue hit full stride, Flint voters elected a nine-person Charter Review Commission and gave them the duty of reviewing the current Flint charter and recommending additions, corrections and changes to the basic governing document that has guided the city since 1974.

Few dramatic changes?

So far, there are no indications of any dramatic changes in the works. The one big issue that was raised at the time of the commissioners' election – a possible move away from a strong mayor form of government and back to a city manager form – seems to have fallen by the wayside. In spite of recommendations from an earlier "blue ribbon committee" for a move to a city manager, support for the current strong mayor form seems unchanged.

But even without massive changes to the charter there are still important issues at stake, particularly as the city's governing power shifts back to local control.

The commission's most recent community meeting, held last month at Asbury United Methodist Church, dealt with the organization and structure of the city council. Though one might expect that the topic would only attract political science nerds and others with nothing better to do, the meeting was well attended by an active cross-section of the community and it generated a list of solid suggestions for the commission.

Council choices: elections, terms, roles?

So what are the choices in putting together a city council for Flint?

First, how large should the council be? We currently have nine wards – but that number was set when we were a city of nearly 200,000. We are now barely half that size. Should we have a smaller city council? For the most part, the groups discussing the issue suggested no change, though there were some who thought that reducing the council to seven wards would be a good idea. Though reducing the size of the council might save a little

money, the feeling was that having more representatives, closer to the voters, was worth the cost. (The Charter Review Commission presented comparisons to other city councils, which ranged in size from 5 to 11.)

Second, how should they be elected? Right now they are all elected from nine wards, equal in population, which are drawn every 10 years, after the census. Though many were fine with that arrangement, some argued for having several of the council members elected at large, with the idea that they would be more inclined to take a citywide view of issues. Others also suggested that when the new ward boundaries are drawn, it should be done by a non-partisan committee to avoid gerrymandering districts to favor one candidate over another.

Third, how long should their terms be? Right now council members are elected for four-year terms, in the years when the mayor is not up for election. Some argued for keeping the current arrangement, to provide checks and balances between the mayor and the council. Others suggested that having the council election in the same year as the mayoral election would strengthen the "strong mayor" and minimize conflict between the mayor and council. A few groups also suggested that the city return to having two-year terms for the council to increase the voters' power. Similarly, there were also a few suggestions that there should be term limits for the council members. There are none now.

Finally, when it came to the duties of the council, the list began as one might expect. Certainly they should be involved with approving the budget, at least some mayoral appointments and delivering constituent services to their respective wards. But some wanted to give the council power for investigating other officials and the power to be involved in city planning.

Surprise: no surprises

Perhaps the biggest surprise was that there were no surprises. For all the turmoil that Flint has been through in the last several years, there seems to be no desire for large, dramatic changes in our city charter. The changes suggested were relatively minor tweaks around the edges – maybe a slightly smaller council, maybe elected a little differently, maybe slightly different terms and maybe a clearer definition of roles. And maybe even those changes aren't necessary.

The modest suggestions offered probably reflect the honest judgement that Flint's problems don't arise from some

(Continued on Page 11.)

UM-Flint researcher examining water crisis effects

By Stacie Scherman

What secondary effects — population loss, property value decline, loss of trust in government — has the water crisis had on Flint? These are some of the questions University of Michigan-Flint Assistant Professor Victoria Morckel is seeking to answer in her latest study.

Morckel and two UM-Flint student research assistants will survey current Flint residents this spring and summer by telephone and mail; the survey also is available online.

According to Morckel, the purpose of the study is to determine what she calls secondary effects that might result from the water crisis. She explained that a lot of research up to this point has looked at issues of water quality and human health. But, she said, her background as an urban planner led her to think about other consequences like population loss, property values, and the physical landscape.

“What does it mean when the population doesn’t trust the local government, state government? How do you, from a public policy perspective, deal with that? That is what I think makes our work very different from the others,” Morckel said. “I’ve pretty much dropped everything to work on this.”

The survey includes questions asking residents if they are considering leaving the city because of health and safety concerns from the water crisis. If the respondent is considering leaving, he or she is asked follow-up questions about the effects of the water crisis on property values and the participant’s ability to sell or leave his or her home. Participants also answer questions about their perceptions of water safety and trust in local and state government.

This is the seventh Flint-specific study that Morckel has either led or partnered on since she came to UM-Flint in 2012. Her research emphasis is on community development and she teaches classes in urban planning at UM-Flint.

Morckel said she’s aiming for a sample of 1,000 respondents, and is at 200 so far. Data collection will continue through August. Sample sizes in her previous Flint studies have ranged from 800 to 1,800.

“I’m interested in improving communities that are losing populations, which is part of what brought me to Flint,” Morckel said. “I study what are called legacy cities or shrinking cities. Flint would be an example of one. I’m originally from Youngstown, Ohio, which is a city

very similar to Flint. I’ve had an interest in these places for a long time, so this is a good opportunity to do this work, being in Flint.”

Morckel’s first two studies, conducted with UM-Flint Associate Professor Greg Rybarczyk, looked at the perceptions of Flint’s downtown district. She said she and Rybarczyk found that respondents who lived closest to the city had the most positive perceptions of Flint. Findings from the first part of the study were published in 2013, and Morckel anticipates

the move would gentrify the market, and others worried that the new location would attract “undesirables.” But, she said, “a successful market serves all segments of the population. There is a fine line between serving those in need and maintaining financial viability.”

The results from this part of the study are finished and in the process of being published. The second part of the study, which will begin this summer, will examine the economic impact of the market’s new location on Flint’s downtown district.

Morckel’s fifth study, which she is presenting at a conference in Houghton in June, focuses on what to do with Flint’s vacant lots. Part of the study includes a model for selecting properties to return to a natural state. “You could have an ecological benefit from letting the property return to nature, like creating habitats and improving things like water filtration,” Morckel said.

Morckel is working with five UM-Flint student research assistants this summer to collect data for her Flint water and Flint Farmers’ Market studies. She said she has worked with a total of 20

students, both undergraduate and graduate, since 2013.

Because Flint is so similar to Youngstown, Morckel said, by doing this work in Flint she feels she is helping her hometown. “I’m interested in revitalization and seeing people return to the city, and seeing downtown and beyond downtown thrive.”

Once the studies are published, Morckel said she will be happy to share her findings with anyone interested and would be available to give public presentations on request.

Staff writer Stacie Scherman can be reached at sscherma@umflint.edu.



Photograph courtesy UM-Flint

Victoria Morckel (c) with students Elizabeth Padalino and Zach Hayes

that the second part of the study will be published by the end of 2016. Morckel said she would wait to share the results of her studies until after they are officially published.

The second two studies examine the new Flint Farmers’ Market. Morckel said the purpose of the studies is to attempt to determine if moving the market was the right decision. In June 2014, the market relocated from its previous location at 420 E. Boulevard to its current location at 300 E. First St. For the first part of the study, Morckel and several UM-Flint research assistants conducted surveys at the new location to determine the demographics of the market’s visitors.

Morckel explained that some believed

Free instruction in the original Biblical languages of Arabic, Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin

Contact: mr_allinger@usa.com



Lessons in Church history: Youtube- Richard Allinger Presents

In Christian Love and Prayer, Brother Richard Allinger Associate Degree in Biological Sciences (1973), C.S. Mott Community College; B.A. in Elementary Education (1978); B.R.E. (2012); and M.R.E. Candidate. www.unitedtheologicalseminary.org, www.mtcalvaryflint.com

Crossing Water guides Flint residents to safer shores

By Nic Custer

Michael Hood knew from 30 years as a wilderness guide that a canoe can't get from shore to shore unless any rotten wood is replaced first. This metaphor is what inspired the name for Crossing Water, an Ann Arbor-based organization playing a crucial role in Flint's water crisis.

Crossing Water, his volunteer outreach organization, is applying multi-disciplinary approaches to finding gaps in social services for Flint residents dealing with the water crisis. They help residents regain some sense of control and receive enough support to succeed beyond their current struggles.

The group's Rapid Response Service Team method (RRST) attempts to benefit low-income residents who may be getting missed by other water recovery services.

Crossing Water's service teams of social workers, firefighters, plumbers, nurses and others are visiting some of Flint's most vulnerable residents. Teams of two to three people bring water bottles to residents' homes and also offer other services like installing filters, educating residents about the filters, replacing faucets and sinks if necessary, and providing child and mother health assessments.

Any issues they are unable to resolve are referred to local medical and social workers. Once a household is identified, the group regularly returns with additional bottled water and support services.

"Our goal is to turn gaps into peaks and make sure those folks are getting the highest level of services," Hood said.

A recent social work graduate from Eastern Michigan University, Hood said the organization started as a class project aimed at domestic violence.

He has run his own business, Vertical Ventures, for the last 30 years. He teaches rock climbing and wilderness courses to groups across the state. But Hood temporarily closed the business in order to focus on volunteering and implementing Crossing Water's work.

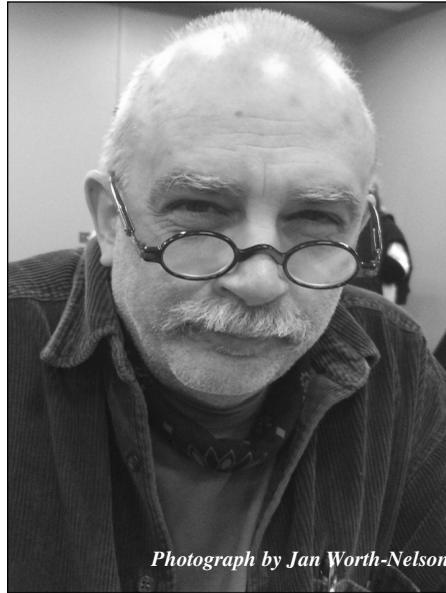
"Some people say I've been doing social work for 30 years. As an outdoor guide and a climbing guide, you hear a lot of people's problems," Hood said. Part of his work as a climbing guide has been to motivate and counsel people to do things they wouldn't normally be able to do like climb a 100-foot cliff. After a midlife crisis, he decided to go back to school to make it official, receiving an education in social work.

While the water crisis story developed, Hood saw gaps in service and decided to act. He emailed National Association of Social Workers members statewide, 225 of whom initially volunteered to help in Flint. Since then the group has also recruit-

ed volunteers through Facebook, word of mouth and media coverage.

In seeking out vulnerable populations like homeless or disabled individuals, Crossing Water staff knock on doors and wait for several minutes. If no one answers, the team asks neighbors on either side of the house whether or not it is occupied. Hood said usually the neighbors will be able to identify if there is someone living in the home that may need help.

The needs are staggering and urgent,



Photograph by Jan Worth-Nelson

Michael Hood

Hood discovered. Through March, Crossing Water volunteers still were finding families who didn't know there was lead in the water. Hood said 75 percent of low-income homes that the group visits have non-working filters including filters that are improperly installed, deactivated by use of hot water, sitting in a box on the kitchen table or that the resident doesn't even have a faucet.

Hood said he and his volunteer teams quickly learned there is considerable mistrust of government agencies.

He said the introduction their staff uses door to door is, "Hello we are Crossing Water, we are not from the government and we are here to help you."

"One of our hallmarks is that we are pretty smart. We don't follow rules, we tend to break through stuff and do things in ways others can't," Hood said.

Crossing Waters has partnered with Flint Rising and initially influenced the addition of five social service questions to the survey Flint Rising volunteers took door to door. Depending on how residents answered the questions, the Crossing Water team would know whether they should deliver additional services to the household.

Crossing Water's RRST model was developed in January. The model, which is based on referrals, sends multi-ethnic, multi-gender teams to homes across Flint, primarily on the east side. The teams give out binders full of information and take between twenty minutes to an hour to listen to the resident's concerns. As many as 13 teams are deployed across Flint at any one time. Each volunteer receives a two-hour educational training before going out in the neighborhoods.

About 10 percent of the group's volunteers are Flint residents. Other volunteers come from Traverse City, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Mackinaw City, Chicago and Indiana.

The group does more than many organizations on the ground in Flint. Hood said they have held dental labs for children of undocumented immigrants, replaced thousands of dollars in plumbing out of their own pockets, replaced an elderly woman's furnace, and furnished an undocumented immigrant family's house with three beds, dressers, a refrigerator and a microwave.

Hood is currently in talks with Genesee Health Systems and other organizations about training social workers, water distribution volunteers and church groups how to ask specific RRST questions about social and health issues. This will help standardize some of the data collection around Flint and allow Crossing Water to offer follow-up services to individuals who need them.

Based on their relationship with Flint Rising, the group has been able to work out of the basement of St. Michael's Catholic Church for the past several months. But each night Hood has had to uproot his operation, packing all of Crossing Water's materials into his truck and bringing everything back the next day. In May, the group will be moving operations to Salem Lutheran Church, 2610 M.L. King Ave., that is donating a suite of offices and use of a conference room. Hood said he is grateful for the support and it will allow for more operational time and less stress overall to have a permanent home for the group's materials. Salem Lutheran will also be helping Crossing Water fundraise and write grants as it applies to become a nonprofit.

For the first few weeks of his work Hood was very affected by what he saw residents experiencing and would cry all the way home. Staff help residents work through trauma they are experiencing as a result of the crisis but this takes its toll on volunteers. At end of every shift, Crossing Water volunteers have a confidential debrief where they share one of their experiences or a poignant story from the day.

(Continued on Page 10.)

May “flushing” process and costs explained, results awaited

By Nic Custer

Results will be announced soon about residents’ participation in a two-week effort to flush the city’s damaged pipes by running cold water for ten minutes each day.

The goal was to push out lead trapped in the system by getting a higher velocity of water running through the water pipes, especially in interior plumbing, according to Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 Acting Administrator Robert Kaplan.

Kaplan explained the situation and the flushing protocol at UM–Flint’s Earth Day celebration. He emphasized that the EPA, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Marc Edwards’ team from Virginia Tech all agree that the process was needed and all recommended it.

Marc Edwards was not at the Earth Day event, but was represented by one of his students. The MDEQ sent George Krisztian, MDEQ lab director and Flint action plan coordinator. Steve Branch, Mayor Karen Weaver’s chief of staff, represented the city.

According to Kaplan and city officials, the water used will be credited back to the users’ bill and there will be no charge for the two-week process.

“We understand there is a financial cost to all that and we need folks to actually undertake the protocol and help themselves reduce the lead so ... the state of Michigan and the city of Flint ... have agreed that water that is used to do that flushing protocol is going to be without cost to residents,” Kaplan said.

At a later meeting of the Flint Recovery Group of community partners at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, Branch said the city in fact is negotiating with the state for the month of May to be a “free water” month so that no residents would hesitate to do the flushing.

Flyers in English and Spanish provided jointly by the EPA, the MDEQ and the City of Flint were distributed in early May, missing the first week of the month for many residents.

The protocol as explained by Kaplan and on the flyers calls for residents to start with cold water at the highest flow in bathtubs run for five minutes and then cold water run in kitchen sinks for an additional five minutes with the filter disconnected.

Residential tests show the chemicals used for corrosion control, called orthophosphates, are working and restoring the pipes’ protective coating, he said.

The orthophosphate levels found at the faucet are rising and not getting blocked by the corrosion in the pipes. He said small lead particles are still spiking in the system but the filters work even for high levels of lead. Although filters are typically thought to

remain effective up to around 150 ppb (parts per billion), the EPA is finding the filters work far above that level. Kaplan showed test results from a home where the amount of lead was 4,000 ppb but the filter was able to reduce that amount to 1 ppb.

He said 1 percent of Flint homes are testing above 150 ppb. He said the average for houses in Flint is 47.1 ppb and filters reduce that to 0.23 ppb. By comparison, the standard for bottled water is 5 ppb.

Kaplan said testing has shown there is little difference in the effectiveness between new and old filters, although he said filters should be changed regularly.

Krisztian of the MDEQ said there have been three types of testing used so far, including residential, schools and a bi-weekly “sentinel” program in which water in 600 homes are being regularly measured.

So far 19,000 residential samples have been analyzed. He said a city Flint’s size is only required to analyze 60 samples over six months.

Working with the Flint Community School district, officials have taken 3,000 water samples and replaced fixtures such as fountains. He said the replacement program has been expanded to replace fixtures at private, charter and parochial schools.

The “sentinel” program has accomplished five rounds of testing so far.

Of 19,000 residential samples taken so far, 92 percent were at or below 15 ppb, the action level required by the federal Lead and Copper Rule. Krisztian said there are two kinds of lead that are a problem in the water currently. Soluble lead, which dissolves in water, is dropping as a result of the orthophosphate layer building up on the pipes.

He said the system is not stable yet though, and there are random releases of the second type, particulate lead, causing lead to spike.

He cautioned even if residents’ samples have been nondetectable for lead, they still need to use filters to make sure they aren’t consuming particulate matter.

He said flushing will reduce both of these types of lead and said similar flushing already occurring in Flint Community Schools reduced their lead levels.

Kaplan said Flint went from the worst sampled city in the country to the best, thanks to all the various government and independent groups testing the water.

“We have by far the most complete data set with regard to lead and other constituents and the water in this system than for any other system in the country,” he said.

A second kind of flushing will add chlorine to the dead ends in the system to kill dangerous bacteria and pathogens in the system like Legionella that thrive in summer months.

He said this is done by installing flushing devices on 15 hydrants around town that run on a timer and move water through the system to make sure the water is refreshed and the chlorine levels are high enough to protect water quality.

Branch said the city’s goal is to replace lead and galvanized pipes and fix main breaks, that are leaking water. Branch said city officials don’t believe copper pipes need to be replaced.

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... Water

(Continued from Page 9.)

Crossing Water is responsible for the 22 multilingual billboards across Flint that warned residents boiling water does not remove lead. A new set of 10 billboards in early May warn residents not to run hot water through filters.

The new billboards are clearly identified with the Crossing Water logo because, Hood said, the organization has become a trusted information source in the community. Additionally the group has sent out 15,000 postcards about not boiling water to all the houses Flint Rising has visited. Crossing Water is working toward a \$100,000 fundraising goal through Crowdrise and is seeking donations of computers, iPads and gasoline gift cards for staff to use.

After months of unrelenting efforts, Hood said there is a sense of volunteer fatigue and he is seeking volunteers to help fill the gaps. Crossing Water needs nurses, mental health professionals, construction workers, HVAC specialists, plumbers, lawyers familiar with landlord issues, teachers and translators of Spanish, Arabic and French for North African immigrants. Hood says he is also seeking massage therapists and cooks willing to help volunteers at the end of the workday.

“This is the work of my life, I love this work. It’s beautiful work, I get energized by it but it kills me that there are so many people we can’t reach because there aren’t enough of us,” Hood said.

Visit crossingwater.org for more information.

Nic Custer, East Village Magazine managing editor, can be reached at NicEastvillage@gmail.com.

... People

(Continued from Page 7.)

particular flaw in our charter, and the cure won't come from some magical "fix" in the charter. Dedicated and involved people can make any form of government work fairly well, and indifferent and incompetent people can foul up any organization.

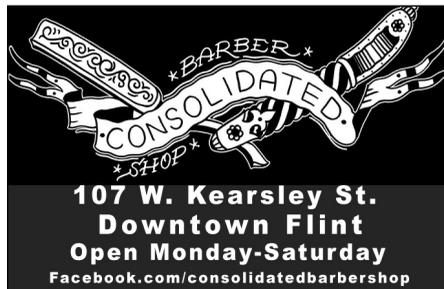
But the real lesson is that the meeting (and the whole process) reflects the dedication and commitment of Flint's citizens. Both the commission and those who took the time to attend community meetings deserve thanks and credit for their efforts. The subject matter was hardly an exciting or thrilling topic to fill a pleasant spring evening, but the commitment of the charter commissioners (Cleora Magee, Chair; John Cherry, Vice-Chair; Quincy Murphy, Victoria McKenzie, Charles Metcalf, Heidi Phaneuf, Jim Richardson, Marsha Wesley and Barry Williams) and those who filled the meeting hall at Asbury Methodist Church said more about the spirit of Flint than any particular paragraph added to, or subtracted from, our governing document.

And in the end, that's probably more important.

Future Charter Review Commission meetings are planned in the next several months,

and the full schedule (and many other details) can be accessed through the City of Flint website or www.flintcitycharter.com.

Paul Rozycki is a retired professor of political science from Mott Community College. He has lived in Flint since 1969 and has been involved with and observed Flint politics for many years. He is author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College. He can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.



... Scream

(Continued from Page 12.)

all together.

They told us it was safe to drink the water.

A few minutes later, after a furious monologue by student cast member Alazsha Donerson, a senior at the International Academy, the whole chorus starts screaming. Primal screaming. No holding back.

I was right there with them. Some days it feels like the whole city should have one good cry. Maybe the mayor should declare a day of the Primal Scream.

We find our own comforts, our own ways to cope. I am one of the privileged ones – no children to worry about, enough money, health care all my life. I'm okay. Still, I snuck out last night – and the night before – to fill the birdbath, using one of the big bottles. For some reason I didn't want anybody to see me doing it, as if it was an indulgence, a waste of the good water we're all getting "free" these days.

But the birds – a horde of gold finches this year, plenty of doves, nuthatches, robins and cardinals – even some grosbeaks today, a treat – are one of the reasons waking up in the morning here makes me happy. I don't want the birds to be harmed by this disaster any more than any of the other imperiled creatures. The people who've done this don't get to ruin my birds.

As for the rest of you, I sense a great weariness. I sense cynicism and fury – that we are still drinking bottled water, that the funds keep getting held up, that we have been saddled like so many times before by unconscionable decisions outside our control, by losses one after the other just when we think we're on the upswing.

And then the governor pulled that dreadfully cartoonish stunt, carting filtered water from a kitchen on Brookside and leaving for Europe the next week. And then Darnell Earley charged the city for his legal fees, the latest outrage, the latest shameful repudiation of responsibility.

Then the president waited there, in the bright lights, for a drink of water. And we watched it on national TV, over and over.

They told us it was safe to drink the water.

And it wasn't. And it still isn't. And we're trying to live good lives here. But not a day goes by that we can let our guard down, that we can trust our days to be free of struggle or our leaders to have our best interests at heart. Even our president gets caught in the rough waters of our distress.

Primal scream, anybody?

Jan Worth-Nelson is the editor of East Village Magazine. She can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

First Presbyterian Church of Flint

Presents
A Festival of Choirs
May 15, 4:00pm
Reception to follow

The choirs of FPCF's Music Ministry will fill the Sanctuary with glorious music for our annual choir festival. Adults, children, bells, brass, organ and congregation will join in voicing our praise and worship of God. This event is free of charge.

746 S. SAGINAW ST., FLINT
810.234.8673 FPCF.ORG



Village Life

President Obama's drink of water, boos for Snyder, and a primal scream

By Jan Worth-Nelson

President Obama's sip of water from a sparkling clean glass at Northwestern High School during his May 4 visit was nothing less than a show-stopper.

After a few small coughs, when the President said, "Uhh, can I get some water?" I bolted upright from my easy chair, where I was watching the speech on TV at home.

The President of the United States wants some water! In Flint!

Riveted in my chair, a bottled water from Station #1 at my side, I found myself shouting, "Yeah, no kidding! Do you get it?"

How could that moment not be electrifying? For Flint residents, how could it not mean something monumental?

What would they do? Why wasn't there water there already? What kind of water would they get him?

It took a while. Why the delay? Did the Secret Service have to check it? Was it filtered?

As *USA Today* reported the next day, the crowd at Northwestern was "restless" to say the least as Obama looked under the podium and to his left.

Rev. Dan Scheid, rector of St. Paul's

Episcopal Church, was in the audience. When Obama said, "I'm still waiting for my water," Scheid, packed among the crowd in the bleachers, said he muttered under his breath, "Us, too!"

When somebody finally handed him the glass, gleaming in the TV lights, that sip added Obama to the list of government officials who've assured us the water is safe to drink – even though there's considerable, deep-seated skepticism and worry among many Flint residents about whether the filters we've been provided cut out enough lead.

Emotion in the crowd, Scheid said, like emotions roiling in our community as a whole these days, ran hot.

By now we all know, of course, that Obama's portentous drink followed a loud and long booning of our clueless governor. I booed too. He deserved it: the unfiltered, untempered disdain of the people, at long last face to face with the man who I believe should be held responsible. I've watched that clip again and again.

Scheid, a man of avid advocacy for social justice, said, "I had the strangest feeling when Gov. Snyder was introduced and met with non-stop booning. What came to my mind in the most surprisingly counterintuitive way was the passion narrative in the Gospels, when Pilate introduced Jesus to a chorus of "crucify him!" In no way, shape or form do I compare nor conflate the governor with Jesus, please! But the crowd turned in an instant from good feelings after the Pledge of Allegiance and national anthem, and in eager anticipation of President Obama, to one of utter contempt and disrespect.

"I wasn't surprised by the crowd's reaction," Scheid said. "I was surprised by my immediate comparison."

This is a time of intense emotional and psychological vulnerability. We are, in short, in kind of a shaky condition. Many of us are frayed around the edges and for so many people who've been trapped in the crisis month after month – residents and social service providers alike – PTSD and burnout are setting in.

This is not something that pure reason is going to fix. For example, some people said they felt condescended to when the president said this: "Although I understand the fear and concern that people have, and it is entirely legitimate, what the science tells us at this stage is you should not drink any of the water that is not filtered but if you get the filter and use it properly, that water can be consumed. That's information that I trust and I believe."

Isn't it his job to be the Comforter-in-Chief, the Reassurer-in-Chief? Don't we want him to stand by science, to nudge us back to the facts?

But we've been burned. We've been handed "facts" that proved to be lies. Children have been hurt, families damaged. The consequences are visceral, scarring.

I appreciated so much the quotes of our hero, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, as reported in the next day's *Detroit News*. She said the President's speech was "a step in a long process for trust to be rebuilt."

"Trust has been so severely corroded here by 18 months of neglect, by betrayal," she was quoted as saying, "and you can have a million studies done on the safety of filters, and many people will still not believe that because they were essentially betrayed by all these agencies that were supposed to protect them."

The aftermath of these betrayals, the physical and emotional exhaustion, are likely to go on for months, for years.

I felt it in myself when I went to the Flint Youth Theater production of "The Most (blank) City in America." If you missed it, you missed an opportunity for a dramatic catharsis, theater at its best.

I was warned: I had Kleenex at the ready. Still, when my tears started up in the dark at the Elgood Theater, they hit me like a squall.

I was crying for this beleaguered, heartbreaking town. And for all those entangled in its travails and miseries.

Andrew Morton's powerful play, framed around the relationship between a Flint teenager and her grandfather, ranges through history distant and recent and does not avoid our water crisis. It begins with natives silently, hauntingly scooping water from a recreated river. (The occasional bubbling sound of it unexpectedly touched me). That quiet ballet sets the stage for a potent thematic exploration of dismay, struggle, guilt and a wrenching, poignant attempt to claim the city's goodness.

There's a part in the play when the "chorus," a favorite device in Morton's "verbatim" plays shaped from interviews and the words of affected people, builds in a spoken-word babble until all their voices converge, in unison, crying out, "...they told us it was safe to drink the water!!!"

That stark moment gripped my heart: as the cry of the heart reverberated in the small theater, it felt as if the betrayal, lying and confusion, all the anguish and anger, belonged to all of us. We were hurt

(Continued on Page 11.)

FLINT: A TRIBUTE

By Grayce Scholt

".... I have set my face like a flint;
...I shall not be put to shame"
(Isaiah 50:7)

When old Isaiah's eyes foresaw a servant hanging on the cross of shame--be it the Christ-- or man or woman boy or girl-- he set his face, firm, resolute and yet he knew that pain, the suffering men impose on men would come to him, would come to all, again, again-- would even come to Flint.

Flint:
dull-colored, quartz
stiff as any stone can be
but even when it's shattered, flaked,
and shards are struck,
it sparks.

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