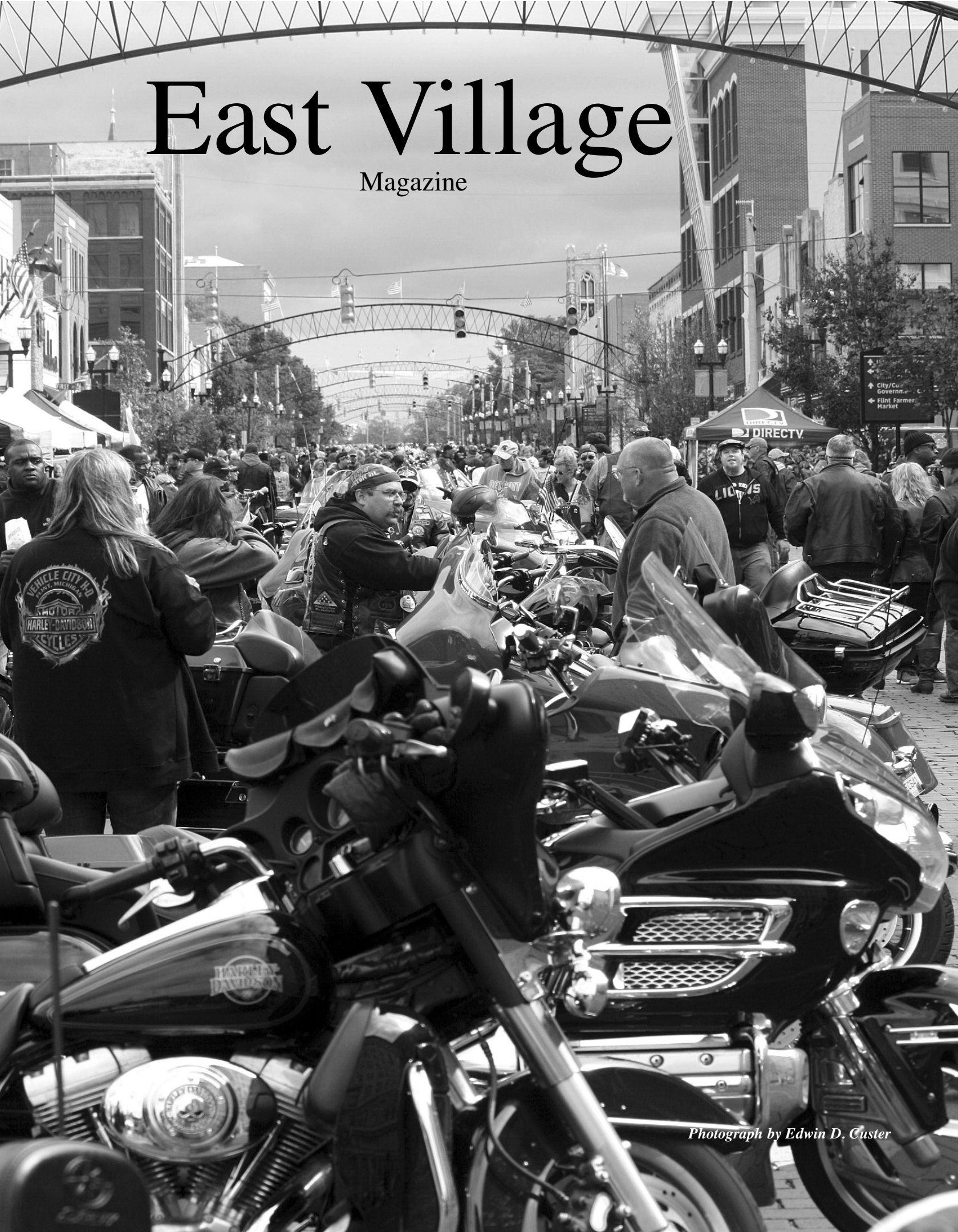


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Magazine



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Comment Six questions for Flint's mayoral candidates

By Paul Rozycki

After a bizarre and tumultuous primary that involved missed deadlines, a potential write-in election, special state legislation, a colorful cast of characters, and Giggles the pig, Flint seems on track for a rather conventional mayoral election between incumbent Dayne Walling and challenger Karen Weaver this November. Compared to recent elections this one seems quiet and almost sedate. Given our past history, it does seem strange, but, what can I say? ... It happens. Enjoy it while it lasts.

This Nov. 3 voters will elect the first mayor in some years to govern the city beyond its long-running emergency manager status.

With that in mind there are several questions we should ask the candidates before we cast our ballots. Some are raised at most forums and debates, others are rarely asked, but are critical for the long term future of Flint. None of them have easy answers. And the choices are not easy or painless.

Water, water, everywhere ...

Clearly Flint's number one issue has been water. The cost of the water, quality of the water and a series of court rulings dealing with the water issue have dominated the news cycle this year and will continue to be major issues long into the future. The recent discovery of lead in the water only intensifies the debate.

There are many questions one can ask about the current water situation. First, who made the decision to shift from Detroit water to the Flint River water, before the Karegnondi Pipeline was finished? Did they do adequate research on Flint's aging pipelines and the additional chemicals needed to deal with the issue? Second, were those in charge honest with the public? And third, and most important, what solutions does each candidate propose in dealing with the issue moving forward? For better or worse, we can't undo the decisions made in the past, but what solutions are being offered that will guarantee the quality of Flint's water, while ensuring a solid financial footing for the city?

Law and order: Flint edition

While the worry over water has drowned out much other discussion, it's not the only issue facing Flint's next mayor. We are on track to challenge our record murder rate — 46 at last count.

While other crimes are generally lower than they have been in the past, and most agree that Chief Tolbert has done an excellent job of taking command of the police department and reaching out to the community, what will the next mayor do to ensure that we reduce crime in Flint? And while the police and the mayor are obviously important to crime control, maybe the most significant question is — what will the people of Flint do to fight crime?

Uptown, downtown and around town

One of the great successes in Flint has been the rebirth of the downtown, led by the Uptown Development group. Even the harshest critics can agree that the new development is a great step forward from our not-so-distant past. Yet, for all the improvements downtown, many neighborhoods remain in dismal shape. What are the concrete plans to share the downtown's growth and development with Flint's neighborhoods? How will the whole city benefit from downtown's resurgence?

The incredible shrinking city?

Many of Flint's neighborhoods today are a bleak shadow of what they were a few decades ago. Once vibrant streets are now lined with empty houses and many blocks have only a few inhabited properties surrounded by weed-covered lots that once were the yards of occupied homes.

At less than 100,000 population, today's Flint is less than a half of what was in the 1960s and we have about the same population we did in the early 1920s. Yet the cash-strapped city is still supporting a territory suited for a city of 200,000 or more. Should there be a serious discussion of downsizing the city to reflect its current status?

(Continued on Page 7.)

Welcome new distributor!

Marabeth Foreman is a new distributor of *East Village Magazine* for the area bounded by Court, Greenfield, Windemere, Vernon, Sherff, and Commonwealth. A graduate of Olivet Nazarene College, she has lived in Flint for 40 years. When she volunteered to distribute EVM, she commented, "It's about time, eh?" Thank you, Marabeth!

Cover:

2015 Bikes on the Bricks, Saginaw Street



Photo of the Month

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Lead in Flint water dangerous, Virginia Tech experts warn

By Ashley O'Brien

A public meeting in September brought nearly 200 Flint residents to Saints of God Church to hear officials from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan and other organizations warn them to protect themselves from lead in Flint water delivered through corroding pipes.

[A week after the meeting, the Genesee County Health Department backed the Virginia Tech results, issued a notice of a public health emergency and urged anyone whose water comes from the Flint River not to drink it. – Editor.]

The forum was sponsored by the Flint-based Coalition for Clean Water, and co-moderated by Lee-Anne Walters and Melissa Mays from Water You Fighting For – one of the volunteer groups in the coalition.

City of Flint Director of Public Works Howard Croft attended the meeting but did not speak.

Virginia Tech professor of civil engineering, Dr. Marc Edwards, along with graduate research students and volunteers, came to Flint to independently test water samples from across the city for lead and bacteria.

According to Edwards, lead in the water is most likely a direct result of switching from Detroit water to Flint River water 15 months ago.

“Detroit water was considered very

non-corrosive,” Edwards said. By comparison, Flint water had about nine times as much corrosive salts.

Edwards said a water treatment professional “should know that when you go from Detroit to Flint River water there was going to be a serious corrosion problem.”

Edwards said Detroit uses a corrosion inhibitor, as do about 50 percent of water treatment facilities across the United States, but the corrosion inhibitor had never been added to Flint’s water.

The corrosive water is damaging Flint’s water pipes, reducing their lifetime, and causing water main breaks, Edwards explained, adding that iron rust and lead rust could dissolve into the water. Pure lead pipes, lead solder, and lead in brass are common sources of lead in plumbing, according to Edwards, who added most homes were likely to have lead solder or lead brass in their pipes unless they re-plumbed in the last 30 years with plastic.

Edwards’ research team looked for lead problems in Detroit in 2010, but found none. By comparison, Edwards said, “Flint has 19 times more lead in it (than Detroit) in a head-to-head experiment.” Edwards urged community members to protect themselves.

“No one should be making up baby formula from Flint tap water at this time,”

Edwards said.

He recommended treating water with a filter certified for lead treatment. Alternatively, he said residents should flush their water lines for five minutes every time they need water for cooking or drinking.

Water safe for bathing, toothbrushing

Edwards did say that the water was safe for bathing and showering and there was no evidence of bacteria in the water. He added that brushing teeth with Flint water was a low-risk activity.

Studying 252 samples, Edwards said, “we learned that two minutes flushing is not enough. There were about 8 percent of homes that still had too much lead with two minutes, and that’s why we’re recommending five minutes.”

Lead is a heavy metal that is toxic to human beings. Current federal guidelines use 15 parts per billion (ppb) of lead in water as the benchmark for safe drinking water.

The Virginia Tech research team collected multiple samples from every ward in the city. Ward 6 had the highest risk; there, 30 percent of water samples had lead levels above 15 ppb. On the other hand, Ward 1 had the lowest risk with 6.9 percent above ppb.

According to Edwards, the EPA set the standard at 15 ppb decades ago when less was known about the harmful effects of

(Continued on Page 6.)

Walling confronts water concerns in CCNA appearance

By Ashley O'Brien

Mayor Dayne Walling came to the September College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA) meeting as a candidate running for re-election, and ended up addressing numerous questions and concerns about the city's water woes.

He said he believes the city behaved at least partly legally and that he trusts the city's water tests.

Regarding the recent court injunction against the city to reverse water rate increases instituted in 2011, Walling said the water rate hike was found to be improper because the city violated a city water ordinance which specified that increases needed to be announced in April and put into effect July 1 of the same year.

"There is now a judge and many public supporters that say that was an illegal act, and I have to admit that it did not conform with Section A," Walling said. [Indeed, in his Aug. 7 order to eliminate a 35 percent increase in water and sewer rates enacted in 2011, Genesee Circuit Court Judge Archie Hayman cited a city ordinance requiring advance notice to customers and noting rate increases are to be added gradually over 12 months. Walling and Hayman both were referring to City Ordinance 46-52.1 CALCULATION OF RATES—Editor.]

Walling asserted, however, that he believed another part of the ordinance gave his administration clearance to increase water rates under certain circumstances and that Flint's budget woes, discovered in August of 2011, justified his decision to increase water rates after July 1.

Mayor trusts city testing

Regarding the flood of concerns about Flint's water quality since the switch from Detroit water to Flint River water in April, 2014, Walling said he had faith in the water testing done by the city, despite claims from Virginia Tech researchers that

the water is unsafe.

"Water chemistry plays a role but the testing method also plays a role on the returns that you're going to get," Walling said.

Walling said the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) mandates that test samples should be collected after letting water sit 6-8 hours then flushing the water for two minutes.

"That's believed to be indicative of how people use the water that's in their house," Walling said.

Virginia Tech, in comparison, let the water sit longer and took samples after different amounts of flushing, including no flushing.

How long to flush?

Walling said he was told by officials at the MDEQ that communities with lead plumbing need to be reminded to flush their system when it hasn't been used for six to eight hours. "That's pretty close to what Dr. Marc Edwards from Virginia Tech was saying as well," Walling said.

[At a recent Flint forum on the issue, (see related article at left) Edwards told the 200 residents in attendance that two minutes is not enough, that people need to flush their water every time they draw it and for at least five minutes, and that under no conditions should baby formula be made with Flint City water — Editor.]

Walling said the MDEQ recommended adding an anti-corrosive [such as that used by Detroit], but that city officials had yet to decide which ingredient would be best.

"Dr. Edwards indicated a common anti-corrosive phosphate," Walling said. However, he said he had been told that particular anti-corrosive could also lead to more bacteria, that was particularly problematic for the Flint River water that is warmer than what came from Detroit.

Call issued for library millage support

Also at the meeting, former State

Representative Jack Minore urged community members to vote in favor of the November millage to support the Flint Public Library. He described the millage as a renewal plus a slight increase, and said it would cost most residents about a dollar a month.

One community member expressed a sense of betrayal when hours were cut several years ago when a library millage passed. He wanted a guarantee that wouldn't happen again.

Minore said the cut in hours was related to falling property values after the recession.

The library would be in dire trouble without the millage, Minore warned. "Because of the loss of property values and number of people that have left, the library has lost a lot of income."

CCNA homes selling, prices inch up

Realtor and resident Mark Fisher reported real estate activity for the College Cultural neighborhood has been slow over the past two years, resulting in higher inventory. However, distressed houses, short sales, and foreclosures have stayed low.

He said 29 houses have sold in the last six months, and for two years, the average price per square foot has been going up. The current average is \$35.

Staff writer Ashley O'Brien can be reached at am.obrien@rocketmail.com

Volunteer Distributors Wanted

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Lead levels may have roots in early Flint development

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Why might Flint's lead levels vary from ward to ward in the water testing reported by experts at Virginia Polytechnic Institute?

One set of possible answers comes from Andrew Highsmith, author of the new book *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan and the Fate of the American Metropolis*. Highsmith, now an assistant professor of history at the University of California, Irvine, spent several years studying metropolitan development and real estate patterns in Flint in the 20th century. He was contacted by *East Village Magazine* to comment on the Virginia Tech results.

Testing results showed that Ward Six, on the city's west side, had the highest proportion of lead in its water, while Ward One, on the city's northwest side, had the lowest.

"Regarding the Ward Six and One comparison," Highsmith said, "in general, the homes and infrastructure in the Sixth Ward are significantly older than in the First.

"Many of the homes in the Sixth Ward were built in the 1920s by General Motors' Modern Housing Corporation. It was company housing for white workers and managers.

"At the time, it was considered state of

the art, but there may have been different materials used in the pipes and solder than in Ward One, which was built much later — mostly after World War Two.

"Interestingly, it was right at the time that GM was building its homes in the Sixth Ward that concerns about lead pipes and lead contamination in water and other things were gaining national traction.

"In response, the lead industry went on a decades long campaign to ensure Americans that lead was safe." He said GM was involved in this campaign, too, via its own advocacy of leaded gasoline.

He said the homes in the Sixth Ward went up very quickly — GM was respond-

... Dangerous

(Continued from Page 4.)

lead in water.

Edwards called the standard “out of date,” and said 5 ppb was another common standard. “Across the city, 40% of homes were over 5 ppb.”

Infrastructure apocalypse at hand?

Edwards emphasized the health risks lead posed, but also stressed the economic problem that was being created. “The real concern is that the water is destroying the pipes. The replacement value of the pipes in the City of Flint is \$1.5 billion, to replace the whole system,” Edwards said.

According to Edwards, the 15 months so far of corrosive water has caused the city’s water pipes to age about 12 years.

Adding the non-corrosive ingredient to Flint River water is a potential solution Edwards investigated, but he said that will reduce lead levels only a small amount. Reporting on an experiment that had been running for two weeks, Edwards said, “It’s not helping. It’s not going to be a magic bullet that makes the iron disappear and the lead problem disappear.”

Returning to Detroit water was a real solution, however. According to Edwards, “if you went back to Detroit’s water, this problem would probably go away in about a month’s time. The pipes would start to heal themselves again. The iron would stay on the pipes. The lead would stay on the pipes.”

If the water is so harmful, why do officials in the City of Flint and MDEQ claim it is safe? Curt Guyette, investigative reporter at the ACLU of Michigan, says he investigated the answer to this question and “found a number of irregularities with the way the city’s tests were conducted.”

City Water Testing Critiqued

“No critical scientist would use the pre-flushing method,” Guyette began. Pre-flushing refers to a major difference between testing methods done by city officials and by the Virginia Tech team. The tests run by Edwards were performed on water straight from the tap, while the city’s tests allowed the water to run for two minutes before collecting samples.

Pre-flushing “is a way to minimize the amount of lead that is found and misses worst case scenarios,” Guyette said.

The testing had to meet certain requirements to maintain compliance with the EPA, Guyette said. One requirement included two separate six-month sampling periods. According to Guyette, “the law requires that all 100 homes tested in the first round are retested in the second round. That didn’t happen. That didn’t come close to happening.”

Instead, only 13 houses tested in the first round were retested, and those 13

Award-winning novelist to visit Flint

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Writer Jeffery Renard Allen, author of the acclaimed 2014 novel *Song of the Shank*, is scheduled to visit Flint Oct. 29. His appearance is part of the African/African Diaspora Artist Series, a collaboration with the Flint Public Library and the University of Michigan–Flint Department of Africana Studies, funded in part by the Ruth Mott Foundation.

The three events of the day are free and open to the public.

“The Power of the Word: Confronting the History of Slavery, Aggression and Inequality through Writing,” a lecture, Q&A and book signing, is set for 10 a.m. to noon in Michigan Rooms A&B, UM–Flint.

“Beyond Plot, Beyond Character: What’s the Story About?” a discussion for

fiction writing students, will be held in 134 Thompson Library (TCLT Seminar Room). Space is limited and RSVP is required by calling 810-762-3285.

“A Conversation with Jeffery Renard Allen,” moderated by local writer and Gothic Funk Press publisher Connor Coyne, is scheduled for 6 p.m. in the Reading Room of the Flint Public Library. Coyne was a student of Allen’s in the Master of Fine Arts program at the New School. The conversation will be followed by a Q&A and book signing.

Song of the Shank is the story of “Blind Tom,” a 19th-century slave and musical genius. Tom Nolan of the *San Francisco Chronicle* recently described the novel as

(Continued on Page 7.)

houses showed low lead levels in the first round of testing. “None of the houses that showed higher lead levels in the first level of testing were retested in the second level,” he said.

Demands for action presented

Co-moderators Mays and Walters shared a list of demands – directed to the City of Flint and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality on behalf of the Coalition for Clean Water. Demands included returning to Detroit water, and water filters provided free to residents. Walters said she originally reached out to Virginia Tech after her son became ill in April.

Staff writer Ashley O’Brien can be reached at am.obrien@rocketmail.com.

... Levels

(Continued from Page 5.)

ing to a population explosion and some very poor housing conditions in the city, so they moved very quickly to get homes built on the west side.”

But he doesn’t have evidence to support that they were thrown up on the cheap.

“Many, of course, for example in Mott Park, have stood the test of time and feature very sound construction.”

He said his research did not include the question of whether there were differences in the pipes, solder and plumbing among the wards.

Jan Worth-Nelson is the editor of *East Village Magazine*. She can be reached at janworth118@gmail.com

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(Continued from Page 3.)

Bankruptcy?

Though Flint seems to be on the verge of moving beyond the control of an emergency manager, it remains under the supervision of the Transition Advisory Board – perhaps an emergency manager in the form of a committee. While Flint's finances have greatly improved and we have a balanced budget for the first time in years, there are several major threats on the horizon.

Will the court decisions forcing the city to end water shutoffs (with a loss of revenue from those who don't pay) and decisions requiring the city to repay \$15 million to the Water Fund bring the deficits back? Will the threat of lawsuits over lead in the water put even greater pressure on city finances? If all this happens, is Flint similar enough to Detroit to consider bankruptcy as a solution?

Consolidation with other governments?

Finally, with all the problems the city faces, should Flint consider consolidation with other area governments? Some of this has happened already and the prospect of a combined city/county building suggests that trend might continue. It has been encouraged by the governor on the state level, and it might be a way to

share the expenses of an older industrial city with the more prosperous outlying area. Consolidation or sharing of government activities can be an economical and efficient way to deliver services. The city of Pontiac has already taken many steps down this road. But it can mean a loss of local control and sharing financial burdens. Both those in the central city and those in the outlying areas often resist for those reasons. If it happens, it should be an open process and allow for citizen input from both sides.

Questions for all of us

But perhaps the important questions are for the citizens of Flint. Will we turn out to vote in significant numbers in November, and will we be willing to work with the newly elected mayor, as he or she faces the difficult questions that lie ahead?

For all of us, that's really the biggest question.

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.

... Novelist

(Continued from Page 6.)

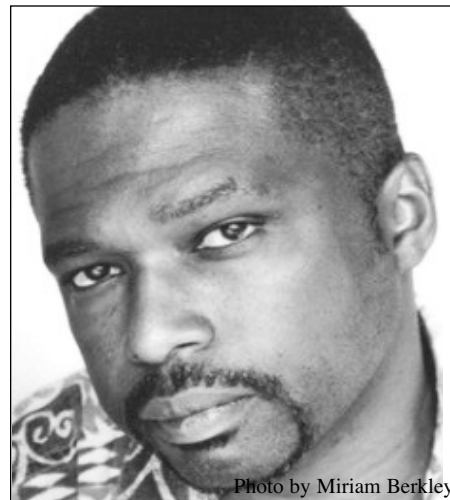


Photo by Miriam Berkley

Author Jeffery Renard Allen

"inventive, earthy, lyrical, demanding, rewarding."

His first book, the recently re-issued *Rails Under My Back*, won the Heartland Prize. Allen's work also includes the story collection *Holding Pattern* and poetry collections *Stellar Places* and *Harbors and Spirits*.

In addition to Allen's many publications and awards, he has also supported developing writers in Africa, and cofounded the Pan African Literary Forum (PALF).

Allen is a faculty member at the New School writing program and a professor of creative writing at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

He holds a Ph.D. in English (Creative Writing) from the University of Illinois at Chicago. His writing, especially his novels, has been compared to the work of William Faulkner and Ralph Ellison.

Allen has received a Whiting Writer's Award, a support grant from Creative Capital, the Chicago Public Library's Twenty-first Century Award, a Recognition for Pioneering Achievements in Fiction from the African American Literature and Culture Association, the 2003 Charles Angoff award for fiction from the Literary Review, and special citations from the Society for Midland Authors and the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation.

More information about his visit is available from the Flint Public Library at 810-249-2569.

Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

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Village Life

Flint's botched water crisis: betraying The Common Good

By Jan Worth-Nelson

To paraphrase Stan Laurel, what a fine mess we've gotten ourselves into.

Frankly, I am worried about us. How can we be so incredibly, myopically inept?

The whole time Pope Francis was here I kept hearing him invoke The Common Good. The Common Good. The Common Good.

Yes, I cheered, yes, I said, yes. I want on that bandwagon, that battered concept. I want that big idea – the grandeur and generosity of it, the poetry of it, an ideal for a humane people.

I'm no tenderfoot – I know it's a concept immensely tough to put into action.

And after all, it's a bit un-American, what with our ardor for the individual – that tense teeter-totter of rights that has kept us in a nervewracking balancing act

for two and a half centuries.

But there are some things so obviously in The Common Good that there should be no debate. I want The Common Good in our rhetoric, in our shared commitments, in our daily life, right now, in Flint.

I want us to cherish The Common Good of safe drinking water.

Water! For God's sake! How could our leaders bungle our ability to provide something so essential to human life?

Flint's water debacle is many-layered, but the bottom line seems clear: the lead level in our water is dangerous. On Oct. 1, in fact, the Genesee County Health Department declared the lead situation a public health emergency, backing the findings of the Virginia Tech testing group whose results the city and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality have continued to question.

The malefeasance, denials, conflicting stories and political jousting that have led us to this stark state of affairs are as corroding to the public confidence in government as the Flint River water leaching through our aging pipes.

This is not an abstract matter. The consequences of failed governance in the case of Flint's water are requiring us to act – in many cases on our own, as if we had no government – to protect ourselves and our children.

Every day, it seems, the catastrophe grows larger and more alarming, the dimensions of interlocking failures more and more disturbing.

As with many public catastrophes, there is not just one villain toward whom we can direct our outrage. Many aim their bile at Mayor Walling, who indeed seemed curiously sluggish for a time in acknowledging community concerns. Many criticize Darnell Earley, the former emergency manager who was running the show when the Detroit water switch was pulled and when the rates were hiked. Many criticize Governor Snyder, who yanked away Flint's democratic options in the first place by installing the EM. And then there's our former Mayor Don Williamson, who propelled the crisis by lifting money from a city water and sewer account to pay off a \$15 million lawsuit. No nobility in evidence here. All have played a role.

But there's more. How about what came before – how funds to keep up our infrastructure have gradually dripped away as people lost jobs and fled from Flint, undermining the tax base? How about blaming General Motors for abandoning us when its own failure to adapt led our city into debilitating losses?

How about blaming General Motors – again – for throwing up company housing

in the Sixth Ward and elsewhere in the 1920s to house its workers – using “state of the art” lead pipes and solder?

How about blaming the lead industry, which convinced us all for decades that the toxic metal was safe?

How about blaming ourselves in our complicity -- for failing to vote, for example, racking up a miserable 11 percent turnout for the last election?

It's all very exhausting. But we didn't know. We trusted people who were not trustworthy. Or not paying attention. Or whose brains were dulled by lead. Or who were scientifically lazy or massively CYA.

But something has turned on the tap of resistance, and people are fighting back. Our children have been put at risk. Perhaps that's what it took. Protecting our children – damn it, is there any doubt? – is the ultimate Common Good.

We can't afford to spend more time taking inventory on whom to hate. Instead, it's time to act, and while we're at it, to demand good government. For once in this beleaguered town.

So, could we please embrace The Common Good? Could we please turn with open hearts, clear heads, and determination to be a successful civil society? A society that protects its most vulnerable citizens?

The impassioned work of residents like artist and mother Desiree Duell, lawsuit attorney Valdemar Washington and his clients, Water You Fighting For, the Coalition for Clean Water, Flint churches, The White Horse Tavern even, providing bottled water and filters, Flint Journal reporter Ron Fonger and neighborhood associations ardently digging for the facts, numerous bloggers speaking truth to power – it's all beginning to clear the scum from the water.

So we are energized by the betrayals, by attempts to distract us from truth. But damage has been done – we don't even know the extent of it yet. There will be consequences for the failures, and the whole community – our children – are likely to be among those who pay.

And to those officials ostensibly in place to help us – politicians and community servants: GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER. Have you forgotten how to be competent?

While it's tempting to want retribution, there's no benefit in humiliating anyone, except at the ballot box. The point now is to make things right for The Common Good.

Jan Worth-Nelson, Editor

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Night

By Grayce Scholt

Night has its own song--
a lullaby?

a cry,
a scream,
a rumbling
grumbling in the bowels
that toss and roll
in fire and foul?
Or is the song a dream
of warm rememberd
bodies touching
in the dark--
or a snarl of snot?

Sometimes it is a prayer that
comes and goes
in pleas
in promises
in hope
aubades will come
with rising suns
and darkest nights
will vanish
with the
light.

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, *Vienna, 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.