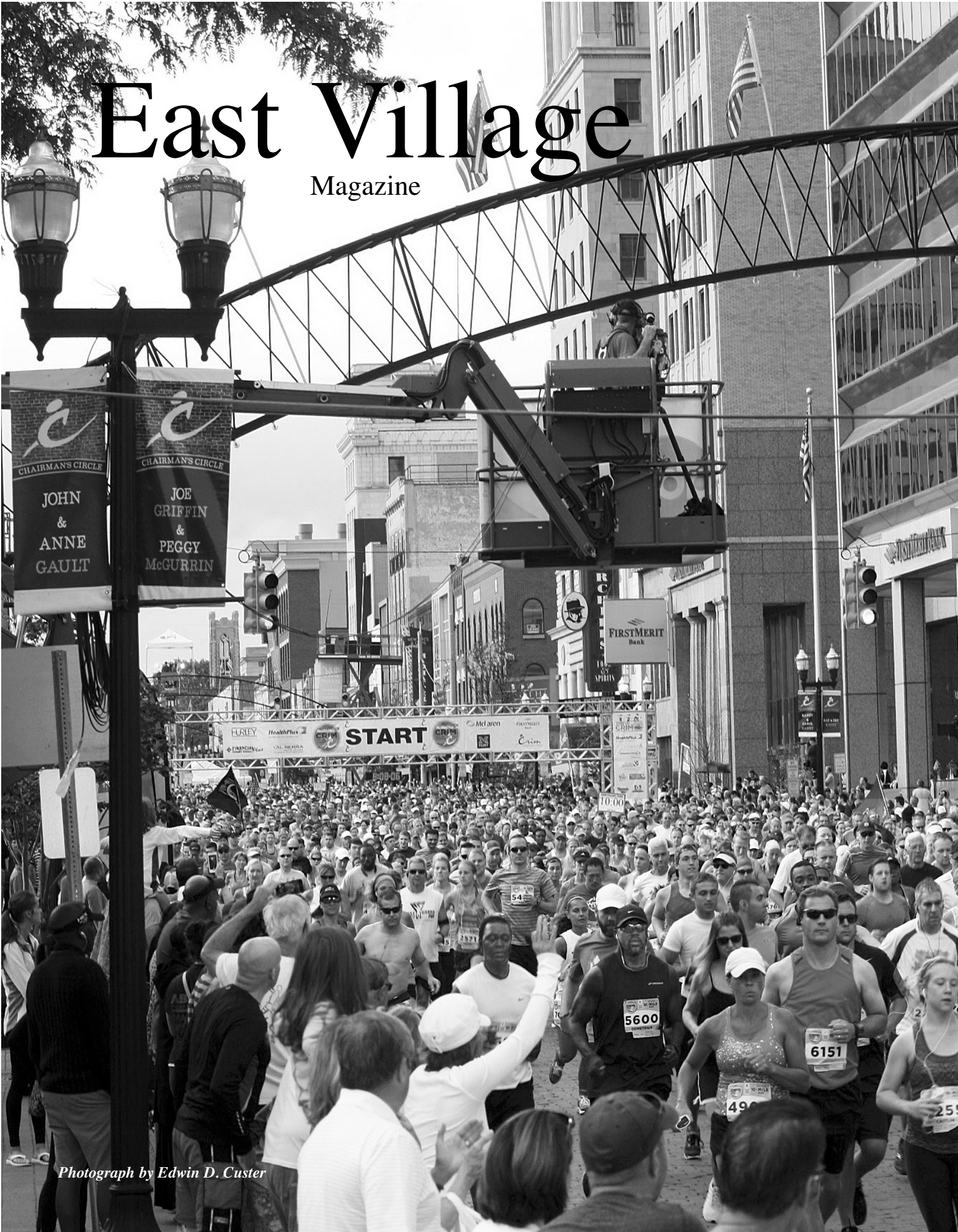


East Village

Magazine



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From the editor *Of feedback, photos, and art*

Last month we received feedback from a reader that set me off on an absorbing and energizing journey.

Shelly Kaye, an artist and artists' agent, called me about our p.4 photo. It was an arresting close-up of part of a mural – the mural on the north wall of the Hispanic Technology and Community Center on Lewis Street.

Unless you were familiar with the center, you would not have known that — neither where it is nor who created it. Microscopically visible in the bottom left corner was the artist's name: Armando Fernandez.

Kaye wanted to know why we identified the EVM photographer, Edwin D. Custer, and not the artist. Also, she said several people who saw the issue thought the photo was connected to the article under it, a piece about the new director of the Art School of the Flint Institute of Arts.

It got me thinking.

Historically, there has always been a photo at the top of p.4 with no caption. It could be best described as a piece of art, inviting readers to invent a story to go with it: for example, why is that hammock empty? (July) Or, hey, that old Buick is just like the one my grandpa had (p.4). Or who's that softball catcher? (May). It's not necessarily tied to the news, but sometimes reflects the season. Or maybe it's just an image that grabbed us, starting with Ed Custer's keen artistic eye. It is not necessarily meant to tie in to the story below it — which is why we enclose the p.4 photo in a border. But I could see Kaye's point.

Because we'd like to make our intentions clearer, we're making the border thicker around the p.4 photo and labeling it "Photo of the Month."

Then there's the question of identifying the photos.

People have often asked about the locations of our cover photos, and for various reasons our late great publisher Gary Custer resisted providing that information. He was a photojournalism major in college, and believed that a great photo stands on its own. He wanted readers to look closely at the photograph and react to its artistic qualities. He thought each photograph both told a story and presented an artistic dimension. That's one reason he also opted against providing photo captions. He saw photojournalism as art *and* journalism, and a look at the hundreds of EVM cover photos by Ed Custer over the

years offers stunning evidence that he was right.

But I also have been asking myself, would captions add to the reader's experience? Should the cover be identified? I'm a "word person" and an editor continually drilling our volunteer reporters on the primacy of the "5W's and an H" (who, when, where, what, why and how).

I love the beauty of detail. I'm not a big fan of mystery. I like people to know things. So with great respect for Gary Custer's enduring aesthetic, I'm introducing some slight changes.

In discussion with my EVM colleagues, starting with this issue, the location of our cover photo will be included in a small box at the bottom of this page. You may also notice that we're adding a few more photos here and there, and that they have brief captions.

Oh, and Shelly Kaye's phone call produced another effect. She got me curious about the artist who painted the mural at the Hispanic Technology and Community Center. In follow-up, I got together with Armando Fernandez for a profile that we've run as the Village Life column starting on the back page. It was a marvelous experience to meet him, to write about him, and to roam the city seeing his vivid and inspirational imprints, often on walls and rooms that really needed art.

Kaye's call was a reminder of the value of feedback from our readers. It keeps us sharp and thoughtful about our editorial and artistic choices. So I invite you to keep in touch at the emails below.

We want our choices to reflect our respect for the community. And we aim to give our readers a memorable and helpful connection to our hometown.

Finally, Kaye's call and what it set in motion reminded me of the exceptional and varied talent that exists in this town. I am invigorated once again, even in the face of the city's difficult summer, by the spirit of creative hopefulness that sprouts from many niches and corners of the community we're all trying to love.

Jan Worth-Nelson
Editor

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Cover:

2015 Crim Road Race, Saginaw Street



Photo of the Month

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Flint politics: A summery (and not so summery) summer summary

By Paul Rozycki

Now that Back to the Bricks and the Crim races are behind us, the warm humid days of summer are giving way to the cooler days of autumn. The same may be true of Flint politics.

Things got hot in Lansing

Certainly one of the strangest and most overheated stories this summer has been the Todd Courser-Cindy Gamrat affair where politics not only made strange bedfellows but generated even stranger explanations. If it were only a story of two consenting adults having an affair it would barely rate a mention for a day or two in Michigan headlines. But Courser's bizarre attempts to deflect the story and cover it up have made it the story of the summer.

At first a convoluted phony story about Courser being caught behind a bar seeking sex with a male prostitute was supposed to draw attention away from his real affair. Then further accounts were said to involve a media blackmailer and the 'Lansing Republican Mafia.' (One waits for additional details involving space aliens and tin-foil beanies as this story unfolds). At this writing, in spite of calls for them to resign or be removed from the legislature, they remain in office.

This may be the first time in Michigan

politics, and one of the few times in American government, where we have seen a stoic and grim-faced husband loyally standing behind his scandal-ridden spouse as she apologized to her family and the public who elected her. How many times have we seen wounded wives standing in the same position as Joe Gamrat?

Could good come out of it?

Is there anything positive that could emerge from the Courser/Gamrat affair? Outside of the sheer entertainment value, it might spur the Republican legislature to finally take action on the roads bill, in an attempt to change the subject.

After the crushing defeat of Proposal 1 on May 5th (labeled 'Sinkhole de Mayo' by radio host Tom Sumner) many predicted that the legislature would be forced to take action and put something in place to fix Michigan's crumbling roads. Not much happened. As of late August, there is a proposal in committee, but the lawmakers have taken a summer break, and there is no guarantee it will get out of committee or be passed this year. If and when the legislators finally take action, at least it might shift the headlines away from the Courser/Gamrat scandal.

Shootings, traged spike

After last year, when Flint seemed to have finally turned the corner on the crime rate, shootings have spiked dramatically this summer. Recently a 70-year-old retired educator and a 1-year-old child were shot in their home. Flint now has more murders than it did all of last year. It's hard to find any good in those numbers except to hope that the shootings in the first two weeks of August were simply an aberration and that crime rates will continue to drop as they have in recent years. Some other categories of crime have declined. Chief of Police James Tolbert's vigorous response, the addition of new police officers, and the added assistance from the state police might prove to be a positive response to this spike in Flint's murder rate.

Goodbye to Giggles the Pig

This summer also gave us one of Flint's strangest mayoral elections. At first, because of a missed deadline, all of the candidates faced a write-in campaign for the August primary. A few weeks later, a last-minute change in state law put candidates Wantwaz Davis, Eric Mays, Mayor Dayne Walling and Karen Weaver back on the ballot. Even then, eight additional can-

... Summary

(Continued from Page 4.)

didates filed to run write-in campaigns. (Giggles the Pig entered the race then wisely dropped out, and several of the write-in candidates didn't even bother to vote for themselves). After one of Flint's more colorful and entertaining campaigns, Dayne Walling and Karen Weaver emerged victorious and will face off in November. The good news is that Flint voters will have two competent candidates to choose from as the city begins to move beyond its emergency manager status.

Water troubles still bubbling

Unfortunately, the water issue, which has plagued the city in the last few years, bubbled up again and placed that newly acquired financial stability in jeopardy. A recent court ruling required the city to roll back water rates by about a third and repay over \$15 million that had been borrowed from the city's water and sewer fund. Appeals are in process, but city officials say that bankruptcy is a possibility if the decision stands. It's hard to find a summery, positive spin to this. Yes, everyone will appreciate lower water rates, but the impact on police, fire and other city services could be enormous. Though there is some discussion about a negotiated settlement, it could be the biggest cloud on the horizon for the city and whoever is elected in November.

Maybe fall will calm down

So if Flint politics this fall is a little less tumultuous than it has been this past summer, there are still a few things we can look forward to.

Maybe Donald Trump will fly by and give all of us a free helicopter ride over Bishop Airport and perhaps Hillary's secret emails will trickle out and let us know what appetizers she ordered for her daughter's wedding as autumn's leaves turn to red and gold.

After all, next summer's campaign isn't that far away.

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.

News Briefs

Bishop Airport receives \$4.4 million DOT grant

Washington, D.C. — A grant of \$4.4 million for Flint's Bishop International Airport was announced Sept. 1 by Michigan's U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters.

The grant, from the U.S. Department of Transportation, will "help the airport rehabilitate its runway, replace and install new runway lighting, and remove trees that could obstruct several runways," according to a news release from the senators.

"This investment will make travelling to and from Genesee County safer and more efficient," Sen. Stabenow commented. "By supporting Bishop Airport, we're also encouraging businesses to invest in the region and create jobs."

Sen. Peters said, "Many travelers rely on Bishop International Airport for travel

to and from the Flint and Bay Region. This funding will improve airport operations and facilitate safe air travel while encouraging economic growth in the region."

The third busiest airport in Michigan, Bishop serves close to a million passengers a year through four airlines: American, Delta, Southwest and United. Its top six destinations last year were Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore, Orlando, Las Vegas and Minneapolis. In addition, the airport services FedEx Cargo operations to Memphis, Indianapolis, Gaylord and Alpena.

The 1,550-acre site has two runways. The airport first opened in 1928 on 220 acres of farmland donated by Arthur Giles Bishop, a banker and General Motors board member.

FIM President and CEO announces 2016 retirement

Paul Torre, the president and chief operating officer of the Flint Institute of Music for the past 35 years, will retire at the end of the FIM's current fiscal year May 31, 2016.

According to a news release, the board of trustees has begun the process of conducting a national search with the completion goal of June 1, 2016. Vince Lorraine, chairman of the FIM board, and Jim Spangler will co-chair the transition committee.

"I have been privileged to lead one of Flint's greatest organizations," Torre said. "I am very proud of the many accomplishments we've achieved. They are the result of the hard work and dedication of

so many over the years — the board, staff, artists, musicians, foundations and the Flint community — without whom none of this would have been possible."

Three organizations make up the Flint Institute of Music: The Flint Symphony Orchestra, the Flint School of Performing Arts and The Flint Youth Theatre. Among them they host more than 300,000 participants per year, including 3,500 students from the U.S. and 21 countries around the globe in the performing arts school.

The FIM was established in 1971 on the grounds of automobile pioneer J. Dallas Dort's family home on Kearsley Street.

Flint's Director of Planning departs for California

Megan Hunter, director of planning and development for the City of Flint since 2012, has departed her position to head the planning and economic development department of the city of Salinas, California.

Hunter had worked in Los Angeles before coming to Flint. A news release announcing her Aug. 28 departure noted she had led the creation of the city's first master plan in 50

years. After the plan was adopted, she led her staff of fewer than 30 employees in its implementation, carrying out 118 master plan projects and strategies since 2013.

"Ms. Hunter played a crucial role in ensuring residents' voices were reflected in the Master Plan by driving a community engagement effort that resulted in feedback from over 5,000 individuals," according to the release.

News briefs compiled by EVM staff

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Planning Commission approves Carriage Town rezoning

By Nic Custer

Following an August public hearing, the Flint Planning Commission voted to align zoning of six parcels along Grand Traverse Street between Fourth Avenue and University Avenue for commercial use.

The commission voted in favor after being given assurances a proposed design for a new development there would honor the Carriage Town neighborhood's historic character.

The rezoning proposal, from Kettering University, goes next to the Flint City Council for final approval.

The request seeks to rezone three B-zoned residential parcels on the north end of the site to D2, described as a neighborhood business, for a proposed multi-tenant development.

John Gazall, project architect, from Gazall, Lewis and Associates, said he would like the parcels to all have one legal zoning description. Currently three of the lots are D2 and the others are residential.

Applicant Joe Asperger, Kettering's director of physical plant, said the plan to rezone the parcels will allow Kettering to replace the former Pick Quik party store, 601 N. Grand Traverse St., with a multi-tenant retail development and expand the parking lot.

Aligning with University Core

Asperger said the project aligns with some of the master plan's long-term goals for the new University Core district, that will allow retail development.

Commissioners Elizabeth Jordan and Phyllis McCree asked if the commercial development would retain the historic character of the area.

Asperger said that was the intent of the plan. He said Kettering is working with the architects to redevelop the site in a way that will "honor the history while meeting the needs of a retail establishment."

The proposed multi-tenant establishment will include a national fast food franchise. Asperger explained many franchises have strict design guidelines regarding how the establishment looks because it is part of their brand.

He said different guidelines exist for stand alone establishments and franchises that are part of a multi-tenant complex.

When the franchise is standalone, the

brand will be very dominant. So Kettering opted for a multi-tenant building to lessen the brand standards and fit with the character of the area.

Jimmy Johns may be coming

Commissioner Patrick Ryals asked if Jimmy Johns was one of the potential franchises Kettering wanted to bring to the area. Asperger confirmed Jimmy Johns is under serious consideration.

Gazall said they have researched exterior historic design requirements in Carriage Town and will use brick masonry, limestone accents, and canopies on the new building to help it blend in with the surrounding neighborhood.

CT residents divided

Several Carriage Town residents voiced opinions on the proposal.

Adam Gerics, who lives on Stone Street, said he opposed it.

"I don't want a commercial business behind me, it's no different from the liquor store being there. You have an excessive amount of traffic, a whole lot of garbage and stuff that doesn't make it into the trashcan like the gas station," Gerics said.

He said he filed a lawsuit August 21 regarding two of the parcels owned by Kettering. Gerics said he was never approached by Kettering and has owned two of the lots under consideration for the past 17 years through "adverse possession." He said this means that he has "hostilely possessed the lots" for more than 15 years and can file through the courts to take ownership. One of the parcel lines, from a shared driveway, comes within one foot of his property, he said.

City Planner Megan Hunter said because what the commissioners were reviewing was zoning and not a demolition request, the lawsuit wouldn't affect their recommendations.

Several other neighbors expressed support for the development. Tim Monahan, who lives on Begole Street, said a major change occurred in the neighborhood when the liquor store was closed. He said 95 percent of the pedestrian traffic stopped and neighbors could keep their windows open at night without having to hear people congregating in the area.

Borders to be softened

Nancy Sinclair, who lives on Fourth Avenue, said she fully supports the zoning

change. She said she had spoken with Jack Stock from Kettering University about the change. She said he promised Kettering will soften borders on the outskirts of the development with mowed lawns and landscaping.

"Their intention to put a family friendly business and soften borders made me in favor of this proposal," she said.

William Sey, who recently moved to University Avenue, said in the short amount of time he has been in the neighborhood, he has seen the university's intentions as noble. In addition to sitting on the University Avenue Corridor Alliance, he said he has spoken with Stock several times and said he believes Kettering's design will honor the integrity and character of the neighborhood. He said it would be better to see a new development than to have to look at the vacant party store that already exists.

Ron Luczak, who purchased 621 Stone Street eight months ago, also said he fully supports the rezoning request by Kettering.

Protection from failure

Phillip Barnhart, a resident who owns four rental properties across University Avenue, said he supports the development with qualifications. He said he had concerns about what might become of the new multi-tenant property if there is an economic downturn. He said considerations should be made in case the development doesn't succeed. Barnhart said he doesn't want more vacant properties or low-rent commercial tenants in the area and would like to see some engaged thought by Kettering about long-term plans. He also echoed Gerics' concerns about there being increased amounts of trash in the neighborhood.

Hunter said the parcels are completely in the University Avenue Core zone, so even if the planning commission didn't act on the request, future zoning would allow commercial. And since the request will go to the Flint City Council for approval any legal questions have to be signed off on by the city attorney. She said the situation would be different if it was an actual construction request approval, but because it is a site plan, the legal disputes don't matter.

Hunter added it was also typical for cities to add additional adjacent properties

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Atwood resurrects as “centerpiece of community life”

By Andrew Keast & Jan Worth-Nelson

Just two years after Atwood Stadium was acquired by Kettering University, high school football has returned to University Avenue. And a lively schedule of activity projected for coming months at the site suggests a return to vitality for the historic pocket of the city.

The game played at Atwood Thursday night, Aug. 27, was a historic occasion — not only for Beecher High School, which won 36-14 over Flint Northwestern High School, but as Atwood’s conclusive emergence from years of neglect. Last season, not a single game of high school football took place there, and that absence was not especially remarkable, given the lack of upkeep and the dearth of events through which the stadium had already struggled for decades.

Some Atwood history

First opened in the summer of 1929 and named for an early mayor of Flint who donated part of the site, Atwood was once a prominent center of the city’s social,

cultural and sports life.

In 1950, for example, 20,600 spectators gathered for the annual Thanksgiving Day football game between Flint Central and Flint Northern high schools — a holiday tradition that extended from 1930 to 1976. F.D.R. appeared in 1936 and J.F.K. in 1960. The Who performed with Herman’s Hermits in 1967. But Atwood declined along with Flint’s economy and population.

Originally a grass field, its 1968 replacement artificial turf eventually was declared unsafe and the field was closed from 1992-1995. It had been used sporadically over the intervening years but

was seen as deteriorating until its purchase from the city by Kettering in 2013.

Reopening celebrations

The success of recent efforts to save and renovate the site has received considerable attention, and the public was invited to the Beecher-Northwestern game billed as a “grand reopening,” and celebrated with an open house on the field, a pre-game parade and post-game fireworks.

While the stadium can accommodate more than 11,000 spectators, it did not seem empty Aug. 27 with attendance of 3,900. The renovated concourse along the top row of benches was often congested with pedestrian traffic, and a dense pack of huddles and lines kept vendors at the concessions booth occupied throughout the game.

And next to the high demand generated by the menu (small bags of chips at fifty

(Continued on Page 10.)



... Walls

(Continued from Page 12.)

and people for whom he feels compassion, people who are part of the community.

It's been a long path from Fernandez's



Photograph by Jan Worth-Nelson

Artist Armando Fernandez

Chicago gang-boy past, but somehow the arts – and recurring powerful encounters with “a greater power,” he says – kept finding him over and over.

Though he grew up in the struggling working class on this side of the border, Fernandez's Mexican family were patri-

cians with deep roots in the arts. His grandfather was a doctor, pharmacist – and artist. After he painted a portrait of the president of Mexico, Fernandez says, he was invited to a state dinner. Fernandez says a museum was created to honor his grandfather in downtown Monterey.

The future took a different turn when Fernandez's father migrated to the U.S. for work. He picked cotton, worked on the railroad in Alaska, and ended up in a Chicago General Motors factory. They were a blue-collar family living in the “gang-ridden South Side” of Chicago, Fernandez says, and he became a gang kid often pushing the limits.

“I was hyper,” Fernandez says. “I don't know all the alphabet for it, A-D- something, but all I know is that I had to keep moving. I still do.” And he kept getting in trouble.

His mother tried everything to manage her restless kid. She sent him to a Cuban Santaria priest; she took him to an old woman who tried a witchcraft spray that was supposed to expel demons. And out of exasperation, Fernandez says with a grin, she even “cold-cocked” him from time to time with that very same aerosol can.

When he was 12, the family went back to Monterey for the summer to visit his aunt, an art professor. As they started to leave, they informed him, “You're staying,” a punishment or preventive for the

adolescent temptations and dangers of Chicago. It was a shock.

“It was hard,” he says. “I felt abandoned.” But that year was the beginning of something. His soft-spoken Aunt Rebecca took him into her studio and he watched her work. He loved the smell of paint, the possibilities of her artist's tools. The year didn't quench his troublemaking, but it planted seeds for his life in art.

Back in Chicago, he took a couple of art classes in high school. His teachers noticed his talent, even though he remained a gang kid. In his late teens, his family again exiled him, this time to Pennsylvania to live with an uncle who was a devout Christian. From there, he got a scholarship to a college in Wilkes Barre, where he took more art classes and was a state wrestling champ.

Eventually he got into GM himself and put in 10 years at Chicago's Willow Springs plant. When it shut down in the '80s, he found his way to Flint to work at Chevy Metal Fabricating. He put in 20 more years in Flint, ultimately taking voluntary retirement from skilled trades as a millwright.

Even on the shop floor, he recalls, he couldn't stop making art. He painted his tool boxes and once created a mural of a crew at work – using only grease. The other workers loved it and worked around it. Noticing his talent, his bosses commis-

(Continued on Page 9.)



Photograph by
Diane Woodruff

... Walls

(Continued from Page 8.)

sioned him to do a 40-by 45-foot mural of the company logo.

He says he found the factory floor and his GM work useful to his art.

"As millwrights, we were like MacGyver," he says. "We were always improvising, always figuring out ways to do things. That has a lot in common with how I make art."

Even though he had a few classes and came from a family of artists, he says he is mostly self-taught.

"What I didn't know, I learned from living my life – from looking at light and shadows," he says.

His first mural was a figure of Christ with open arms, which he painted at 19 in Chicago in a niche where he and his former gang mates used to hang out. By then he had become a Christian, but he still saw a lot of the old crowd. Next thing he knew, some of his old buddies were there, peeing against the wall.

"I didn't take it personally," he says with a laugh. "I don't think they even thought about it."

Fortunately, he's encountered much better responses to his work in Flint. A tour of his many works in the city includes the Boys & Girls Club, the Hispanic Technology and Community

Center on Lewis Street, and the new United Way of Genesee County headquarters in downtown Flint.

That enormous piece, wrapping around two walls, happened because the new United Way (UW) chief executive officer, Jamie Gaskin, knew Fernandez from when Gaskin was director of the Boys & Girls Club.

Diane Woodruff, UW campaign and marketing coordinator, says watching Fernandez's process over the three months it took last year was fascinating. "He worked at night," she says, "sometimes all night. In the morning we would come in and think it was totally done. And he'd look at it and say, 'I'm not quite done, I think I have another idea' and then later we'd see what he changed and he just punched it."

Gaskin says working with Fernandez – and the mural that resulted – was immensely rewarding.

"There are so many aspects to the issues we're trying to deal with in Flint," Gaskin says. "A mural can bring together so many different ways to look at something."

He brought Fernandez in to meet with United Way staff. "We shared all the concepts we were interested in and really just let him go," he recalls.

"I've known Armando for eight or nine years and I trusted him. I had that faith in him that if we threw a smorgasbord of

ideas out he would find a way to make it meaningful for us. He's fantastic."

Now that he's retired, making art is a full-time job, but also Fernandez's love. He says he believes public works like his murals open up art to those who might never find their way into a gallery.

He's divorced and his five kids are mostly grown now. For a year, he's been dating Shelly Kaye, another artist who's helping him promote his work – it's the part he says he likes least about being an artist.

Some of his works, like a 100-foot long mural at the Whaley Pool and another at Homedale Elementary, are long gone. That's Flint, he says, and he doesn't dwell on it. It keeps him humble, he says, knowing that his work, like all of life, is temporary.

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

The two shots below capture progress last year on the United Way mural, now finished. On the left, Fernandez is caught, unusually, working during daylight hours. Thanks to Diane Woodruff of United Way for the process photos.



Photograph by Diane Woodruff

... Atwood

(Continued from Page 7.)

cents each, a can of soda for a dollar, two dollar hot dogs), recent improvements were evident in the stadium's physical structure. The concession booth has been renovated. Repairs have also been made to the press box, the stadium's concrete steps, restrooms and locker rooms.

Field upgraded

A major focus of recent modifications has been the field itself, now striped for soccer and lacrosse, as well as for football. It has been carpeted, at a cost of \$750,000, with the same turf found at "The Big House" in Ann Arbor and the Detroit Lions' Ford Field.

Kettering paid for the new turf with a grant of \$1.75 million from the C.S. Mott Foundation. A donation from Diplomat Pharmacy is making the stadium available to Northwestern, Southwestern and Powers Catholic high schools for the season as well.

Efforts to raise funds for the renovations of the stadium were spearheaded by the Friends of Atwood Stadium, led by Genesee Circuit Court Judge Duncan Beagle, and coordinated with officials at Kettering, led by President Robert McMahan. McMahan's address to the crowd at half-time expressed a shared vision of Atwood as a "gathering place of a vibrant community" and "a centerpiece of community life in Flint."

Many uses open up

An ice rink with open skating has been set up during each of the past two winters at Atwood, students from Kettering have come to play ultimate Frisbee, flag football and broom-ball, and the Atwood Stadium Races have become an annual event of the summer.

In addition to the Beecher-Northwestern game on opening night and the next day's victory of Kearsley over Flint Southwestern, four more high school football games are scheduled for September. The stadium also has been reserved on seven dates in September for Powers Catholic High School's soccer teams, which brought soccer back to Atwood after 29 years by defeating of Detroit Country Day on Aug. 25.

The renovations and reopening of the stadium have drawn a variety of reactions from its Carriage Town neighbors, partly because of ongoing disagreements about disposition of nearby Native American burial grounds and remains and partly because of what leadership in the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association (CTHNA) perceives as inadequate consultation on larger issues in the neighborhood beyond Atwood itself.

"The Neighborhood Association has no problem with investment in the neighborhood that supports planning, partnership and transparency," said Michael Freeman, president of the CTHNA. "We do have an issue with the actions by the City of Flint against the historic district, de-listing the stadium as a historic resource (arguably one of the most historic in the city)."

Freeman contends he holds the majority view. However, at least a few vocal others say they are satisfied with the degree of consultation and especially with Kettering's efforts.

Ken Van Wagoner, proprietor of the Good Beans Cafe at the corner of Grand Traverse and W. First Avenue, for example, voices less ambivalence, not so much about the City of Flint, but about the efforts of Kettering.

"I have seen more change in Carriage Town in the last four years than I have seen in the 21 years I have been here," he said. "I attribute most of that change to the contribution of resources from Kettering University. Once very insulated from the community, Kettering University is now a driving force behind several initiatives that embrace their extended campus and create a better environment for all."

"Atwood Stadium is just one example," he said, "and it is beyond stellar. Although a bittersweet sale for some, the transfer of ownership from the City of Flint to Kettering University could have very well been the lifeline Atwood Stadium needed to preserve historic significance and maintain stabilization."

"From what was sure to be demolition, Kettering University has saved and returned Atwood Stadium to a once again viable, first class, sports arena offering local high schools and others the chance to utilize this venue for the intent of its design: The Peoples' Park," he said.

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HAPPY 90TH BIRTHDAY GRAYCE SCHOLT

In celebration of your exceptional talent, commitment, and accomplishments. Your outstanding contributions and wisdom are gratefully acknowledged and deeply appreciated. You are the "Poet Laureate" of EVM. Thank you!

With love from the staff of East Village Magazine

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Forum crowd cheers water decision, calls for more help

By Ashley O'Brien

At a recent town hall meeting, more than a hundred residents celebrated developments in a court judgment against the City of Flint calling for a 35 percent reduction in water bills and a moratorium on water shutoffs.

Flint City Councilman Eric Mays, the Concerned Pastors for Social Action, and the Coalition for Social Justice organized the forum at Vernon Chapel AME Church so residents could gather information about the recent court-imposed emergency injunction and what it means to them.

For many in attendance, the injunction is good news but not enough.

In addition to the rate cuts and end to shut-offs, the decision, handed down in August by Genesee Circuit Court Judge Archie Haywood, requires the City of Flint to return \$15.7 million to the city's sewer and water fund.

An existing Michigan law limits how much water rates can be raised in a year, according to Valdemar Washington, the attorney representing the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, resulting in Haywood's decision. Washington, himself a retired Circuit Court judge, explained that the administration legally may seek a higher rate increase if there are extenuating circumstances. For the City of Flint, he said, the \$15.7 million shortfall in the water and sewer fund contributed to extenuating circumstances.

The \$15.7 million was not a part of the original lawsuit, Washington said, but was added to the case by Haywood. In fact, that money was taken from the city water and sewer fund in 2007 by Mayor Don Williamson's administration to cover a different lawsuit settlement. But the City of Flint can only use specific accounts to pay for settlements, Haywood contended, and the water and sewer fund was not one of them in the previous case.

Budget shortfalls

The judge reasoned the lawsuit settlement payment stemming from the Williamson era created budget shortfalls that led recent city administrations to hike water and sewer rates, and therefore was relevant to the case. He thus ordered the money to be returned to the water and sewer fund.

For one member of the audience, this raised more questions. "Why didn't the

city auditors notice this the following year?"

Washington responded, "That's a question for the city auditors."

Several times throughout the spirited meeting, Washington received a standing ovation.

"It's a fantastic start," said Justin Steffon Cearcy, 26. "I think there's more that needs to be done. It's definitely a good rough draft to cool the heads of people right now."

Sandra Hull, 40, said she had filed for bankruptcy last year and also had to cope with a water shutoff notice. "For me, it's glory, but we should get more," she said. "I feel good. It should go down lower. I just hope they get it right."

Water quality, price intertwined

Washington reminded the audience that a separate water quality case would be forthcoming. But for many people at the meeting, water quality and water prices remain tangled together.

Rev. Sharon D. Moore said Flint residents are upset because they were paying three times as much as the national average for water they couldn't use.

City officials have been quoted as saying the moratorium has resulted in dozens of customers not paying their bills.

Moore said she thinks some residents' non-payment is an act of revolt. "There are always a small remnant that will take advantage, but the great majority of people are very angry because for nine months, the city had knowledge of the water problem, but chose not to inform the people."

Hull, who said she has lived in Flint her entire life, said she uses bottled water to cook and make coffee in addition to drinking. "I don't like the water quality. I buy cases and cases of water. So I have to pay for water and then have to pay for more water."

Kincaid contests city claims

Flint City Councilman Scott Kincaid was at the meeting. He challenged claims from city officials that this ruling would lead Flint to bankruptcy. "It's easy to say that. It's a scare tactic," he asserted.

"If they want to file bankruptcy, let them," Washington said. He said bankruptcy won't allow debts to be discharged if they resulted from wrongdoing. Washington said city officials knew their

actions would cause harm to Flint residents and he would work to prevent bankruptcy being granted.

City of Flint authorities have asked the state Court of Appeals to stay the injunction, but recently announced a plan to begin lowering the rate payment structure. Parties involved are scheduled to meet in court again in November.

And on Aug. 31, Hayman certified the transformation of the case into a class action lawsuit against the city with 30,000 Flint residents as Washington's clients. The amended case contends Flint's water and sewer customers since September 2011 have all been subject to illegal and improper rate increases.

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

... Rezoning

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when initiating a rezoning change. This avoids creating a spot zoning, where one area doesn't conform to the zoning around it. She said even if the applicant didn't own it all, it would be required to rezone a block larger than what may have been requested.

Zoning Administrator Sheree Pierce reported she had attended a recent Historic District Commission meeting where Kettering representatives shared their plans. Pierce said the HDC informally supported the project.

Chairman Robert Wesley said the development fits with the master plan and is a much needed improvement in the area.

Commissioner Robert Jewell noted that other properties on the block are similarly zoned.

Commissioners Jewell, Denise Smith-Allen, McCree, Jordan, Ryals, Carol-Ann Blower and Wesley all voted in favor. The proposal next goes to the city council. Commissioners David Jackson and Leora Campbell were absent.

The commission meets Sept. 8 and 22 at 6 p.m. in Flint City Hall, City Council Chambers, 1101 S. Saginaw St.

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Village Life

He brings walls alive with history, hopes, and heroes

By Jan Worth-Nelson

He's mostly color blind and his knees hurt these days when he climbs up and down ladders, but Flint artist Armando Fernandez, 57, keeps making huge, bright murals anyway.

He says making big public art is a calling that fills his spirit with joy. And because of his devotion and drive, dozens of Flint walls radiate with vivid cross-sections of the community's struggles, histo-

ry, inspiration, heroes and hopes.

We're sitting under a tree on a scorching summer day near Fernandez's latest project. It's a mural on a building owned by Flint attorney Dean Yeotis, a friend and admirer, on Oakley Street near the International Academy. He joined us at the site to add his views.

The building on Oakley, formerly a sign shop, houses a huge collection of vinyl records for Yeotis's Ferndale company, Found Sound. Yeotis has a crew inside cataloguing and organizing as Fernandez works outside.

The mural is much less complex than most of his community works, which are usually mosaics of many images. This one features just two: Flint native actor George Aguilar, who is of both Hispanic and Native American heritage, and a giant owl.

"Aguilar grew up on the East Side," Yeotis says, and represents not just a successful Flint native who started from difficult origins, but also a reminder through his Native American roots of the cultures along the Flint River that existed for thousands of years before automobiles.

The front of the building retains a faded mural, soon to be refreshed, by a previous artist, Charles Boike. Yeotis and Fernandez call it, "the sad Statue of Liberty," because there appears to be a tear dropping down the Lady's face. Yeotis and Fernandez think the two sets of images work well together.

"The reality is the way we as a nation dealt with the Native Americans was sad, any way we look at it. It was a very unfortunate part of our history," Yeotis remarks. That's perhaps why Yeotis and Fernandez picked the owl, a symbol of wisdom, for the second image – a call for a more respectful era ahead.

Yeotis won Armando's work at a fundraiser for the Boys & Girls Club of Flint last year. He bid for it after seeing Fernandez's murals in the cafeteria and courtyard there, in the former Sobey School on Averill.

"He has so much heart," Yeotis says. "He's an example of the art and the artist being inseparable. Everything he does is an expression of who he is."

He says he also was drawn to Fernandez's spirituality.

"His intent is so pure – to create a beautiful work of art that has meaning. He cares deeply about people and wants to make this planet a better place to live." Fernandez sprawls in the shade and shows me his bug-bitten knees. "That's from

apitherapy," he says. "I heard bee stings might help with the pain, and they really do. It's been tremendous." He's spent more than 40 hours at the wall spread over several days, working fast as he always does, using electric airbrushes and paint brushes.

He's athletic as an artist and admits he doesn't know how long he can keep it up. Of his work methods, Fernandez says, "I'm a brute. I'm so intense once I start working, it wears me out."

He uses brushes, brooms, mops, rags – anything that comes to hand for manipulating the acrylic and getting the effect he wants. Once he chopped off his thumb – he holds up the stump – and drove himself to emergency where a shocked staff shook their heads at his jokes about the sheared digit.

He's brawny and barrel-chested, with a shaved head and intense, kind eyes. His muscular approach echoes his youth as a wrestler and his lifelong attention deficits. "I'm so right-brained that there are many things I can't do," he says. "But what I can do is look and see things. And make art." He says he's learned to welcome and harness the flow of energy – not only his own but the outside world's.

Sometimes it rains while he's working and that becomes part of the piece. Sometimes there's wind, and that has its meaning, too. He takes it all as messages from God – a dance, he says, that he and God do together. Other times, he incorporates people who have watched him work

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Why?

By Grayce Scholt

The farmer says:

Why does God test me so--
He drops a kiss of rain or two
on withered wheat, then stops.
There'll be no yield, no
stalk of corn that ripens
in the field, no cherries,
none.
What did I do?

His wife says:

And what about when after storms
the sun breaks through too late
to blot the floods,
that cover what was
clover, cows,
all washed away,
gone.
What was my wrong?

Their children ask:

Why do it, God?
When even after wars are won,
men still rot beneath the sun
that even rain's
sweet kiss can't change.
A punishment for what?

How strange,
how odd.

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.



Fernandez with Dean Yeotis at Oakley St. mural