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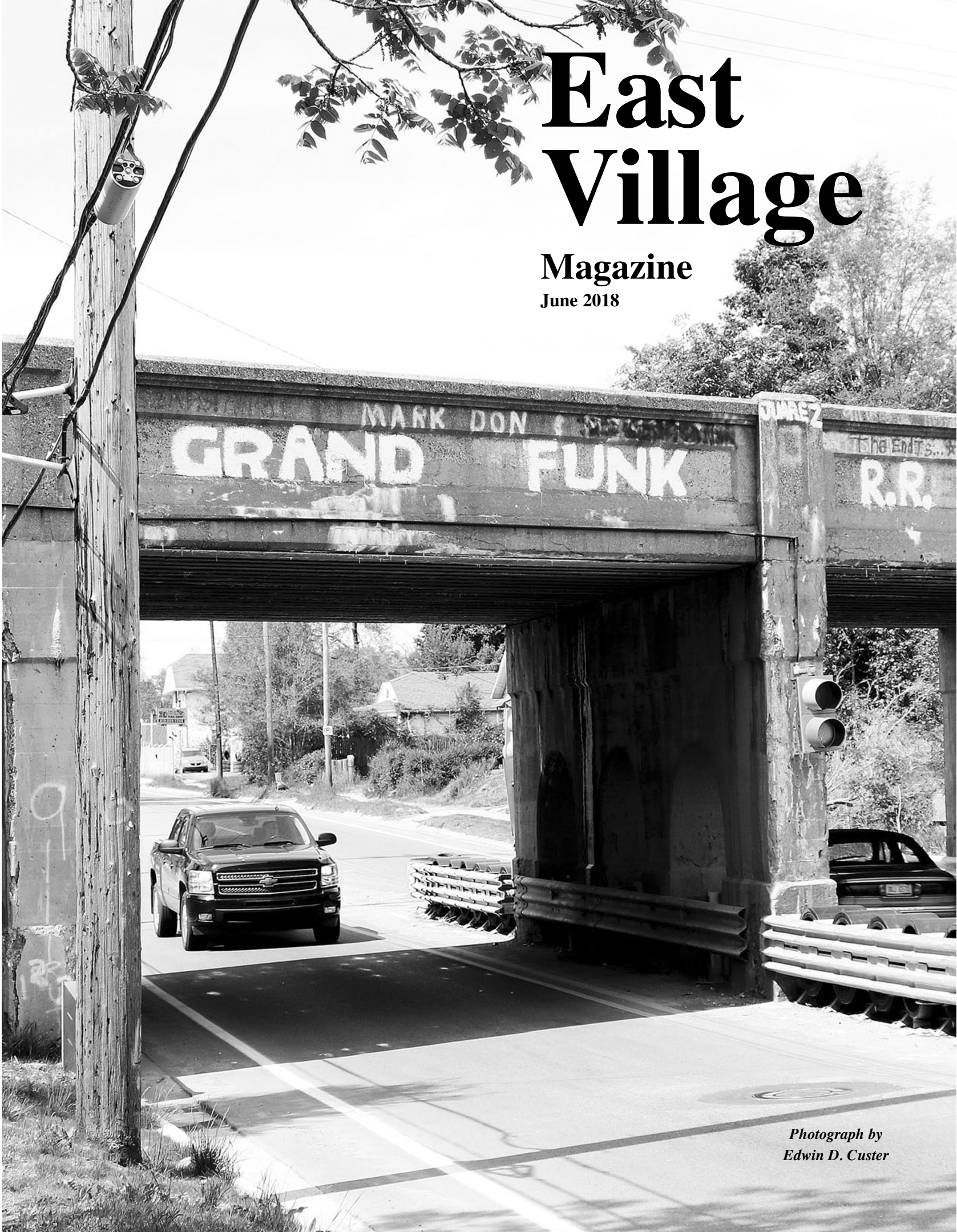

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Commentary
Beyond the water crisis — another crisis looms for Flint

By Paul Rozycki

In its own clumsy way the Flint water crisis seems to be slowly drifting to some sort of resolution. Most scientific reports are showing a significant reduction in the lead levels in our water. As a result the state has ended its distribution of free water at its water points of distribution (PODs) in the city, over much protest and anger. Several private groups and churches have stepped forward to provide bottled water, on a much-reduced basis, for Flint residents. The pipe replacement continues, and more than a third of the estimated 20,000 pipes have been replaced so far.

Debate over whether Flint's children have been "poisoned" by or simply "exposed" to lead also reflects the division and a potential shift in the view of the water crisis (For more on that, read editor Jan Worth-Nelson's story on page #). Yet, Flint's recent Memorial Day "boil water" advisory, after a water main break, is not going to make any of us feel more confident that the end of the water crisis is on the horizon.

But the water crisis is only the most recent of Flint's underlying problems. The financial challenges the city faces are as significant and longer-lasting than the water crisis.

City Council proved it can meet short

The Flint City Council held a remarkable meeting recently. As reported by *East Village Magazine's* managing editor Meghan Christian, the council met for 27 minutes, heard a presentation on the city's proposed two-year budget, held a brief discussion, and adjourned — one of the shortest meetings in recent memory. In sharp contrast to many recent meetings, it was an organized, civilized, and focused discussion of the most important part of the council's job — approving and passing the city's $56 million budget.

Though there is much more to be done, at the moment Flint's budget seems to be balanced, and the city appears ready to move beyond its years of state oversight and emergency managers.

But hidden in those dry columns of budget numbers are the seeds of a larger problem that Flint faces — a basic financial crisis that may be more difficult to resolve than replacing lead pipes in the city.

While the mayor's budget projects a surplus for the 2018-19 year, many projections show a deficit in the years that follow.

Two major reasons lie behind those troublesome numbers — a lack of revenue and increasing legacy costs.

The city tax base

With the loss of nearly 80,000 well-paid GM jobs in the last few decades it's not surprising that the impact on Flint is devastating. The city has gone from a population of almost 200,000 to less than half that today. While the population loss has been striking, the loss of tax base has been more dramatic. The taxable value of Flint property declined by half — from about $1.5 billion in 2001 to $750 million in 2015. The personal income loss has been even greater. In 1996, the personal income in Flint was $3.5 billion. By 2013, it had fallen to $400 million. As a result, tax revenues for the city fell from about $12 million in 2006 to about $5 million in 2014. The city lost almost two-thirds of its tax base within a few decades.

But if property values should rise, as they have done (a little bit), wouldn't that fix things?

Not quite. Because of Proposal A, passed in 1994 to address voters' frustrations with property taxes and inequities in education funding — along with Headlee amendments to the Michigan Constitution, taxes generally can't rise any faster than the rate of inflation. So if even if proper-

(Continued on Page 8.)

Cover: Flint-style trestle, Grand Trunk Railroad overpass at Fenton Road.

Photo of the Month: Summer returns to the Farmers' Market

Council hashing out $55.8 million city budget proposal for 2018-19

By Meghan Christian

Since the City of Flint's Chief Financial Officer Hughey Newsome presented the proposed City of Flint 2018-2019 budget of $55.8 million and a proposed 2019-2020 budget of $56.6 million at a public hearing May 22, the Flint City Council (FCC) has held multiple special meetings to discuss possible amendments to the mayor's budget.

The discussed amendments ranged in topic from increasing the salary of the city clerk from $70,000 to $90,000 to finding a grant writer for public safety and a parliamentarian for FCC. But at the time of print, only a handful of those amendments had been passed and sent on to the mayor.

According to Newsome, the city is expected to bring in approximately $55.8 million revenue to the general fund in 2018-2019, of which $4.7 million is expected to come from property taxes. This is an increase of roughly $120,000 from the 2017-2018 amended budget.

Property taxes are expected to increase again in the 2019-2020 proposed budget. According to the notice posted by the city in *The Flint Journal* on May 6, property taxes are expected to account for roughly $4.8 million of the general fund revenues; an increase of about $160,000.

On the expenditure side, included in the mayor's proposed budget is $250,000 for the Office of the Ombudsman for both upcoming fiscal years. This office was a requirement of the new Flint City Charter, which was adopted by a two-to-one vote in August 2017 and was to be implemented on Jan. 1 of this year. The council has yet to appoint an ombudsman.

Even with these proposed increases to the general fund revenue, Newsome said the city needs to maintain control on spending to be able to combat rising costs across departments and to meet its Municipal Employees' Retirement System (MERS) obligations. These obligations are pension commitments for retired city employees.

"We have to really focus on maintaining control of our costs, and right now one cost that is going to continue to increase … are projected expenditures across different departments," Newsome said. "But underneath that is the MERS obligation, the pension obligation, that we have," he added.

Newsome also touched on other expenditures, including retiree health care and increasing costs in the city's other funds. "I won't go too deep into the other funds right now, but I will say that for the most part what you do find is that … in our other adopted funds we are seeing increased costs," Newsome said.

During a special budget meeting on May 30, Fourth Ward Councilwoman Kate Fields proposed four amendments to be voted on as a group that passed with a vote of five-to-two. The four included an increase of $20,000 to the city clerk's salary; the addition of a parliamentarian for $30,000; full health benefits for part-time employees, including council members; and the restoration of the deputy clerk's position. Those in favor were Councilmembers Santino Guerra, Fields, Monica Galloway, Allan Griggs, and Eva Worthing.

"There's nothing in here that's unacceptable," Worthing said of the amend-

(Continued on Page 5.)

... Council

(Continued from Page 4.)

ments proposed by Fields. "This will help move the city forward in my opinion," she added. After these amendments passed, the budget went back to the mayor, who at the time of print, had not vetoed or approved the amendments.

Those opposed were First and Second Ward Councilmen Eric Mays and Maurice Davis. While Mays said he opposed the amendments partly because they were being voted on as a group, Davis voted down the amendments in favor of the mayor's proposed budget. "We should approve this budget that's been proposed by the mayor's administration because there's a lot of work to be done," Davis said.

Fifth Ward Councilwoman Jerri Winfrey-Carter also voiced disapproval of Fields' proposed amendments, but was not present at the time of the vote. "We need to be looking at getting more police on the street and we need to be looking at clearing up these blighted areas in our city, so I don't like the idea of voting on this all at once," Winfrey-Carter said.

Winfrey-Carter also commented on the state of the budget during a special finance committee meeting at 5 p.m. May 31.

"This budget is tight and for us to be thinking about ourselves as far as health benefits and all of the other benefits that comes with having a job … We just can't do that right now," she said.

Davis echoed Winfrey-Carter's sentiment, adding that the council should not be getting increases while there is still a water crisis plaguing the city. "The whole city is in a crisis, most of my constituents' water is cut off … We have to all suffer and struggle together. Maybe after the budget increases, we'll get a little better," Davis said.

The final adoption of the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 budgets were expected to take place at 5:30 p.m. June 4 during the regular FCC meeting. To read more, check out the story at eastvillagemagazine.org.

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New Evolution Education Center opens with African-American fraternity support

By Harold C. Ford

The New Evolution Education Center (NEEC) will open its doors to 50 youth in grades kindergarten through 8th grade this summer for six weeks July 9-Aug. 17. The nonprofit NEEC will focus on literacy, science, and math, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Cutting the ribbon (from left) John Littleton, Wesley Coleman, Joyce Piert, Jacquinne Reynolds
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)

The Center is housed at the James E. Kennedy Life Center, 1610 W. Pierson Rd., in Flint.

A $64,000 grant for the project was awarded by Sigma Pi Phi, the first successful and oldest African-American Greek lettered organization in the U.S. Wesley Coleman, a Disney Company executive since 2006 and Sigma Pi Phi's current national president, came from California to present the check to NEEC in person.

The grant for the project, modeled after the 1964 Freedom Summer Project, was written by local educator Jacquinne Reynolds. Joyce Piert, a University of Michigan-Flint instructor, will be executive director and UM-Flint professor Erica Britt is chair of the board.

More information about the project is available at piertjoy1@gmail.com or 810-814-2037; a full article about the history and design of the project by *EVM* staff writer Harold C. Ford is available at eastvillagemagazine.org.

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Review: Politics, misused power, poverty all play a role in Anna Clark's riveting "The Poisoned City"

By Robert R. Thomas

A current Flint kerfuffle is the Hurley Medical Center controversy about whether we Flintstones were "lead-poisoned" or "lead-exposed."

Anna Clark's riveting reply to that question and many more is *The Poisoned City – Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy*. The book will be officially out in July, launched in Flint at Tenacity Brewing on Saturday, June 23.

Anna Clark
(photo by Michelle and Chris Gerard)

Key elements in Clark's examination of Flint's water woes involve power, politics, arrogance, ignorance, authoritarianism, elitism, poverty, and environmental racism — what the author describes as "the broader patterns of power in a community."

Her narrative digs deep into these minefields. Lots of dots are connected, as State power comes under Clark's searing scrutiny. Lack of accountability keeps creeping up into the equation of who did what and why to Flint's water.

The book's comprehensive investigative journalism is impressive. The account is loaded with detailed documentation. The 67 pages of Notes are real notes, not the abbreviated references of usual footnotes. For example, one of her Notes is a compact timeline of the history of Michigan's Emergency Financial Manager (EFM) law. The notes often tell backstories I had not known. And Clark's narrative voice makes the research come alive like the ongoing story it is.

Her account shines light into darkened corners of a state power that has a terrible transparency record and an EFM law that remains in place. How that all came to be is enlightening contemporary Flint history.

She points out that Michigan places dead last in transparency among the 50 states, and that the governor and legislature are exempt from Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) access.

Clark backs the word "poisoning" in the book's title with a myriad of scientific evidence, documents, and journalistic accounts--for example, this from a press release from the state Attorney General's department: "(AG) Schuette Files Civil Suite against Veolia and LAB for Role in Flint Water Poisoning."

Chapter Two (Corrosion) and Chapter Five (Alchemy) convincingly delineate that lead is poisonous to the human body even if the "approved" levels are considered "normal."

While both chapters elucidate the science of lead and its effect on the human body, they also address the alchemy of how lead became acceptable and how the federal Lead and Copper Rule has been laxly interpreted.

The role of Charles Kettering in developing and promoting leaded fuel was a piece of ironic Flint history I did not know.

The introduction of leaded gas, initiated by Kettering, Delco and research director of General Motors from 1920-1947, and for whom Kettering University is named, led to the release of large quantities of lead into the atmosphere around the world until it was banned from leaded gas in the 1990s.

Clark's report on citizen, scientist, and journalist activists focuses on the usual major figures: Melissa Mays, LeeAnne Walters, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, journalist Curt Guyette, Virginia Tech scientist Marc Edwards, EPA whistleblower Miguel del Toral. It was their stories and their stories and interactions I found most fascinating. I tucked into these sections of Clark's narrative like I might a good mystery.

Citizen activist Claire McClinton said in 2016: "The people in the city of Flint are resilient, and we've created our own paths to resolve this problem." Her quote, when juxtaposed with one from Governor Snyder on the Oct. 8, 2015, switchback from Flint River water to Detroit water, is revealing. Here is Clark's account:

"Snyder salted his announcement with a distinct desire to move on. 'Again, this isn't about blaming anyone,' he said. 'Right now, I want to stay focused in on the solutions and taking actions to solve problem.' It was a remarkable turnaround. Just days earlier, Snyder had insisted in a news release that Flint's water was safe."

But, as Clark writes, "Much as Governor Snyder wished to face forward, there was a reckoning to be done. How had an entire city been poisoned by its own water?"

The Poisoned City offers a sobering read through all the spin and cover-ups.

"A ready explanation for what happened in Flint," Clark writes, "quickly took on the appearance of fact: a flawed and hasty decision motivated by careless and petty cost-cutting to meet a budget. But this was not quite the case."

Clark then injects the involvement of the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) into the mix. As the Flint Water Advisory Task Force noted: "Whether KWA's influence is just an extreme and tragic illustration of politics as usual or whether there is something more at work is still unanswered." Earlier in their "Final Report," they noted: "The influence that KWA and Genesee County Drain Commissioner Jeff Wright exercised was undeniable. They got exactly what they wanted from Flint City Officials, Emergency Managers and State Officials at DEQ and Treasury."

(Continued on Page 7.)

... Poisoned

(Continued from Page 6.)

What we Flintstones will be on the hook for whether we stay with KWA or leave shocked me. The information made this reader smell more Flint smoke and mirrors and a story that needs to find light.

Three months after returning to Detroit water, along came the Legionella outbreak. The book's report of the ensuing spin and cover-ups over accountability again demonstrates the intransigence by leadership to listen, learn, or act in a timely manner to a public health crisis.

One of the book's takes on accountability at the highest levels of state government offers a letter from a citizen to the *Detroit Free Press* dated Jan. 31, 2016. Titled "Government Run as a Business Doesn't Work," Kathryn Ross notes that Michigan had "voted for a business person" in electing Snyder. For Ross, they got what they wanted: "someone who is from a culture of what's best for the bottom line and what's best for the investors. As governor, his bottom line has been the state budget and his investors are his donors and fellow Republican legislators. Ross continues that Snyder "missed his duty to the people. I don't question his genuine remorse and anger … but he is certainly responsible for the decision his emergency managers made …. on his behalf. Governing a state as well as governing a nation is not like running a business. He and the people of Flint have found out the hard way."Further proof of Ross's contention is, of course, in the details.

Shortly after reading Clark's book, I read an MLive account of the Hurley contretemps. The report concluded with a quote by Flint scientist/citizen activist/humanitarian Dr. Hanna-Attisha, one of Flint's revered heroines: "Our water was poisoned," she said. "That is scientifically proven."

Clark's book backs the good doctor's play on this issue.

A cornucopia of history and responsibly researched details is at the core of Clark's work. I have yet to encounter a more thorough, accurate or readable account of the poisoning of Flint's municipal water supply than *The Poisoned City*.

This is an important book, for Flint, for all American cities, and for our nation.

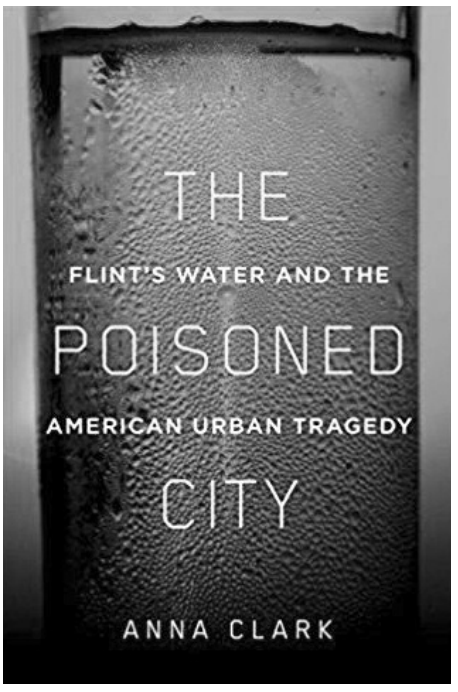
EVM *reviewer and board member Robert R. Thomas can be reached at capnz13prod@gmail.com.*

Flint to get first look at new book, The Poisoned City, *at Tenacity Brewing launch June 23*

By Jan Worth-Nelson

One of the first books to emerge from the Flint water crisis, *The Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy,* by Detroit author Anna Clark, will be launched from 5-7 p.m. Saturday, June 23, at Tenacity Brewing.

The Poisoned City dives into Flint's history, exploring the social, political, and economic issues that led to the water crisis (See Robert Thomas' review, p. 6 in this issue) It will be officially published July 10, but, according to Clark, because it's important for people in Flint to see the book first, before it's available to the wider public, the author and publisher are hosting an open house. Clark said guests can expect a casual, kid-friendly event. One hundred copies of the hardcover book will be available free to Flint residents, first come, first served. She said first drinks are free and the event will include gifts and "other surprises."



Clark's writing about cities, urban policy, and the people who are affected by them have appeared in the *New York Times, Elle, Politico*, and other publications. She has been a writer-in-residence in Detroit high schools and a longtime co-leader of an improv theater workshop at a prison in Macomb County.

While writing her Flint book, Clark learned that her grandmother was born in Flint to Dan McGrath, an Irish-Canadian immigrant who worked at GM and was part of the historic 1936-37 Sit-Down Strike.

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... Crisis

(Continued from Page 3.)

ty values go up by 10 percent, tax revenues are likely to rise by only a percent or two.

Revenue sharing

In Michigan, cities receive "revenue sharing" funds, where the local governments receive funds from the state. In the past it has been a significant part of Flint's budget, as it is for most cities and many other local governments, but in recent years, the state has reduced revenue sharing greatly. In 1998 Flint received about $22 million in revenue sharing. By 2014, that amount was down to $10 million.

The Michigan Municipal League projects that Flint lost over $54 million in revenue sharing between 2003 and 2014. Cities in Michigan have lost more than $8 billion in revenue sharing in the last decade and a half. By some measures, Michigan local governments have lost nearly 50 percent of their promised revenue sharing in the last 15 years, and we typically rank last among the states in revenue sharing with local governments.

The fact that Flint seems certain to fall well below the 100,000 population level in the next census will make it even more difficult to qualify for larger state and federal grants offered to bigger cities.

All this means fewer resources for a city facing increasing problems and challenges.

And as our population declines many of those problems loom larger.

Legacy costs

One of the major financial problems facing the city is the cost of retirement benefits that were taken on by a much larger and financially stable city. According to *The Flint Journal*, the city currently has obligations to about 1,800 retirees. That might not be a major problem if the city still had 1,800 or more employees.

But it doesn't. In 2008, the city had about 800 employees. In the next year or so it will have about 527. The city currently has less than half of the money needed to take care of its current retiree costs.

The legacy problems have two major causes.

In the past, perhaps city administrations were all too willing to promise a generous retirement package to its workers. Yes, maybe that was true, and maybe past administrations should be blamed for a lack for foresight in promising too much. But, the city was growing, the tax base was increasing, and it shouldn't have been all that difficult to pay for it. The future looked bright for an expanding city.

But a major part of the problem is also a reflection of the city's decline and loss of population. A city with 2,000 employees will find it easier to support 500 retirees than a city with 500 employees can support 2,000 retirees. Declining cities tend to have more ex-employees than current ones. Flint isn't unique in this. Most cities (and organizations) with a shrinking population face the same problem.

One other problem that cities like Flint face is simply that they are older cities, and there is much that needs repair, replacement or upgrading — often at a great cost. Flint's aging water system is only one example of a system that may have been appropriate and affordable when it was put in place 50 or 100 years ago. But today, the pipes, roads, schools, and government buildings now need renewal and the funds just aren't there. Again, there's plenty of blame to go around. Probably past administrations should have kept up with maintenance and repairs better, but today Flint faces the problem of maintaining a system designed for a city, and a tax base, of 200,000 people, with less than half of those resources.

Other problems also don't shrink as rapidly as the population. Certainly the need for police officers, firefighters, maintenance workers, trash collectors, judges, courts, and social workers has not dropped as fast as Flint's population or tax base has. In many cases the needs have risen. But the city's ability to support those services has fallen even faster than the population.

Solutions?

The possible solutions to the financial problems of local governments deserve another column, but a few things should be briefly considered.

First, the state needs to restore the missing revenue-sharing funds. The cuts of the last few decades have crippled many local governments and have been a major cause of much of the financial problems faced by cities, townships, and villages.

We need to realize that emergency managers can't do much if the resources aren't there, and often do more harm when they try.

Second, as property values rebound from the 2008 recession, the law should allow tax revenues to recover as quickly.

Third, regional governments and regional tax bases can be another way of dealing with urban areas facing declining population, fewer resources, and increasing problems. Though this has been used selectively in a few parts of the state, politically, it will be a hard sell in Genesee County, given the friction between the city and the out-county.

Finally, local governments need to step up to the plate and responsibly deal with the fact that they don't have the resources they once did. All too often that hasn't been the case in Flint. They can't simply shift funds from one pocket to another in the hopes of avoiding a crisis. Flint's habit of borrowing from the water fund didn't serve the city well in the past and won't in the future.

If there is any light at the end of the tunnel for Flint's financial problems, it might rest with the fact that we're not alone. More than 150 cities, villages, and townships are facing financial stress for the same reasons Flint is. According to *Bridge Magazine*, Michigan has at least 138 cities, 26 townships, and 15 villages that are distressed — and they cover the alphabet from Adrian to Ypsilanti.

At least we might have some allies who share our plight.

EVM *political commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu*

Local Grocer credo: good nutrition is our best defense

By Darlene Carey

Erin Caudell, co-owner of The Local Grocer on Martin Luther King Boulevard and a longtime farmer and food activist, chafes when she hears the term "food desert" to describe Flint's food availability challenges.

"A desert is a diverse, thriving ecosystem," Caudell says. "Lack of food in a community is not."

"Food apartheid" is a more descriptive term for what has happened in the city, she says. She defines it as "the systemic production and distribution of nutrient-poor, disease-causing foods to economically-vulnerable areas that disproportionately harms communities of color.

"Food apartheid is rooted in injustices such as colonialism, slavery, land loss, and environmental racism," she asserts. The term "apartheid" was used in South Africa during a time when segregation was at a high and British colonials disenfranchised the local community.

The Local Grocer is an independently owned business, with a staff of 15. Caudell and her partner and co-owner Franklin Pleasant are Flint residents who saw the demand for more local farmers and the need for a grocery store in their community.

The Local Grocer opened its storefront in December 2015, having already been three years prior a vendor at the Flint Farmer's Market. Caudell and Pleasant also are farmers, owners of the nine-acre Flint Ingredient Company, which supplies fresh produce for their store and Farmers' Market stall.

Over the years, Caudell and Pleasant have partnered with non-profit organizations, such as Edible Flint and Flint Fresh Mobile Market, to advocate, educate, and improve access to healthy food.

According to DataUSA, 40 percent of Flint residents live below the poverty line and have a median household income of less than $25,000. To an already stressed community, the Flint Water Crisis has had seismic implications — the toxic health effects of lead and recent drawbacks of state bottled water deliveries creating additional urgency to Caudell's efforts.

"Good nutrition is our best defense for keeping lead out of our blood stream (once it has settled in our bones)," she says.

"We focus on that aspect of a healthy community. There are wonderful groups in our community doing some of the other work. We have partnered with them for special events and programs."

Along with the non-profit organizations, Caudell has aligned her own food production with several other local farms and what Caudell highlighted on blog posts at thelocalgrocer.com, as "CSA program (Community Supported Agriculture)," The CSAs provide produce from Caudell and Pleasant's farm, Flint Ingredient Company, and three additional Michigan farms: Ten Hens Farm, Thread Creek Farm, and Simple Gifts Farm.

Running a farm is hard work. Caudell understood early on that a small farm would not be able to sustain the supply of produce needed in the store's operation, so she and Pleasant grew their farmer partnerships to more than 12 over the last few years. Those partnerships provide customers with a large variety of locally-grown organic vegetables produced by people with shared values.

Erin Caudell
(photo by Darlene Carey)

"As residents we wanted to have a positive impact on the economic development of our community. By selling products from other local farms and food businesses we are helping to circulate our communities' dollars closer to home," Caudell says.

The Local Grocer aims to gradually reshape food availability and delivery by growing a diverse customer base from surrounding neighborhoods, supporting other local businesses, and attracting people who drive from outside the city to support businesses in Flint.

Caudell says the store focuses on locally made and produced items, including "grab and go" snacks and meals, locally grown meat dishes, vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free options.

Caudell hopes to dispel the perception that organic food is more expensive and less sustainable than mass-produced food from big corporate outlets.

"We participate in many programs that help support families in need, including Double Up Food Bucks, Hoophouses for Health, Senior Fresh, and Project Fresh," she says.

"The Local Grocer is approaching food access from a perspective that farmers and eaters are the most vulnerable groups in the food chain," she says, "and we are attempting to balance farmers' ability to make a living with residents' ability to access healthy, safely grown produce."

She continues, "There is still a lot of work to do in order to 'fix' food access in our community. I'm glad we are part of improving it. Food systems are complex systems and take changes throughout the system in order to improve it."

The spacious layout and design of the store, with its whimsical checked floor, seems intentionally to suggest an open, welcoming environment.

"We do offer space for community events and meetings," she says. "We partner with Flint Handmade to host monthly art walks and craft academy classes. We often host tastings for local brands and businesses. We've hosted everything from meetings to book clubs to birthday parties."

"Thinking of our store as a community space, hosting events, being open to suggestions for new products has been a big part of our approach to business," she adds. "We've been extremely fortunate to have such wonderful customers and really love being a part of the neighborhood."

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"Poisoned" or "exposed"? Hurley docs trigger protest

By Jan Worth-Nelson

A May resolution by a group of doctors at Hurley Medical Center to refer to Flint children who experienced the water crisis as "lead-exposed" rather than "lead-poisoned" has drawn protests from Mayor Karen Weaver, her chief medical officer, other doctors, water activists and a journalist whose book about the water crisis is about to come out.

The change in wording was shepherded by Dr. Hernan Gomez, a toxicologist, and approved at the medical officers' annual meeting in mid-May.

The resolution was built on findings of a study by Gomez and six other authors in an article published in June in the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

The study, analyzing blood lead levels in Flint children over 11 years, documented that blood lead levels (BLL) at the height of the water crisis in 2014 and 2015 were half of the BLL in 2006.

No child poisoned?

The startling conclusions of the findings led Gomez et al. to assert that "not a single child in the City of Flint has been lead poisoned from the water switch. Rather, they were lead-exposed."

They wrote, "Everyone agrees that there was an issue in 2014 - 2015 with BLLs and that any lead level over the lifetime of a child is bad. However, a lead exposure does not equate to a lead poisoning and therefore does not equate to a damaged generation of children in the City of Flint."

As in the *Journal of Pediatrics* study, they concluded that what happened in Flint "did not meet the level of an environmental emergency."

The doctors said they issued their change of wording because the children of Flint "were not poisoned and therefore they don't have to be burdened by the stigma that the 'poisoning' label brings to mind."

Claims "preposterous"

Speaking to the Hurley Board of Managers May 30, Melissa Mays, one of the leading water activists, called the claims underlying the Gomez statement "preposterous."

She added, "Let me just explain what hurts my sons more than the title of being 'poisoned': being lied to by officials who are hired or swore an oath to protect them; their pain and struggle being downplayed by those who swore an oath to protect them; and losing essential medical education, physical, and mental health resources because some decided to remove the urgency of the situation." Mays and her family were part of a settlement in a class action lawsuit against the state, with the ACLU and the Concerned Pastors for Social Action, that required the state to provide $100 million for pipe replacement, door-to-door filter deliveries, and free bottled water for Flint residents.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a Hurley pediatrician whose work in documenting heightened BLLs in Flint children in the fall of 2015 broke open the Flint story nationwide, was not at the meeting and said she did not agree with her colleagues' decision. While Gomez first announced the decision was unanimous, Hanna-Attisha said others present in the room said it was not.

"Just move forward"

"I think we just need to move forward," Hanna-Attisha said. Asked what motivated her colleagues to change their wording, she said she did not know.

Her book about her life and the water crisis, *What the Eyes Don't See: Story of Crisis, Resistance and Hope in an American City* is about to be released and will be launched locally at the Flint Public Library June 21.

In a March op-ed in the *Detroit Free Press*, Hanna-Attisha acknowledged that "Flint's blood lead levels are not the worst in history nor even the worst in the country." But she has emphasized any amount of lead that gets into children's bodies is too much, and added screening procedures during the time Flint was on Flint River water were "inadequate to document the extent of Flint's lead poisoning problem."

Toxic effects of lead well-known

The effects of lead in the blood, especially in children, has been well documented for decades.

The March 2000, edition of *The Nation*, for example, Jamie Lincoln Kitmanin summarized that lead can cause lowered IQs, reading and learning disabilities, impaired hearing, reduced attention span, hyperactivity, behavioral problems, and interference with growth. (See Harold C. Ford's article on p. 14 of the April 2018, *EVM*).

Anna Clark, a Detroit journalist whose book *The Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy*, also is about to come out, responded in an email to *East Village Magazine*, "Of course, Flint's children do not deserve to be stigmatized.

"Of course, not every child will experience the consequences of lead exposure in the same way, and of course, the city's next generation is full of genius and humor and talent; the children deserve absolutely every chance to succeed.

"You know what else they deserve? The truth. Sanitizing the language about the violence that was done will not serve them," Clark said.

All six of those who addressed the Hurley Board of Managers, including Melissa Mays, asserted that the recent resolution has dealt a blow to the community's already decimated trust.

Yvonne Lewis said she and others had

(Continued on Page 15.)

This Month in the Village

"This Month" highlights a selection of interesting events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of June 7. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our July issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at meghan.christian22@gmail.com by June 26.

From Lens to Eye to Hand: Photorealism 1969 to today

Every day in June
Noon - 5 p.m.
Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
810-234-1695
Admission: $7

A reexamination of photorealism and the use of the camera as a foundation of expression, as well as the groundbreaking artists of the time.

A Matter of Balance

June 7
1:30 p.m.
American House Senior Living Communities,
3375 N. Linden Rd.
810-733-8900
Admission: Free

This eight-week program from Valley Area Agency on Aging is designed to help increase activity levels and to manage falls by improving balance, strength, and flexibility.

Sierra Club: "Kilowatt Ours"

June 13
7:30 p.m.
Mott Community College Prahl Center, Genesee Room,
1401 E. Court St.
810-230-0704
Admission: Free

This film looks at solutions to one of the most pressing environmental issues: energy. The film touches on topics like mountaintop removal and climate change. Light refreshments will be served.

Night of Champions

June 14
6 - 9 p.m.
Rollhaven Skating Center,
5315 S. Saginaw Rd.
810-694-4533
Admission: $5-6, plus skate rental

Join the Rollhave Figure Skating Club for their fundraiser skate. Featuring door prizes, a 50/50 raffle, a bake sale, and a silent auction, all proceeds benefit the club. Admission is $5 for spectators and $6 plus skate rentals for those skating.

Youth Basketball Camp

June 18-21 and June 25-28
8:30 a.m. - noon
UM-Flint Recreation Center,
401 Mill St.
Admission: $40/week, $35/sibling or for an extra week

Campers will learn the basics of the game including basic court strategies, court awareness, the building blocks of the game, and more.

Fiesta Mexicana 2018

June 23
10 a.m. - 10 p.m.
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church,
G2316 W. Coldwater Rd.
810-787-5701
Admission: Free

A family friendly event, enjoy the parish's annual fest. Enjoy musical entertainment, have some delicious Mexican food, and more.

Flint Pride Festival

June 23
2 - 8 p.m.
Riverbank Park, Downtown Flint
Admission: Free

The eighth-annual Flint Pride Festival is a safe space for LGBTQ+ people and allies to celebrate the community.

Flint Roller Derby vs. Motor City Disassembly Line

June 23
7:30 p.m.
Rollhaven Skating Center,
5315 S. Saginaw St.
Admission: $8 in advance from an FRD player or Brown Paper Tickers or $10 at the door

Come support the Flint Roller Derby girls as they play at home against Motor City Disassembly Line. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. and the game begins at 8 p.m. Attendees 21 and up are able to bring in two 16-ounce unbreakable containers of either beer or wine. Kids under 12 can get in for free with one paid admission.

Movies Under the Stars: "The Little Rascals"

June 29
7:30 p.m.
Flint City Hall, Back Lawn
Admission: Free, donations appreciated

The first in the summer-long series of films, pre-party events kick off the fifth year of this series at 7:30 p.m. and the film, "The Little Rascals," will begin at dusk.

"Terrifying" Roller Derby entertains with strength and flair

By Dylan Doherty and Meghan Christian

Grace Seymore had been a roller derby skater for a year before her team dissolved as she was considering moving from Clarkston to Flint. Looking to join a team again, she dropped in on a practice session of the Flint Roller Derby (FRD) crew.

What she saw there immediately got her attention, and she tried out.

"These people are f--king amazing," she remembers thinking, "This is terrifying. I need to do this."

Derby Girls embrace strength along with fun (Photo by Meghan Christian)

Now Seymore, 24, a paramedic in her day job, is league president, with Coach Nick Cotton, 38, of Flint, guiding the team into official status in the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) and drawing packed stands for its games at Rollhaven Skate and Fun Center in Grand Blanc.

The Flint Roller Derby played their first home game at Rollhaven May 5 against the Downriver Doll Stars from Woodhaven. FRD lost by 14 points with the final score being 206 to 220.

Regardless of the outcome, members of the team, now thriving after about a dozen up-and-down years, were happy to see so many people in attendance.

Gail Stone, 24, of Flint, a new member of the FRD team, said she was proud of their efforts. "It was such a good game and I'm really proud of my team," Stone said. "Also, it was really cool to see how many people came out to watch the game. Not everyone can pull in large crowds, so I think it says a lot about the Flint community," she added.

FRD practices twice a week at River Church in Goodrich on Wednesdays and Saturdays, with optional speedskating practices and team crossfit workouts. Regularly scheduled practices feature scrimmaging and strategies specific to their upcoming opponent.

Roller derby terms: jamming, blocking, "the pack"

Figuring out what's happening in a roller derby match, called a "bout," can be a bit daunting at first.

A bout is broken up into two 30-minute periods, which are themselves broken up into "jams," which last a maximum of two minutes.

At the start of a jam, four "blockers" from each team position themselves in a 30-foot long space bounded by the "pivot line" in front and the "jammer line" in back. One "jammer" from each team is positioned behind the jammer line. The goal is for the jammer, wearing a helmet with a star, to pass the blockers once, and then to score points for each opponent she passes again, for a total of five points per jam. The first jammer to pass the "pack" of blockers becomes the "lead jammer," who is able to end the jam at any point by repeatedly touching her hips.

Seymore says this simple description belies a stringent set of technical distinctions, including the definition of "pack." "The pack is defined as the largest majority of players from both teams skating together, so there can be a point where there is no pack if the pack splits itself or if (they) are not all within 10 feet of each other and so then you can't hit anybody, so you have to reform the pack." This requires constant vigilance amongst players to calculate the size and dimensions of the pack during a jam to ensure their defensive tactics are legal.

Even the apparently simple idea of passing an opponent is bounded by rules. The jammer must be upright and in bounds for a pass to be legal. A pass is also defined by passing the hips of an opponents, as opposed to just passing their feet.

Seymore was initially perplexed by this technical minutae. "I'm not a sporty person, so learning all this, I was like 'Excuse me? I just want to skate around.'"

In practice before a game, the team holds hands in a circle repeating affirmations recited by Cotton, including "I'm a good jammer," "I'm a good blocker," "I am great at skating," and "Our walls are impenetrable."

Seymore says this practice "on a personal mental level, helps as a team to be in that environment where you are physically connected to these people right now and also thinking about my place in the team."

Team nicknames part of the fun

The atmosphere at the games is a combination of noisy fun and serious athletic effort. Each player adopts a nickname — often hilarious plays on words highlighting their competitive instincts. Seymore's moniker is "Graced Lightning" and others include "Allen Wench," "Al Funk You Up," "JoJo McBruiseher," and "Tyrannojanna Wrex."

Stone, whose team name is "Gail Force," shares Seymore's ongoing awe of the team. "Many of the girls on the team have been playing for years, and they are so graceful on skates. Honestly, it's inspiring. I'm constantly working at improving and learning new skills," she said.

Another player, Jess Duncan, 30 — team name "Duncan GoNuts" — says she started playing roller derby as a stay-at-home mom looking to "get out, get active and socialize."

"Roller derby definitely helps release some pent-up aggression but most of all it is a great way to get fit and make new

(Continued on Page 13.)

... Derby

(Continued from Page 12.)

friends," she says.

Bumps and bruises part of the game

The games are physically demanding and can get a little rough.

"I played in my first scrimmage recently," Stone says, "and of course I was tired but more than anything I felt

Derby Girls practice workout
(photo by Dylan Doherty)

accomplished. I went home with a few bruises but nothing I couldn't handle." Stone says. "It's an outlet for me to forget about things I'm worried about."

"Immediately after a game, I feel great," Duncan says. "The following day is when I start noticing the bumps and bruises and then the day after that is usually when the soreness kicks in. It really isn't that bad, though."

Alex McCarley, 26 — her team name is "Al Funk You Up," though she usually goes by "Funki," — says she piles up on carbs and "tons of water" before a game, and increasingly focuses as game time approaches. Then there's the aftermath.

"We put so much energy into each game (physical, mental, emotional) that you end up riding a huge high off your team's victories, big and small, but at the same time feel extremely drained," McCarley says. "I always consider going home and straight to bed, but usually I can't resist going out to celebrate and talk about the game with my teammates."

Bonding and challenging stereotypes

"In general, women's sports are a good resource for community bonding, for meeting those people that are kind of like-minded in that they're a little out of the ordinary," Seymore says, "especially with roller derby that attracts a lot of people who aren't necessarily run-of-the-mill individuals that you are going to meet every day of your life. Especially in Flint it's a really good example of people coming together, doing good things," she says.

Seymore says it is important "from a feminist standpoint to show a strong community-oriented organization that's doing good things thats reclaiming the stereotype of a female athlete or even female groups in general."

According to Stone, FRD fosters a positive atmosphere while pushing team members to try new skills and improve. "It's always a challenge, but everyone on the team is so nice and supportive," Stone said.

FRD also serves the wider Flint community, knitting blankets for the Humane Society, passing out bottled water, sorting food for the Food Bank, and planting flowers near the College Cultural Neighborhood, where several of the team members and Nick Cotton live. Participating in two to three community service events a year is part of the FRD bylaws.

Legitimizing the team

Cotton says over the years the team and the sport as a whole has changed.

In the past, he said, "You didn't have a lot of real athletes on your team. It was a more bruising, solo-battering sport," Cotton said. The team was split between players who wanted to move in the direction of a serious, legitimate sport and those who still prefered the sport as it had been played.

In 2017, the matter was resolved by a team vote to pursue becoming a WFTDA apprentice league. Paperwork is continuing, the process spearheaded and facilitated by Cotton and Seymore. The shift has nudged the team toward greater athleticism.

"They're not just skating around in fishnets anymore, flopping on top of each other and hitting each other with chairs." Seymore says.

The pursuit of legitimation, Cotton and Seymore believe, is warranted after decades of roller derby as a mode of sports entertainment akin to professional wrestling. Roller derby has transitioned away from the past and now seeks acceptance as an Olympic sport in the 2020 Summer Olympics.

The team has rebounded following some difficult years. At the 2014 state tournament, FRD suffered a devastating loss, bringing the morale to a new low. At the end-of-year meeting, "a miracle happened," according to Cotton: nearly half of the team quit. FRD went into the 2015 season with only nine skaters. Cotton says "2015 was truly the rebirth of our team."

So after years of leaving the past behind, Seymore says roller derby players can relax a little. "Now people are feeling … they can show that we're having fun

Grace Seymore
(photo by Dylan Doherty)

again. If we're on a really good winning streak, we'll do a little bit more of a fun warm-up where we can go out there and be a little more relaxed.

"We don't necessarily have anything to prove. As we're legitimizing roller derby, people can go back to wearing fishnets and having ridiculous halftime shows because now it's taken a little more seriously. It's come full circle and a half."

The Flint Roller Derby next home game is 7:30 p.m. June 23 at Rollhaven, 5315 S. Saginaw Rd. Tickets are $10 at the door.

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... Everett

(Continued from Page 16.)

potential crowd funding to do another series of murals in the center's gymnasium.

In addition to his work with kids at Flint schools like Eisenhower Elementary, Carpenter Road Elementary and at the Applewood Series, Everett is part of Flint Underground, a loosely organized clan of artists and musicians who like to hang out and "have a good time with the arts," he said. He coordinates the Churchhill's Food and Spirits participation in the popular downtown Art Walk held the second Friday of the month from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. The monthly event takes place at various locations.

Like his other community endeavors, Everett doesn't receive any money for his promotion of the event. He said the gathering itself is a reflection of his art, as the show includes local artisans' work, paintings, drawings and music infused with collaboration and what he called, "healthy socialization."

Everett's work has been shown at Buckham Gallery, the Greater Flint Arts Council (GFAC), The Good Beans Café, the Elated Flute Foundation, Red Ink of Flint, the Spiral Gallery in Grand Rapids, multiple shows in Detroit and most recently in Harrisburg, Pa. "That show nearly sold out," he says, as he sits the sugar skull painting down, examines it for a moment then rests it on his legs before going back into the lines with his paint marker. "I met some cool people in Harrisburg too; it's all about going out to strange places and figuring shit out."

With the sugar skull nearly complete, Everett describes the feeling he gets when he finishes a painting. "It's cool, you know. Sometimes I get an indescribable feeling. You surprise yourself sometimes. Doesn't happen all the time; it's a blue moon situation. You have to step outside your comfort zone for that shit to happen." With that he sits back from the painting and takes a good look.

"It's good medicine for everyone," he says, "it's universal good medicine."

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... Hurley

(Continued from Page 10.)

worked long and hard since April 2014 to try to help the community understand the gravity and impact of the crisis and to advocate for the community's needs — often relying on the expertise of the medical community about the effects of lead on pregnant women, children, and senior citizens.

"Who can we trust?"

"You as physicians have a great deal of respect in our community, and as a result we have put our lives in your hands," Lewis stated.

"And if we can't trust those who care for us, who can we trust?" she said.

Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, a pediatrician and child community health consultant, former past president of Mott Children's Health Center and Genesee County Medical Society, who has been vocally involved in lead crisis activism since the beginning, noted how in the early months county, state and federal governmental agencies argued over who was in charge and whether it was an emergency or a disaster, while nonprofits and community organizers "coalesced to deliver water and filters until an official response was deployed."

And yet, after all the efforts to combat the "preventable exposure and mass ingestion of a known toxicant, some members of the Hurley Medical staff announced the exposure as just an exposure, forgetting the ingestion and unmeasurable incorporation of lead into bone, teeth and brain."

He said "the exposure and its disparate impact was delineated by one's address, a feature of environmental injustice overlooked by the limited context of the statement issued by the Hurley medical staff."

"Protean harm and mental trauma"

In light of "the protean harm and mental trauma caused by the crisis and attempts to minimize it," he asked that the Hurley Board of Managers "make it clear that the reported medical staff statement does not represent its views and is a statement of staff members only."

A Hurley spokeswoman said to her knowledge neither Hurley management not the board of managers planned to issue a statement separate from the Gomez resolution.

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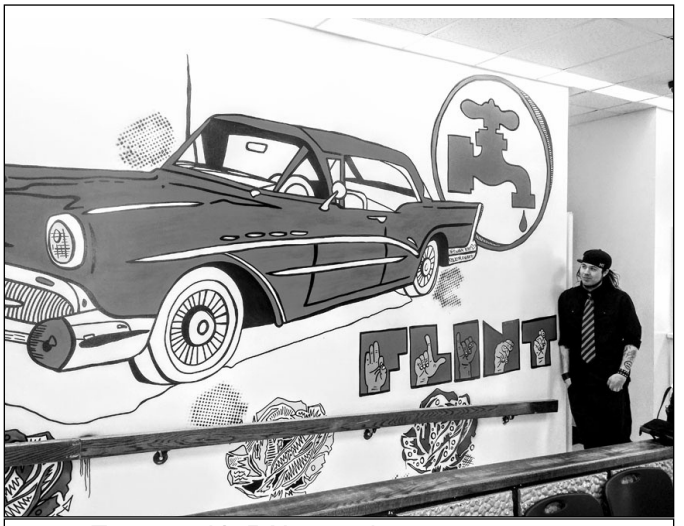
Village Life

Pauly Everett: making art that's "good for the soul"

By Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.

In Flint artist Pauly Everett's work, a mixed media mash-up of pop culture icons and comic book details are delivered in exuberant primary colors and a hip-hop street art flavor. He calls his signature style "city psychedelic art," and from his crowded, bright studio, Everett, 29, has established himself not just as a maker of vivid canvases but also as a community-spirited benefactor of art for local kids and a fixture of downtown energy.



Everett with PAL mural (Photo by Jeff Carey)

In his studio at the corner of Beecher and Corunna roads, Everett moves fluidly, a piece unfolding as the radio plays Madlib, Otis Jackson, a blend of hip hop and old sounds. He says he plays music from the time he gets up until he goes to bed.

He says his commitment to art is related to what it does for people. For those with anxiety or depression — or for anybody, for that matter — "it can make folks happy. It's just all in all good for the soul."

Born at Flint Hospital, a revelation to him after digging out his birth certificate during the interview, Everett is the son of Anthony Everett, who still lives in town, and Tina Pinkerton, who lives in Greenbush. He has two older brothers and two younger brothers, and he says family members are close and really supportive and into the arts and music. His brother Phillip died at 24 last year.

Everett recalls working on his own art in elementary school, but admits he did not become more serious about his art until middle school.

Everett refers to his early work as "cartoony stuff like giant turtles crushing cityscapes, just weird shit." He describes this while flipping the painting upside down and working in more lines of what are becoming roses around a sugar skull, a Mexican-Catholic folk art decoration traditionally made of sugar and representing a departed soul.

It was in high school though where Everett fell into experimenting with the styles prevalent in his work today. He says he spent his formative years in exercises of abstract and psychedelic art, all on his own and with no formal training. Now he says he fashions his work by whatever subject matter takes him at the moment.

"Don't know what you would call it," he ponders as his paint marker eddies around the panel. "It's recognizable."

He concedes much of his work is designed around whatever colors of paint he has on hand. He works with latex, acrylic and sometimes oil paint either donated to him or left over from other projects.

While he calls his work "psychedelic," he doesn't do acid; rather, in an email he characterizes his paintings, like other "psychedelic art," as "colorful, loud, strange and purdy." He wants people to have fun with it, especially children, whom he says he tries to teach "to not be shy and to have fun, because painting can be a lot of fun, especially to a youngster that's never painted."

The stream of repurposed paint keeps the buckets from otherwise being wasted and allows Everett to paint up to three paintings a day at times. "I'll squeeze in a few paintings a day if I'm by myself," he says while his hand continues to bring out the details on the sugar skull.

It's a commission for Dave Hamilton, he explains, a singer-songwriter for the band, Happy Curmudgeons. "He wanted it lavender and pink and shit," he adds with a smile, in his freewheeling, cheerfully salty style. He notes the color scheme was not his usual.

Everett says he does not use his art for political purposes. Deliberately leaving his pieces untitled, he says he allows viewers of his work to have their own experience with his work and to apply their own meaning.

"I stay clear of that political shit," he says. "There is a time and place for it, but it's not my favorite shit." Still he does enjoy using his art at times for social awareness, which he does not consider "political." One of his many recent exhibits, at Buckham Gallery in downtown Flint, for example, focused on the water crisis.

His humanitarian work and involvement with the community recently drew the attention of Syrah Scott of the New York-based National Clean Water Collective (NCWC) who asked him to spearhead a community project in Flint.

Everett agreed to work on a mural with water-based and Flint themes at the Flint Police Activities League (PAL) building at 2201 Forest Hill Ave. Asked about the call from the NCWC, he says, "Obviously I'm going to say yeah," and offered to donate his time.

Though Everett was not paid for the mural that spans a 30-foot wall, he did receive an award at the PAL Earth Day #Just Clean It Jamboree held at the PAL Corp Haskell Youth Center. The NCWC presented Everett the award, a heavy piece of blue and clear glass shaped like a drop of water, for art, his contribution to the community, and for his continued work with Flint youth.

"I do the work for free, because it's for the kids," Everett said, adding it is a "win-win," because he gets to paint and "teach a little." As for the PAL Corp Haskell Youth Center, Everett remarked with a grin, "the place needs more rad shit going on." He hopes to raise enough money through

(Continued on Page 15.)