



East Village

Magazine

February 2019

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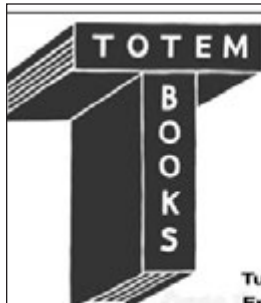
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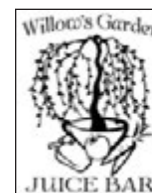
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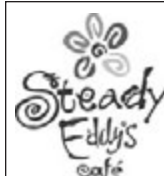
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Commentary Politics 2019 – more civility? Maybe, but don't count on it

By Paul Rozycki

"It's tough to make predictions,
 especially about the future."

-Yogi Berra

With a newly elected Congress in Washington, a new administration in Lansing, and a mayoral election in Flint, this year will be anything but tranquil politically. As has been the case for the last few years, predictions are easy to make, but often wrong. Like so many things attributed to Yogi Berra, I don't know if he actually said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future," but it's obviously true. In any case, at the risk of proving Yogi correct, here are a few things to look for in politics this year.

On the national level

As we begin the year, some expect 2019 to be "the worst year of Donald Trump's life." That may or may not be true, but, for the first time, President Trump is facing a Democratic House, with the power and the intent to investigate his business dealings and potential ties to Russia. The nation also awaits the Mueller report on any possible Russian collusion, and at least six individuals with ties to the Trump campaign have been indicted so far. The FBI also has launched investigations over Trump's possible ties to Russia.

During the record-breaking 35-day government shutdown, Trump took most of the blame for the layoff of 800,000 federal employees and the turmoil that followed. The shutdown had the image of a bad reality TV show as Trump and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi traded dueling cancellations, as she blocked his State of the Union message, and he denied

her military flights to Afghanistan. The recent agreement to open the government for three weeks offers an opportunity to end the shutdown for good and may give both parties a chance to work together. How that plays out and how long it lasts, remains to be seen, but 2019 looks like it may be a year of investigations, charges and countercharges and, perhaps, a move to impeach the president from the U.S. House.

The background for much of this is the fact that the 2020 campaign is already underway. At least eight Democrats have declared they are running for president, with more to come. And Trump's campaign has been in place since his inauguration two years ago.

On the state level

For the first time in many decades, Michigan Democrats have flipped the governor's, attorney general's, and secretary of state's offices from one party to another. Yet even with that victory, Republicans remain in control of the state House and the state Senate, as they have for a number of years. Will that mean that Michigan faces the same gridlock we have seen in Washington? Maybe, but there are at least a few signs that both parties might work together better than they have in the past.

Unlike the past two governors, Gretchen Whitmer brings legislative experience to the job. She served in the Michigan House for six years, was elected to the state Senate in 2006, and was chosen as minority leader of the Michigan state Senate in 2010, serving until 2014. That experience, which both Gov. Snyder and Gov. Granholm lacked, led Whitmer to meet with "The Quadrant," the leaders of both parties in the Michigan House and

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Photograph by
Edwin D. Carter

Photo of the Month: That one day with the dogs, Byram Lake

Flint City Council wrestles with civility, removes Mays from finance committee chair

By Meghan Christian

As 2018 ended, some members of Flint City Council (FCC) expressed hope that the new year would bring a new attitude to the council and that they would be able to leave many of their divisive issues behind. But it became clear at the conclusion of the first month of 2019 that this would be a difficult goal.

Mays removed

Perhaps the most dramatic action of the council in January was the removal of First Ward Councilperson Eric Mays from his position as finance chair, by a vote of six to one, during the Jan. 23 finance committee meeting.

The removal, based on a motion by Council President Winfrey, was the culmination of months of discord between Mays and, in particular, three female council members: Fourth Ward Councilperson Kate Fields, Seventh Ward Councilperson Monica Galloway, and Ninth Ward Councilperson Eva Worthing, as well as FCC's support staff.

Those in favor of his removal were

Third Ward Councilperson Santino Guerra, Fields, Sixth Ward Councilperson and FCC President Herb Winfrey, Galloway, Eighth Ward Councilperson Allan Griggs, and Worthing. Opposed was Second Ward Councilperson Maurice Davis. Absent at the time of the vote were Fifth Ward Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter and Mays himself.

Mays wasn't there for the vote because he had been removed from the meeting by Flint Police Officer William Metcalf 20 minutes earlier, after Galloway, the chair of the meeting, declared him out of order.

Continued fighting between members of FCC, staff

The Mays controversy seemed to come to a head with explosive debate in the regular council meeting of Jan. 14, when discussion of a special order added an extra hour to the meeting time because of arguing among council members and what some believed were abuses of "Point of Order" and "Point of Information" —

both outlined in Robert's Rules of Order—the parliamentary procedure manual used by FCC and many other organizations throughout the United States.

"You are abusing your rights as a council person," Winfrey said to Mays. "Your problem is you want people to listen to you and to respect you, but you don't listen to everybody," he added, before Mays cut him off.

Fellow members of the FCC were not the only ones under fire from Mays; council staff support were targets of his outbursts as well. During the regular FCC meeting Jan. 14, Mays recounted part of the Jan. 9 finance committee meeting where, according to Mays, the council's staff informed them they could not make a motion on a pending resolution regarding AECOM, the city's water pipe replacement management company.

"When our staff starts telling us when we can make motions and can't and then I research it — and I want this council to

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... Council

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know – our staff was wrong,” Mays said. “Do what we ask and stay out of our debates if you don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

“I know what I am talking about, Mr. Mays,” City Clerk Inez Brown retorted, in defense of herself and her staff, “and the other thing that I indicated to you during the course of the (Jan. 9) meeting ... Ms. Winfrey-Carter made a motion, but you wanted to make the motion — you would not allow her to do it. Now, had you allowed her, it might have gone through,” Brown added.

“She ain’t a council person, we are in a debate ... She’s out of order,” Mays said in response to Brown. “You can’t call on her as a member of this body,” he protested to Board President Winfrey.

“Usually the city clerk has the ability to chime in because what has been discussed here is based on believing that what was shared from that position was incorrect,” Galloway said. “And I just want to know how far and how many people have to be subject to Councilman Mays’s anger and outbursts,” she added.

FCC Executive Assistant and Office Manager Davina Donahue felt so strongly on the current state of the council that she filled out a public speaking slip and spoke before FCC, something she stated she had never done in a regular FCC meeting since being on staff.

“There’s something on my heart that I have to talk about. Things keep coming up in meetings on the record, so I want to have time to respond,” she said.

“I’ve been with council for 12 years now and I’ve never seen anything like the fighting because you don’t agree,” Donahue said. “I don’t profess to know everything, but working for the clerk, the keeper of the records of the council, if I think that you’re doing something you haven’t done before, I am going to speak up. The clerk deserves more respect than that,” she concluded.

In formally moving to remove Mays as chair, Winfrey recounted a conversation he had with Mays when he told Mays he did not think he was a fit match for the position of chair. “I said,

‘Councilman Mays, with the skills that you have, if you would just change those attitudes, you could serve as finance chair. I would like to have you serve as finance chair, but you have to apply those rules across the board,’” Winfrey said. “How do you call folks in order when you are out of order?”

Clashes between Mays and community members

Residents in the city also spoke out against treatment they felt was not right from the First Ward councilperson. At the Jan. 14 FCC meeting, former member of the Charter Review Commission and city activist Quincy Murphy described how Mays had treated him during the Jan. 9 finance committee meeting.

Murphy said he had filed a damage claim for being unlawfully removed from a finance committee meeting, and asked the council to censure Mays. He further requested that the council have a parliamentarian at all committee meet-



Councilperson Eric Mays
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

ings and, finally, to remove Mays as chairman of the finance committee.

During the Jan. 23 committee meeting, several residents from the First Ward turned out in protest against Mays, their councilperson. One said, “We will not be silenced. We are the First Ward residents. We are tired of the verbal abuse. We’re tired of the abuse of women on our council, and we say no to verbal abuse from any council member.”

AECOM Update

Meanwhile in January, another struggle came in the form of deciding whether

to grant a second change order to the city’s contract with the LA-based global engineering firm, AECOM, that would give them an additional \$4,802,482, according to the resolution listed in the Jan. 9 finance committee agenda. (AECOM is the company’s official name; the letters of the acronym stand for Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations and Maintenance) As reported in *EVM* in April, AECOM took over the water service line replacement project from General Michael McDaniel in the fall of 2017. The firm received a 13-month, \$5 million contract from the city which began Dec. 1, 2017.

Both times this resolution for the second change order faced the FCC — once in committee on Jan. 9 and then again as a reconsideration moved by Mays during the Jan. 14 regular council meeting — it failed with a tie vote of four in favor and four opposed. Some members of the FCC said they would not support giving AECOM more funds when they felt the company had not fulfilled the terms of its first contract.

Others said they believed not granting AECOM the \$4.8 million would not only be a detriment to the public health of residents, but was just a way for certain council members to go against Mayor Karen Weaver and her administration.

“The mayor already did her part. She brought in the best company, the best safety with MDEQ (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality) and all the rest of them,” Maurice Davis said. “We can’t keep track of every dime and every penny that’s dealing with AECOM ... We don’t want to reset this clock with some trying to save a dollar ... trying to save a penny digging holes. That’s flat out stupid,” he added.

“What I see some of the council people are doing could turn (pipe replacement) to a trickle, could leave lead pipes in the ground an extra day, an extra week, an extra month,” Mays said.

“I wish my colleagues would really put past their personal opinions and go back to why you’re actually sitting in these chairs,” Davis said. “We don’t want to reset the clock on this.”

Managing Editor Meghan Christian can be reached at meghan.christian22@gmail.com.

Flint's Katie Stanley Band launches new EP, making music from waves of challenge

By Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.

On a cold January evening at Flint's Soggy Bottom Bar, the Katie Stanley Band released its new EP (Extended Play) titled *Lake Superior* to a very warm audience. The band, comprised of singer/songwriter Katie Stanley; bassist Tammy Pendleton; and drummer Michelle McAuley, released the new EP Jan. 18 with the release show on Jan. 19. The show also featured opening artists Dylan Grantham of Young Ritual and Cory Mark Glover.

Stanley, 31, was born in Fenton, but has local ties. "I'm an only child," she said. "I have lived in Flint in the past and grew up playing shows in the area."

By day, she's a fair housing attorney at Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and serves on several nonprofit boards in the City, including Factory Two Makerspace, the Flint Local 432 Performing Arts Venue, and the Flint Community Housing Resource Board. "I also serve on several local committees," she stated, one of them being Girls Rock Flint, an organization whose mission is to empower marginalized youth in Flint to believe in themselves by providing a supportive environment that fosters self-expression, confidence, and community building through music education and performance.

Stanley's drummer, Michelle McAuley, is a banking compliance officer and the bassist, Tammy Pendleton, is a pharmacist. Both live in Flint. The band members write all their own music. Occasionally they cover a song, but the songs on their three EP's are all original. "In Flint, my fondest memories were formed at the Flint Local 432 where I grew up playing," Stanley said. "Some of my fondest musical memories include my grandmother playing ragtime, my dad singing James Taylor songs, and my mom and I practicing together before school."

Stanley brings a rich background in music to her role as front person for the



From left, Tammy Pendleton, Katie Stanley, Michelle McAuley at Soggy Bottom
(Photo by Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.)

band. "I've tried most string instruments and briefly took drum lessons," she said. "Now, I mostly play and write on guitar and piano. I also often play banjo, baritone ukulele, harmonica, and mandolin."

Stanley's family is also highly musical as her dad is a guitar teacher, and her mom is a piano teacher. Stanley's maternal grandmother sold and played pianos. "It was always something that was in the family," Stanley said. "Since I was born I've been exposed to music. I can't imagine and wouldn't have it any other way."

"My parents still teach guitar and piano lessons to this day," Stanley said. "My grandmother was an incredible piano player and also owned a local piano store in Flint."

Her paternal grandfather's cousin, Ralph Stanley, was a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame and has been dubbed the patriarch of bluegrass. He was a banjo player, singer, and songwriter whose work influenced the earliest bluegrass style.

"The first songs I ever learned were classical piano, since I couldn't hold a guitar until some years later. I had my first piano recital at three years old," Stanley said. "My earliest and fondest memories with my family all involve music."

Lake Superior is Katie Stanley's third EP with the previous releases being, *When in Roam* and *Canary in the Coal*

Mine. When asked how they came up with the name of their band, Stanley stated, "Well, we couldn't think of one, so it just stayed 'Katie Stanley' and we added 'Band' at the end. Very creative, ha!"

The folk and country sound of the Katie Stanley Band combines influences from many sources, including Nathaniel Rateliff and the Nightsweats, Gregory Alan Isakov, Etta James, Carol King, and Motown or blues artists.

"One of my dogs is actually named Sam after Sam Cooke, who is one of my favorite singers,"

Stanley said. "The other is named Bader, after Ruth Bader Ginsberg."

Opening at the Soggy Bottom release show was Dylan Grantham, 23, of Young Ritual. Born and raised in Flint, Grantham stated, "I would consider myself Indie/Alternative/Americana and some influences would be Father John Misty, Randy Newman, Chris Warren, and The National."

"I've been playing music since I was just a little kid," Grantham said. "I was born here, and I've stayed here and I've had the pleasure of knowing Katie for probably a decade now, so we've played together a few times."

Grantham said he first met Katie at his cousin's open house years ago. "She played a set there, and I was immediately taken by her voice," he recalled.

Glover, 37, has been playing music for about 18 years, but admits the past 10 or so years have been pretty casual and more of a hobby. "I was born in Flint and spent most of my 20s working and hanging out in the town," Glover said, "but now I live in Ferndale."

"I play with Katie a few times a year," Glover stated. "I definitely think our music informs each other. I think if you sat us all down and had a group chat we would have similar threads of influences. I love Katie's soulful singing and take on the genre and Dylan has a per-

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... Band

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formance aesthetic and lyrics that are amazing.”

Outside of the Soggy Bottom Bar, Katie Stanley has toured through the southern states, up the East Coast, through a bit of Canada and back. “I toured with some friends just after I graduated high school,” Stanley said. “We all crammed into a tiny Saturn, including all of our bags, instruments, and a cello that whoever rode in the back had to keep across their laps. It overheated more than once and we didn’t plan anywhere to sleep for the entire tour. Luckily, we always had some where to crash.”

Asked how she balances her music with other parts of her life, Stanley said, “I try to go through the seasons of life without too many judgments, as long as I feel like I’m doing the best that I can. There was a time while I was studying for the bar exam that I couldn’t play much. It was one of the most difficult periods of my life, for a variety of reasons. Once I passed, we were

able to play more again, I was writing a lot, and we even recorded a new album.”

This sense of resilience is also a major influence in Katie Stanley’s new EP, *Lake Superior*. “Several years ago, I swam through the caves of Lake Superior,” Stanley said, “and I’m not a very good swimmer. I remember being struck by the raw power of the waves, of the larger world of which I was a part, and the timelessness of the love that I felt for the person I was with.

“Often, life’s most defining moments have caused me to feel fear for my own powerlessness, but at the same time, gratitude for the opportunity I have to be present. To some extent, I think where I am now in releasing this album, I feel similar, struck by my own smallness, by the overpowering wave of challenges these past few years has brought, but also grateful I am present with love in my heart.”

Stanley, who is gay, along with her sister band mates, said her parents did not accept her coming out at first but now embrace her decision, and they

have become very close again. She just came out of a long relationship, some of which propelled the songs of the latest EP.

“It’s all a give and take ... and we only have so much energy to give,” she said, “so I try to be intentional about what to pursue and to honor (my) own wellness also.

“Being in public service is something I’ve always valued and wanted, despite its challenges,” Stanley added. “I don’t know that I could ever just do one thing ... working towards balance across my interests has taught me so much about grit, resilience, and what really matters to me. In my limited experience, finding connection, being of service to others, music, and the humility and awe of spending time in nature have been the most valuable to me. But, music provides a balance and creativity to my life that I don’t get in other areas. It really is all about balance, and I’m grateful for all of it.”

EVM Staff writer Jeffery L. Carey, Jr. can be reached at jlcareyjr@hotmail.com.

“Unity in Diversity” goal of Feb. 23 intercultural festival

By EVM Staff

“Unity In Diversity,” an interfaith and intercultural festival, will celebrate diversity in Flint beginning at 7 p.m. Feb. 23 at the Insight Institute of Neurosurgery and Neuroscience, 4800 Saginaw St.

The 4th annual event features local artists and performers. Co-founder Muna Jondy, Flint-based attorney and member of the Flint Islamic Center, said, “something artistic” is what the community needs in the midst of tension around immigration and global events.

Organizers say the concert will feature diverse performances, and some audience participation, including music,

dance, spoken word, and storytelling. Local physician Bobby Mukkamala returns as emcee.

Rev. Jeremy Peters, of Court Street United Methodist Church, said that

each year some world event gives a new sense of urgency to interfaith understanding, noting that this year the event comes in the wake of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh.

Sponsors of the Unity In Diversity event include the Flint Islamic Center, the Flint Jewish Federation, Court Street United Methodist Church, and Mott Community College.

For more information, contact Carrie Walling,

cbwallingflint@gmail.com, 810-247-3408.

—EVM Staff



Flint Ethics and Accountability Board still plodding through formative stages

By Meghan Christian

The Flint Ethics and Accountability Board (EAB) has passed another month since it was established by the new City Charter 18 months ago without hiring an ombudsman, one of the group's main jobs.

But the group did welcome a new member, addressed potential issues with accepting complaints, and discussed plans for 2019 during their brief meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 22. Absent from the meeting were Fourth Ward appointee Nicolas D'Aigle and Sixth Ward appointee Delores Langston.

As described in previous *East Village Magazine* coverage, the EAB is a requirement of the charter adopted by voters in August, 2017, by a two to one vote and which was to have taken effect in January, 2018. The charter calls for 11 members, comprised of one member from each ward and two members appointed by the mayor. Terms on the board are staggered, meaning each of the 11 members serve a different number of years, to ensure that there is always someone on the board with experience.

The board's main functions, as set out in the charter, include appointing an ombudsperson and hearing resident concerns. The board is empowered to hold public servants accountable per the ethical standards outlined in the charter. This power manifests in various ways, outlined in the charter, from calling hearings to subpoena powers, should it be necessary.

New Appointment

Bob Gallagher replaced Eric Roebuck as the Ninth Ward appointee to the EAB Jan. 14 by a unanimous vote of the Flint City Council. Asked by Second Ward Councilperson Maurice Davis how he would be able to handle bias, Gallagher stated, "I am an honest person. We're all brothers and sisters here. We need to get along."

"We're grown-ups, you need to act that way," he added.

Accepting Complaints

As of the Jan. 22 meeting, the EAB has received a total of three complaints, which Third Ward appointee Linda Boose has been holding onto in the interim until the board hires an ombudsperson. However, the way the board has dealt with complaints has raised some potential flags for some residents of Flint.

Quincy Murphy, former member of the Charter Review Commission, addressed a concern about how a complaint was handled in a previous meeting during the public speaking portion of the Jan. 22 meeting. "Attorney Alex Gibbs filed a complaint. One of your colleagues turned around and gave that complaint to a councilperson for them to read. I thought that was unethical," Murphy said. "It could have come across as intimidating to the person filing the complaint and I think that you guys should look at ... signing a confidentiality statement."

"If I file a complaint with you guys, I don't expect my complaint to get turned around and given to the person who the complaint might have been filed against. It is very intimidating. Some of us already feel like we can't come to council and voice our concerns and complaints without being degraded by certain council people," Murphy said. "I was appalled and I felt that I needed to come here and say something."

Executive Assistant and Office Manager Davina Donahue reminded the EAB that Gibbs, who made the complaint mentioned by Davis, made it publicly. "The reason why he insisted that you accept his complaint, which he did do publicly, was he felt it was your responsibility," Donahue said, referencing the part of the Flint City Charter that states without an ombudsperson,

the EAB also has an obligation for taking residents complaints.

"Complaints were always supposed to be kept confidential; we discussed that," mayoral appointee Loyce Driskell said. "Things have gotten so out of hand."

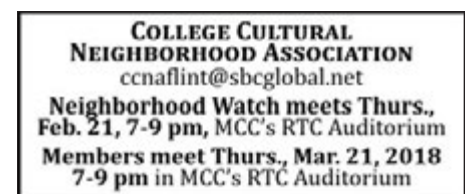
Mayoral appointee Art Evans said he thought it was not right for the EAB to take complaints before the board has a system in place to do so. "To receive a complaint at this junction ... is inappropriate. We should stop this process of taking complaints," Evans said.

"I don't think we can investigate them, but we can still keep accepting them," Second Ward appointee Joe King answered.

Plans moving forward

Driskell urged all members of the EAB to bring their ideas on the complaints process to their next meeting. "And I think we will work on putting together the bylaws, talk about processes," Driskell said about their next meeting, adding, "My personal view on it is that I see everything coming through the ombudsman. We were put together, as I understand it, to hire an ombudsman ... and that should be our number one priority."

EVM Managing Editor Meghan Christian can be reached at meghan.christian22@gmail.com.



Consumers offers heating bill aid

By EVM Staff

Consumers Energy encourages residents having difficulty paying heating bills to ask for assistance, and has contributed \$10 million since October to defray those costs in southeast Michigan.

Consumers Energy's CARE program allows customers to establish a payment plan with monthly credits and gradual forgiveness of past-due balances. Consumers Energy cash contributions to local agencies provide assistance to those having trouble paying bills.

In Genesee County, those Consumers resources are managed by the Genesee County Community Action Resource Department (GCCARD) and the Salvation Army.

A company spokesperson noted natural gas use for Consumers Energy's residential customers was up more than 20 percent in November 2018, compared to the previous year, due to colder-than-normal

temperatures.

For forgiveness of past-due balances or payment plans, call Consumers at 800-477-5050. For assistance with current bills or other needs, call 2-1-1 or go to mi211.org; or call GCCARD at 810-232-2185; or the Salvation Army at 810-232-2196.

--EVM Staff

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1.27.19 – 5.26.19

^
Kwele peoples
Gabon/Democratic Republic of Congo
Mask, n.d.
Wood
18 inches
Collection of Dr. Robert Horn

>
Vanessa German
American, born 1976
We Go This Way; Let Us Dance (detail), 2018
Mixed-media assemblage
97 x 39 x 42 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok, Fine Art, NY
Photo: Heather Mull



Saturday 3.2.19

Join Dr. Nii O. Quarcoopome, Co-Chief Curator and Department Head, Africa, Oceania, and Indigenous Americas at the Detroit Institute of Arts, for his lecture *African Art Making and Use and Western Collectors: The Complicated Life and History of African Art*, from 2p-3p.

Free to the public.

Sunday 1.27.19

Opening of two exhibitions
Meet artist Vanessa German from 1p-2p
Free to the public



Vanessa German Miracles and Glory Abound

1.27.19 – 4.20.19

Vanessa German at ARThouse, Homewood, Pittsburgh.
Courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok, Fine Art, NY
Photo: Brian Cohen



“Miracles and Glory Abound”: Artwork of Vanessa German at FIA through April 20

By Harold C. Ford

*Editor’s Note: EVM staff writer Harold C. Ford is also a provisional docent at the Flint Institute of Arts (FIA) and was present in a dual capacity during a walk-through of Vanessa German’s new exhibit at the FIA Jan. 25. *Miracles and Glory Abound* opened to the general public Jan. 27.*

“The future belongs to the human beings who have the creativity and the courage to live inside the truth.”

—Vanessa German, 2017

Vanessa German discovered the transforming power of art when she escaped a particularly dreadful phase of her life by collecting things as she walked her dog to find relief from the gloom.

“I would pick up little objects and things from vacant lots, from around abandoned houses in my neighborhood,” she told a Pittsburgh audience in 2017.

She took the objects — shards of glass, buttons, cans, swatches of fabric, glass bottles, scraps of paper — to the basement of her Pittsburgh home and put them together to create works of art.

“A shard of glass looks worthless,” said German. “But when you put those shards together you can create an entirely new picture.”

“I found that when I was in the process of creating these figures something happened to me. Something came over me so holy, and truly, and completely, that I was changed by the process ... I could contend with the despair.”

Artistic style rooted in childhood

Creativity was bred into her during her childhood as the middle child of five siblings raised in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s.

“I was really influenced by my mom (a quilter) who basically kept us safe and



Vanessa German
(Photo courtesy FIA)

kept us alive by keeping us in the house,” German said. “She would make us make stuff. She would put art supplies all over the table and we would have to make our own lives.”

“We made our own clothes, toys, books, recordings, plays,” she recalled. “So I really grew up my whole life understanding that I did not have to outsource my own fun (or) creativity. I could make the things of my life.”

“I never experienced the great music or arts school,” she said. “I always felt like I was an artist and could always do whatever I wanted to do.”

Assemblage art

According to Hilary Robinson, professor of feminism, art, and theory at England’s Loughborough University, German’s style, dubbed “assemblage art” by the art community, is “part of an aesthetic tradition that has a strong thread within art by African American artists.”

Robinson’s comments are contained in a new 63-page book, *Miracles and Glory Abound*, produced by the FIA and meant to complement the exhibit of the same name.

Many assemblage artists, according to Robinson, “have marginalized cultural and political identities, or (are) from sexualities that have been regarded as deviant and criminalized.” Thus, Robinson continues, “the strength of assemblage as a

mode of art making amongst African American artists is striking.”

John Henry, FIA executive director, explained in the foreword to the companion book *Miracles and Glory Abound*, that he saw German’s work at the Pavel Zoubok Gallery in New York City in 2016. “I knew at that moment that not only did a work of hers need to be in the FIA permanent collection, but that such an assembly of sculptures would make for a fantastic exhibition.”

Prior to installation of the current exhibit, German conducted workshops with young people at the Berston Field House, the Boys and Girls Club, and in the Flint Cultural Center in July 2018. On the weekend of the exhibition opening, she visited with students and educators at Mott Community College and the Flint Public Library.

Miracles and Glory Abound:

The centerpiece of German’s FIA exhibit is a mixed-media installation titled *Miracles and Glory Abound* (2018), a life-sized representation of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), the iconic painting by Emanuel Leutze.

Leutze’s painting is a representation of a foundational story about the birth of America. It is the visual narrative of George Washington leading Continental soldiers across the Delaware River in 1776. German’s *Miracles and Glory Abound* challenges the Leutze narrative.

“Who gets to shape-shift that story?” German asked her FIA audience. “Who gets to create the images for those stories of American greatness?”

German’s take on the Leutze painting is reminiscent of Robert Colescott’s painting, *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook* (1975), in that all the human figures are obviously African American.

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... Artwork

(Continued from Page 10.)

“*Miracles and Glory Abound* with its boat full of figurative sculptures, functions as both a continuation of and a disruption of the canon,” according to Holly Bass, a writer and performance artist.

“She (German) inserts and asserts her Blackness, her womanness, her multivalent queerness, into this ongoing American narrative and asks us to consider the birth of this nation, a mythology of chopped cherry trees and founding fathers lying through wooden teeth.”

“The political meets the spiritual meets the cultural,” German said of *Miracles and Glory Abound*. “They meet in a way of my understanding of rightness.”

Power, color, intention

German’s artwork frequently includes female figures that she calls “power figures.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* writer Diana Nelson Jones described them in this way:

“Festooned with buttons, beads, shells, toys and other objects, each is a personified experience, the persona centered in a head painted black with objects on top of it or shooting from it.” In addition to those assembled aboard the boat on *Miracles and Glory Abound*, German’s “power figures” are ever-present in the artist’s other pieces chosen for the FIA exhibit including: *Oh for the healing of the blues* (2016); *imagine then, seeing your own face, outside of your own face, for the very first time* (2018); and *we are the animals are us* (2017).

“This is my neighborhood,” German said of her artistic personages during the FIA walk-through. “I created a family that is looking.”

The color palette of German’s neighborhood is dominated by red, white, black, blue, and gold. Colors, as well as objects, are the lexicon that guide her collection of objects that may become



***we are animals are us*
(Vanessa German, 2018)
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)**

incorporated into her art.

“There are other colors too,” Bass writes, “... yellow, pink, bits of orange and green, the faceted brown-black of African masks and dark skin.”

“Everything is intentional,” German said. “You’ll always see birds because birds, in my lexicon, stand for true liberty



***Miracles and Glory Abound*, (Vanessa German, 2018)
(Photo by Harold C. Ford)**

... Everything means something.”

African inspiration:

Discerning makers of art familiar with German’s work detect a style inspired by Africa. Artist and poet Daniel Simmons writes:

“German’s works are that of a modern magical diviner, drawing power from accumulated objects from personal history, community, and the society in

which she resides and creates. Like the traditional makers of nkisi, who used various materials available to them, such as bones, nails, pieces of mirrors, and herbal potions to infuse magic into the objects ... ”

Nkisi are spirits, or an object that a spirit inhabits. The term is frequently applied to objects found in the Congo Basin in Central Africa.

German’s Flint connectedness

German may feel kinship with a city whose public perception is that of a beleaguered urban center wracked by crime, poverty, and infrastructure failures. Homewood, her adopted neighborhood in easternmost Pittsburgh, was described as “the most dangerous neighborhood in America” by MSNBC journalist Rachel Maddow.

Reminding her audience that she is a native of Pennsylvania “fracking country,” she said she understands the importance of clean, safe, drinking water. “We have to think politically about water,” she said during her visit to the FIA. She stood

with Native Americans at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation to oppose the construction of oil pipelines under natural waterways.

Humanness is likely the only commonality that German needs to find connectedness. She told her 2017 Connection audience: “We are earthling siblings, gravity-bound, oxygen-breathing, creatures of carbon star-shine, and dust. We are 99 to 99.9 percent genetically identical.”

The Vanessa German exhibit, *Miracles and Glory Abound*, is at the Flint Institute of Arts through April 20. A companion exhibit, *Engaging African Art: Highlights from the Horn Collection*, runs through May 26. It features works from the Dr. Robert Horn collection drawn from more than 60 African cultures.

EVM Staff Writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

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

UM-Flint Ice Rink Open Skate

Every Wed., Fri., Sat., and Sun. until March 3
Wed: 6 - 9 p.m.
Fri: 5 - 8 p.m.
Sat and Sun: Noon - 4 p.m.
University Pavilion, 303 S. Saginaw St.
810-762-3441
Admission: Free, \$3 skate rental

Enjoy ice skating at the UM-Flint ice rink. Skate rental is available. No hockey pucks or equipment allowed.

Wellness at the Wheel

Mon. - Sat.
Various times
The Ferris Wheel,
615 S. Saginaw St., 6th floor
810-213-4710
Admission: \$12

Enjoy a variety of health and well-being classes offered at the Ferris Wheel.

Schedule:

Monday: 5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Tuesday: 7 a.m. - Rise and Shine Yoga
4:30 p.m. - Pound Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Wednesday: 9:30 a.m. - Ashtanga Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Hatha Yoga
Thursday: 2 p.m. - Adaptive Yoga
5:30 p.m. - Yoga Basics
Friday: 5:30 p.m. - Mindful Movement
Dance
Saturday: 8:15 a.m. - Hatha Yoga

24th Annual Children's Champion Breakfast

Feb. 8
7:30 - 9:30 a.m.
Riverfront Banquet Center,
1 Riverfront Ctr. W.
Admission: \$26.95

Enjoy a fun-filled breakfast where various organizations and individuals will be recognized for their contributions to keeping Genesee County a great place to raise kids.

February Art Walk

Feb. 8
6 p.m.
Various Locations Downtown
Admission: Free

Enjoy food, drink, and art at various locations downtown.

Friends of Modern Art Film Series: "The Gospel According to Andre"

Feb. 8 and Feb. 9, 7:30 p.m.
Feb. 10, 2 p.m.
Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
810-234-1695
Admission: \$4-6

Watch a film following fashion editor Andre Leon Talley, featuring interviews with Whoopi Goldberg, Diddy Combs, and more.

Flint Handmade 5th Annual Valentine's Mini Market

Feb. 9
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Flint Farmers' Market, 300 E. First St.
810-232-1399
Admission: Free

A mini market to get ready for Valentine's Day. Shop from local vendors and get a take-and-make craft.

Science on Tap: Projects to Improve Health Equity

Feb. 12
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.
Table & Tap, 555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631

Join John Girdwood, a UM-Flint sociology lecturer, in a discussion on health equity in Table & Tap's casual setting.

Children's Storytime at Totem: "The Day Gogo Went to Vote"

Feb. 9
11 a.m.
Totem Books, 620 W. Court St.
810-407-6402
Admission: Free

Join Totem and UM-Flint's Africana Studies Program to celebrate Black History Month during the weekly children's story time. The story, "The Day Gogo Went to Vote," which was praised by Nelson Mandela as "inspiring and moving," will be read, as well as a fun craft and snack.

4th Annual African-American Film Series: "Love Jacked"

Feb. 14
5:30 - 9:30 p.m.
Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
Admission: Suggested donation of \$5 per person

Enjoy an evening of fun, live music, art, and a showing of the film "Love Jacked", a rom-com following Maya and her clashes with her father when she returns from a trip to Africa with a fiancée.

Pax Christi

Feb. 14
10 a.m.
Dorothy's House of Coffee, 503 East St.
989-413-8538

Pax Christi strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring and witnessing to the call of non-violence. Coffee or tea by donation. All faiths welcome.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

Feb. 15
7:30 p.m.
The Capitol Theatre, 140 E. 2nd St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$10-25

See Shakespeare's classic play following two sets of lovers as they struggle to stay together and overcome the magic of the faerie realm.

3rd Annual Galentine's Day

Feb. 17
Noon - 7 p.m.
Flint Local 432, 124 W. 1st St.
Admission: Free

Come together at the Local to help those in need during this time. Bring items to donate and receive a raffle ticket per item. Raffle prizes include gift cards and services by local sponsors. Items that can be donated should be hygiene related. Some examples include: feminine products, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, laundry items, infant care supplies, etc.

Comedy Night at Totem

Feb. 22
8 p.m.
Totem Books, 620 W. Court St.
Admission: \$15 per ticket
(810)-407-6402

Enjoy a night of laughs. Ages 18 and over only, please.

Cabaret at the Captiol

Feb. 22 and 23
7:30 p.m.
The Capitol Theatre, 140 E. 2nd St.
810-237-7333
Admission: Check thewhiting.com for ticket prices

Enjoy an evening of Broadway hits performed by UM-Flint students in an intimate cabaret setting.

Science on Tap: The Vulgar Linguist - Swearing Over Time

Feb. 26
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.
Table & Tap, 555 S. Saginaw St.
810-250-3631

Join Emily Feuerherm, a UM-Flint assistant professor in linguistics, in a discussion on swearing throughout human history.

"Freedom Bound"

Feb. 26
7 p.m.
The Whiting, 1241 E. Kearsley St.
810-237-7333
Admission: \$20

See the story of the Underground Railroad and escaped slave Addison White. Recommended for 3rd graders and older. Runs about 50 minutes with a Q&A session following.

... Politics

(Continued from Page 3.)

Senate, to discuss future plans. That meeting alone doesn't guarantee anything, but there is one issue where both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans have found common ground. So far, both parties have come together on bills to limit Michigan's asset forfeiture law, which has allowed law enforcement to seize property from individuals, even if there is no criminal conviction. In a rare instance of politics making strange bedfellows, both the liberal American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the conservative Mackinac Center have pushed to limit the practice.

The Michigan Supreme Court, where Republicans are a majority, unanimously selected Democrat Bridget McCormack as chief justice for the upcoming term, in hopes of raising the court's image above the partisan bickering of the legislature and the governor. Their new slogan is "aggressive non-partisanship."

That's only two issues, and there will be plenty of room for partisan division in Lansing. Issues like the roads, infrastructure, K-12 school funding, gerrymandering, Enbridge Line 5, auto insurance reform, the MSU Nasser scandal, and the Flint water crisis, certainly won't find easy agreement between the parties. But at least there are some early indications that things might be different this time around in the state capitol.

On the local level: mayoral challenges coming?

The city of Flint is about to have its first election under its new charter. Mayor Weaver, having survived a recall attempt over a year ago, has already raised \$250,000 for her campaign and will be a formidable candidate. Several groups already are in the process of recruiting opponents for the August primary and the November election. In the months to come we'll hear a number of names, both well-known and not, put forward as Weaver's potential replacement.

As the mayoral contest heats up, we're likely to see the pro- and anti-Weaver

forces gear up for the campaign. Given the nature of recent city council meetings, (which make the worst of Washington seem positively statesmanlike), the council members may be even more divided as they take sides in the mayoral contest. However, we'll see if the recent ouster of Eric Mays as chair of the finance committee adds even more fuel to the fire, or is the start of a council that can work together more effectively.

Still no ombudsman

There will be many issues driving the Flint mayoral campaign, but one that should be at the top of the agenda is the appointment of a city ombudsman. The new city charter was approved by the voters in 2017, and took effect over a year ago. Yet, over the past year, the mayor, and some on the council, have delayed the appointment of the Ethics and Accountability Board (EAB), which has the duty of appointing an ombudsman. The board is finally in place, but there is still no ombudsman. Though the ombudsman's position has been posted, disputes over funding have slowed the process. The EAB hopes to fill the position by March. If not, it will likely be a key issue for the mayoral campaign, and it should be.

Political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

7,966+

Source: press release from Candice Mushatt, City of Flint public information officer dated 01/28/19.

Crews from the five area contractors doing the replacements have identified copper service lines at a total of 9,919 homes that did not need to be replaced. A total of 20,490 pipes have been excavated altogether as of 01/28.

The city aims to have all of Flint's lead-tainted service lines replaced by 2020.



St. Paul's Episcopal Church MUSIC IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

FEBRUARY CONCERT

• Sunday, Feb. 24, 4:00 pm
A² Youth Chorale

**Admission:
\$10 Adults, \$5 Students,
or Membership Pass**

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
711 South Saginaw Street
Flint, Michigan 48502
810-234-8637

Flint River Coalition celebrates

By Jan Worth-Nelson

About 200 supporters and sponsors of the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC) braved sub-zero temperatures Jan. 31 to attend "The Voice of the River," an annual celebration to raise funds and highlight progress on river clean-up, environmental education, and recreational access.

News offered included recent announcement of the 72-mile Flint River Trail as one of the first eight state-designated water trails in Michigan. Flint's trail, encompassing almost all of the river's 78 miles, travels from the headwaters in Lapeer County into Genesee County.

Rebecca Fedewa, FRWC executive director, also announced upcoming access improvements for the Mott Park Recreation Area, including a paddlers' landing with safe and easier access to the river. Funds are being sought to match \$50,000 from Patronicity, a state-sponsored civic crowd-funding platform of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The campaign has been primed by \$10,000 from the Hagerman Foundation. More info available at flintriver.org.

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

Wanted: 150,000 responses for water crisis data, resource assistance through Flint Registry

By Jan Worth-Nelson

The Flint Registry, a four-year, federally funded program designed to locate people exposed to the Flint water crisis, document and monitor their experience, and connect them with services and programs to promote health and wellness, launched formally in January at the Flint Farmers' Market amidst a dozen celebratory speeches, music, art, free teeshirts and cookies.

Speakers included Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, who emceed the event, along with Mayor Karen Weaver, U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, U.S. Congressman Dan Kildee, U.S. Congressman John Moolenaar of Midland, along with local residents and teens from the Flint Youth Justice League.

"We are moving from crisis to recovery," Weaver said, "and this is part of what has been taking us to recovery."

The Registry, she said, "is something we fought for, and we fought hard. What we need are fighters to keep fighting. This will help us decide what else we need to bring to Flint for services for our residents."

The main point repeated by many of the speakers was that "this will only work if people sign up," as U.S. Senator Gary Peters said. "That's the surest way you'll be able to get the help you need."

Registry staff, headed by director Dr. Nicole Jones, are seeking anyone exposed to the Flint Water Crisis from April 25, 2014, when Flint's water switched to the Flint River, to October 2015, when the city reconnected to Lake Huron water — the high-risk period prior to the emergency declaration announcement.

That target population includes anyone who went to school in Flint, went to day-care in Flint, or worked in Flint — including prenatal exposure. Registry staff estimate that number to be about 150,000.

Enrollees are requested to fill out a survey, which takes about 45 minutes. More information on how to enroll is available at FlintRegistry.org, 833-GOFLINT, OR flintcares.com.



Although the January celebration marked the launch of the formal enrollment period for the registry, about 6,000 people already have signed up in a "pre-enrollment" phase, through the website FlintRegistry.org. (A July 3 story at eastvillagemagazine.org offers more detail.)

Hanna-Attisha said the Registry staff has conducted 150 outreach events to inform the public, and have trained 235 "Flint Registry ambassadors" who will help continue the education and enrollment campaign.

Funding for the program originated with \$14.4 million earmarked for Flint from the \$150 million Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act signed by President Obama in December 2016. Dollars come in annual awards (\$3.2 million last year) through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and related Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registries.

The Dean of the MSU College of Human Medicine, Norman Beauchamp, echoed the importance of the Flint Registry project, paraphrasing Thomas Carlyle that "He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything."

After Congressman Kildee noted to the audience that one of the biggest casualties of the water crisis was the public's loss of trust in its public servants, an acknowledgement came from Robert Gordon, newly appointed director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Gordon said he was on his fifth day on the job after being hired by incoming Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Bemoaning the loss of trust, in particular from his own department, Gordon said, "How do we rebuild that trust? One, we do the work. I have been so impressed with people you know and you don't know who are there working--

12-hour days. We need to keep doing that work."

Second, he said, "We need to hold firm to the right principles." He said he told his staff those principles include, "That you honor and listen to science and scientists, you put the interests of the public ahead of agency and personal interests, and you treat people, whatever their race or background or where they're from, with dignity, respect and with honesty. Those are hard principles to live up to and I won't promise everything overnight, but those are the principles Gov. Whitmer believes in and I believe in and I hope you will hold me accountable."

Kenyatta Dotson, chair of the Flint Registry community advisory board, said the Registry process has been community-informed and community-driven moving forward. She said Registry staff are "really listening" and taking many steps to educate and inform the community of the benefits of registering. "We have all been impacted ... therefore we need to register ourselves, our family and others that we are closely connected to. It's time for recovery, it's time for healing from the devastation of the Flint Water Crisis."

Hanna-Attisha detailed what she called "A model program for recovery," in the months during and since the crisis, including "expanded home visiting, two child care centers, Medicaid expansion, breast-feeding support services, nutrition support, mindfulness in our schools — the list goes on and on to mitigate the impact of this crisis."

She also introduced the newest resource for children in Flint, the Neurodevelopmental Center for Excellence, a result of an ACLU lawsuit settlement. It offers, she said, the resources to thoroughly assess all the children of Flint — a partnership with Genesee Health Systems and Hurley Medical Center.

Hanna-Attisha concluded with a quote from Martin Luther King: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane." She

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... Signs

(Continued from Page 16.)

we felt a little heroic. Everyone was laughing and slapping backs and hands. Good deed done. That had never happened before and it's fair to say it never happened again. I'm not sure I ever felt more like a member of an extended family than I did that day.



Gary Fisher
(Photo by Jenny Lane Studios)

We talked about our city with pride, and especially about our part of the city. That part — that side — the Eastside. It was one word to us — like a city: “Where do I live? The Eastside.” And there were daily lessons to learn there. My folks were often the professors for not just my sister Vickie and me, but many of the kids in the ‘hood. My mom was the neighborhood lunch lady. The Homeroom Mom. The official chauffeur to all ball games. She taught my buddy Dennis how to tie his shoes. Damn near raised several other neighborhood kids. She was there to bail them out of trouble, listen to their problems, loan a couple of bucks, or make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I learned what it meant to

be there for someone — to really be there.

My dad was the gym teacher, boxing coach, and my personal big brother back up if fights became unfair. You could fight, sure, but it had to be clean, and most of all it had to be fair. He also made sure we had lots of sports stuff, all of the equipment and balls and bats. My folks liked knowing where I was, so we had a little pool in the summer. We had a swing set and a whirly bird. They encouraged my entrepreneurial instincts and I wrote and distributed a handwritten newspaper called “*The Neighborhood News*” (my investigative journalism caught the neighborhood peeping Tom). I ran a carnival in my backyard (we hired entertainment and security guards, i.e., the “older guys”), and I was the neighborhood paper boy for the *Flint Journal*. Talk about a business education!

My folks let us wear the yard out playing football and baseball on the side yard, soccer in the backyard, and endless games of catch on the front yard. My pals and I wore the grass down to dirt. We played “round up” until 11 on summer nights and had to duck a cop car or two because some neighbors weren’t thrilled with kids on their roofs at 11 p.m. We “found” some orange cones and made goals for street hockey on Wisconsin, and used spray paint to make yard markers for street football. I left a lot of skin on Wisconsin Avenue. But far more crucial was what I picked up, and that made all the difference.

I came to understand loyalty, trust, and honor. I was educated on the fine art of building coalitions, organizing, leadership and communicating. I got a Ph.D. in relationships and many of those

street football, Mountain Dew chugging, bike patrol partners are still close friends today. We were proud to be from Flint, proud to be from the East Side, and pride mattered — a lot.

But the most valuable thing I learned was love. What it meant to love where you lived, who you lived with, what it meant to be loved, to love your neighbors, and to feel the warm embrace of being from somewhere, and belonging to something: A city, a community, a family. It wasn’t hard to do. If I ever needed a reminder I just had to look up at those green signs and it all made sense.

Gary L. “Fish” Fisher was born and raised in Flint and has lived in the area most of his life, residing in both the East Side and East Village neighborhoods. His family has been a part of the Flint area for over 100 years. In fact, they were in Flint when General Motors got its start; his great-grandfather, grandfathers, grandmother, and dad (along with numerous cousins, uncles, and aunts) all worked for GM, most of them at “The Buick.” His fascination with the history of the city has existed as long as he can remember. Fisher moved his financial planning business into the Mott Foundation building during the water crisis, in part as a show of support and solidarity for his hometown, he says, and has been there for three years. He is a trustee on the board of the Genesee County Historical Society and hosts a radio show on WFNT-AM 1470 every Wednesday at 11 a.m. EST called “Fish and The Flint Chronicles.”

Fisher can be reached at ply2win2006@aol.com

... Registry

(Continued from Page 14.)

further quoted him, “Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.”

“Flint has had its share of injustice — social, economic, racial,” she said, “... The work toward restorative justice is a long path, but please know that this Registry is one tiny way of restoring that justice and bridging those inequalities, especially in health.”

Pastor Rigel Dawson of North Central Church of Christ cited an anonymous

quote, “The bitter fruit of crisis often carries the precious seed of growth.”

“I hate what was done to us, but I love what we’ve done with it,” Dawson said. “I love that so many have discovered their strength, found their voice, been able to tell their story in a powerful way; strong bonds have been formed, and lasting partnerships. We stood up for ourselves, doggedly pursued outside resources we were owed, and began creating our own.”

“The Flint Registry represents our determination not to be overlooked, or undercut, or ignored ... the Flint Registry

represents that we will not be paved over with platitudes or empty promises, but to come together as a community and be counted. Because we count. We matter,” Dawson said. Musician and singer Roshanda Womack ended the event with an original song, “We Are Flint.”

The Flint Registry is located in the old *Flint Journal* building, now owned by Michigan State University, at East First Street across from the Farmers’ Market.

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

Village Life

A tale of two signs on the “Eastside” of Flint

By Gary Fisher

They’re just metal street signs. Been there for years, decades, a very long time, after all. There they are perched at the top of a standard street sign pole.

Nothing to see here, folks.

Or maybe there is. Well at least for *me* there is. That’s because sometimes street signs aren’t just street signs. Sometimes they are so much more. Those two signs were the literal and figurative signposts of not only my life, but also scores of other lives for the last 100 years.

The date is stamped on the sidewalk right below the sign: 1919. That’s the year they poured the concrete, laid out the avenue, and decided it should be a place where people lived. Modest homes with tidy yards, two bedrooms and a single bathroom so tiny you could turn on the shower, flush the toilet, and brush your teeth in the sink — simultaneously (I did this literally thousands of times). Homes with a true Michigan basement that were home to hard working folks. Immigrants from Europe, migrants from the deep south, young families, and natives alike.

The signs bear the name of a state and of a person. Wisconsin and Cronk, juxtaposed just so across one another, a corner on the “Ave.” So it was that situated at the corner of Wisconsin and Cronk Avenues on the east side of Flint was a “university” of sorts. Like a typical institution of higher education it was a place where learning took place. It was a place where lessons were learned. The signs that seemed so benign were anything but.

To wake up every day and look at those signs told you some things. They told you where you lived for sure. They even told you how you lived. If you looked up and saw those signs, your family probably relied in some way or the other on one of the Earth’s greatest factory complexes located just a few blocks away. There were two close by, both east and west: General Motors and Buick’s first factory to the west, and AC Spark Plug to the east.

If you saw those signs you knew you



were at a crossroads of the American experience of the 20th century. From a cartographer’s perspective you were somewhere in the hazy epicenter of it all. You were in the halfway point between those two goliaths of the American Arsenal of Democracy, slanted somewhere between the tip of that Buick factory, the Lewis and Leith Street neighborhoods, and the white collar Court Street/East Village. Just a bit to the south and east was the predominantly black part of the East Side— once called Floral Park (although no one I know who lived there ever heard it called that) and long known as “The 9th Street” area in my ‘hood. I knew my way around them all. How could I not? I was living in the traffic station centrifuge. A weigh station of sorts — right there on the corner.

In the summer I could step out onto my back porch and take a deep breath in and smell equal parts Buick paint jobs and drop forge refuse exhaust and Angelo’s Coney Islands and french fries. They both smelled like home to me — especially Angelo’s because that was just two quick blocks away. Two blocks to the fries and gravy. Two blocks to the pure delight of the ultimate community meeting place. Glance at the signs and you knew you were dwelling in a special place. Blue collar and white collar. Rich and poor. Black and white.

The American Century and a helluva hotdog

The signs were there when those factories were being built up. When the first denizens graced the slapped-up

houses built specifically for the immigrant residents. From Poland, and Russia. From Germany and Canada. The Scots — Irish from Missouri, Tennessee, and Arkansas. All mashed together in that little neighborhood. The lawns were mostly well manicured. The houses kept up. Little gardens, picket fences, tidy patches of the American Dream, nestled together in a universal understanding of our status, or comprehensive lack thereof.

Saying a neighborhood is a “family” sounds clichéd at best, and a fantastical bit of memory whitewashing at worst. But there it was. We may have done a little bit of fighting amongst ourselves, but outsiders better leave us alone — or they’d get all of us.

I remember one poor soul in particular who learned that lesson the hard way. He rode the city bus looking for a victim and found a good one in an elderly lady at the corner of Ohio and Franklin Avenues, and so he mugged her. Hit her and grabbed her purse. Then he ran down Ohio Avenue, turned right, headed towards those two signs — Wisconsin and Cronk. So he ran past my buddies and me, swigging on big glass bottles of Mountain Dew. He was wearing a baby blue sweat suit and carrying a purse. As our jaws dropped, gazes switched to the man in the brown plaid sport coat running after him yelling “Did you see a guy in a sweat suit carrying a purse run by? He hit my mom and stole her purse!” We jumped on our homemade motocross bikes and gave chase. We were soon joined by the Vietnam vet Vic who lived on the corner, the former FBI agent Ward Trevarthen in his car, and a bunch of long-haired stoners who leapt off of the couch on their porch.

We caught him just as he made a sprint toward Kearsley Park. When the cops showed up, my buddy Knight and I had the purse and were being interviewed by *The Flint Journal* writer who showed up on the scene. We were rather pleased with ourselves and best of all

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