



# East Village

**Magazine**

May 2020

*Photograph by  
Jan Worth-Nelson*

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## Commentary Beloved neighbor, this nurse captures wrenching COVID-19 realities

by Paul Rozycki



### Message at the DaVita Dialysis Center, Davison Road

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

With the 24/7 news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are days when the story becomes nothing more than a blur of infection numbers, death rates, protests, presidential press conferences, and predictions about when the curve will flatten, or when a vaccine will be found. When the tsunami of news and numbers is so overwhelming, it's easy to lose sight of the true impact of the crisis on individuals.

Sometimes it just takes the voice of one person to humanize the crisis in a way that all the numbers, charts, statistics, and medical reports can't.

Shelly Rettberg-Chuleas is our neighbor in the East Court area. We've known Shelly and her family for years, been to her wedding, attended family gatherings, celebrated her son's graduation, and exchanged greetings over the backyard fence as our pets checked each other out. She attended Mott Community College and the University of Michigan-Flint as she earned her nursing degree almost a decade ago.

Shelly is now a nurse at a local hospital, and like all those in the health care profession, she has been dealing with the overwhelming impact of the COVID-19 crisis daily. Like many health care workers, she's lost colleagues to the virus in recent months. By every measure, it's an emotionally draining challenge. When we see her car in the driveway we know she has completed another 13-hour shift.

A few weeks ago, on Facebook, Shelly posted her personal reaction to losing

her first COVID-19 patient that goes to the gut of what this crisis means. In the last few months, there have been millions of words written and spoken about the COVID-19 pandemic, but sometimes a brief, honest response, from someone on the front lines, can say more than 10,000 words from those who aren't there. As one who is in the center of this, Shelly's words give powerful meaning to the painful and emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She wrote:

*"I lost my first Covid patient. I have never felt so incredibly helpless. It was like watching a train wreck that you were powerless to stop. As a critical care nurse we have a different magic bag of tricks than the med surge floors do."*

*"We frequently bring patients back from the brink of death and watch them walk out the front door."*

*"We are all adrenaline junkies, we thrive in the chaos of it all and function together like a well-oiled machine."*

*"But this shit, this is like nothing I have ever witnessed."*

*"Not one trick in my magic bag worked, I felt helpless, useless, defeated..."*

*"I will never get over this one."*

*"These are not just numbers on a leader board, these are human beings, and for us they are our extended family, we strive to treat each of our patients like one of our own relatives."*

*"Please, please, stay home, do not"*

(Continued on Page 7.)

Cover: Even Buddha takes precautions in Flint





Photo of the Month: At the pet cemetery—remembered when his luck ran out (Photo by Ed Custer)

## *Flint city council postpones secondary water pipeline decision, reviews expanding 2021 budget*

*By Tom Travis*

., The Flint City Council voted to postpone to May 11 an important resolution to enter into a contract for a secondary water source pipeline and also voted to receive an amended 2021 Flint city budget from city administration.

Both items resulted in long discussion among council members and city officials. The council meeting, conducted via YouTube telephonically April 27 because of the coronavirus, lasted nearly eight and a half hours, adjourning at 1:13 a.m.

One item appeared twice on the agenda — first as a special order then as a reconsideration. The special order called by the city administration was to have Eric Oswald, director of the Drinking Water and Environmental Health Division with the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), to discuss the construction of a secondary water source pipeline.

### **EGLE spokesman: Secondary water pipeline “urgent and necessary”**

Oswald stated the case for having the \$14 million pipeline construction contract fulfilled and for the city council to approve it. Noting that the contract had been approved since 2018 with an original completion date of December 2019, Oswald said the new expected completion date is December 2020. D’Agostini and Sons, of Macomb County, submitted the winning bid for the contract, pending council approval.

The facts, Oswald said, are that in the event of a catastrophic single failure point in the city’s primary water source there is only about one day’s worth of water stored in the supply tanks.

He emphasized the contract before the council for a 5.5 mile long Karegnondi Water Authority secondary water source pipeline, connecting the

Genesee County Drain Commission treatment plant at Francis and Lewis roads to the Flint water treatment plant on Dort Highway at Stewart Street was the only “viable option” for Flint. He noted the contract has met and been approved by the Michigan Safe Drinking Water Act and the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Oswald further stated he does not believe Flint has managerial and technical capacity at this time to operate the treatment of water through the city’s own treatment plant, which had not been used for 50 years before the water crisis. Oswald said the process to meet that managerial and technical capacity would take one to two years.

Councilperson Allan Griggs (8th Ward) who spent his life as a mechanical engineer in the petroleum industry, specifically with water cooling plants for petroleum plants in Saudi Arabia, challenged Oswald,

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

## ... Council

(Continued from Page 4.)

also a trained engineer. Griggs asked why Oswald had said that it would cost “tens of millions of dollars” to bring the Flint water treatment plant up to code.

Oswald stated it would cost that much because when using the secondary source, the plant would be dealing with raw (untreated) water from Lake Huron. He said studies would need to be completed, significant changes and upgrades to the treatment plant and managerial and technical training would need to be done.

Griggs rebutted that he has visited the plant twice, which had been idle for



**Allan Griggs**  
(Screenshot by Tom Travis)

50 years until the water crisis, and saw that it definitely needed upgrading. But in Griggs' opinion it would cost \$5 to \$10 million to update the plant, not tens of millions.

Griggs pointed out he does not believe building this secondary water source pipeline is actually a “secondary” water source. Griggs argued that because both Great Lakes Water Authority (and the Karegnondi Water Authority) get their water from Lake Huron.

He noted a case in 1993 in Milwaukee when a sewage spill into Lake Michigan caused bacteria to get into two water source points for the city. Griggs stated, “God forbid” if a terrorist got something into Lake Huron and both our primary water source and “secondary” water source were contaminated and unusable. Griggs challenged with the question, “what then?” Griggs

stated, “I’m looking out for the safety of our city.”

### **Council and city officials discuss ramifications of delay**

Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) explained to Oswald that, “there was a breach of trust with MDEQ [the former name of EGLE] and this community.” Galloway asked Oswald why the project has been so delayed. Oswald noted there had been design delays, delays in funding from the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act, delays in paperwork from the City of Flint getting to the state, and finally delays in the obtaining of easements and right-of-way clearances.

City of Flint Director of Public Works Rob Bincsik stated bids are good for 60 days. The D’Agostini contract for the secondary water source pipeline was approved March 12, meaning it is good until May 12. Councilperson Eric Mays noted the next council meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2020.

Councilperson Santino Guerra (3rd Ward) made the motion to reconsider the contract with D’Agostini and Sons for the secondary water source pipeline. Mays then made a substitute motion to postpone the vote on the reconsideration until the May 11 meeting. Griggs seconded Mays’ substitute motion.

The council vote on the motion to postpone was 5 yes to 4 no. Voting no were Maurice Davis (2nd Ward), Guerra (3rd Ward), Kate Fields (4th Ward) and Eva Worthing (9th Ward).

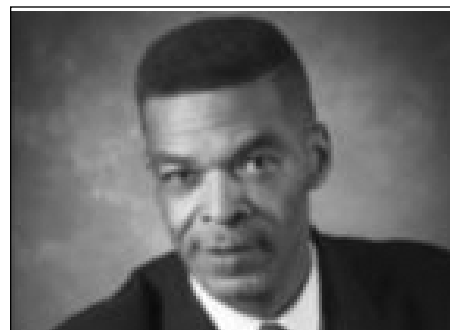
### **City Finance Department presents amended 2020/2021 budget**

On March 3, Mayor Sheldon Neeley presented a \$55.6 million budget to the City Council. However, city officials are now presenting the council a roughly \$12 million dollar increase on that estimate. In a previous council committee meeting, City of Flint’s chief economic advisor Eric Scorsone stated the increase was due to legacy or pension costs. Scorsone is

an associate professor and director of the Center for Local Government Finance and Policy at Michigan State University.

Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward) opposed receiving the amended budget, arguing that according to the charter there is a set day for the City Council to receive a budget from the administration. He argued the council should continue with the already accepted budget in place and if the city has now found that there are increases necessary they should be presented as separate amendments to the council.

Ultimately, the council voted to receive the budget 6-3 with Mays, Galloway and Winfrey-Carter voting no. Once the amended budget was received, Scorsone and City Treasurer Amanda Trujillo discussed what Trujillo described as “a presentation of differences,” meaning differences between the original budget presented



**Eric Mays**  
(Screenshot by Tom Travis)

to council March 3 and the amended budget.

The amended budget changes were discussed without the public’s ability to see it either online or in a hard copy form. City finance officials and the council could see the Power Point presentation during the meeting, but the public could not see what was being discussed.

The budget is now available for the public to view on the City’s website.

The public will be able to view and comment on the budget at the YouTube/Telephonic city council meeting starting 5:30 p.m. Monday, May 11.

*EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can be reached at [tomntravis@gmail.com](mailto:tomntravis@gmail.com).*

# Greenhouse owner tells gardeners: keep tilling soil

By Darlene C. Carey

Amid the COVID-19 fears, the protest echoes, and the stay-at-home spring, the roots of some Michiganders' voices became apparent, deeply embedded in the traditions of doing and going. It is no wonder people are so entrenched in their convictions about what they can and cannot do that they are willing to risk so much — sometimes, too much.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer faced a national backlash for expanding restrictions that impacted small business such as garden nurseries and landscaping. The order, issued April 9, which many Michiganders felt was overreaching, was an attempt to curb the state's

Meanwhile the world goes on."

"We think it is important that we all stay safe, and social distancing is working," says Joe Wojciechowski, local owner of Wojo's Greenhouse at 7360 E. Court St. in Davison.

Asked to weigh in on the protests surrounding the stay-at-home order, Wojciechowski states simply, "We live in a country of free speech." The Michigan Conservative Coalition had crowded the streets surrounding downtown Lansing, creating noise and congestion in opposition to the stay-at-home order.

Were the orders excessive, or was the governor rightly focusing on being safe? Wojciechowski insists, "She was being safe, although most other states consider a garden center an essential business; we have not here in Michigan."

He explained why so many Michiganders might have felt conflicted. "We do grow about a half million vegetable transplants, along with fruit trees and supplies to support your garden. Since vegetable plants are connected with food, that is why most states consider garden centers essential, not to mention the health benefits of gardening on both the body and the soul. Flowers are better than anti-depressants for many people."

When asked when the planting season starts, Wojciechowski states, "That would depend on the plant. Some of the best times to plant trees would be March and April."

Debates surround the timing of getting seeds started in consideration of Michigan's cool weather. Wojciechowski says, "Flowers like pansies do well in the cooler season, so April is a great time for them. Other frost-tolerant items such as cabbage, broccoli, kale, most perennials, and flowers like petunias can be planted now as frost doesn't hurt them. Most other sensitive plants it is best around mid-May, depending on the weather."

Speculating on how the order is negatively impacting smaller nurseries, Wojciechowski says, "Not being able to open and sell our product has not helped." However, this did not stifle his efforts in

preparing for when business can safely resume. "We have been working to make our shopping space safer by creating more open spaces, marking floors for social distancing, sanitizing items throughout the day, installing sneeze screens for our cashiers, wearing masks and other things as well."

Essential workers remain on hand to



**Teresa St. Pierre unloading flowers at Wojo's**  
(Photo by Darlene Carey)

prepare for this year's growing season.

"As far as plants on time," Wojciechowski said, "we do have our own growing facility and greenhouse workers are considered essential, so we have been here safely planting and growing our plants during this time. We have plants that are ready, and will have just as many plants available as we have had other years."

There has been a rise in seed buying, likely due to a fear of food scarcity. According the International Seed Federation, a non-governmental, non-profit organization representing the interests of the seed industry globally, "Seed is the starting point of the food system. Farmers everywhere depend on access to quality seed in order to grow healthy crops. Seed is a globally traded agricultural product, with inter-



**Wojo's customers observing the "six-foot rule"**  
(Photo by Darlene Carey)

vere coronavirus outbreak.

While many of the order's provisions have garnered scrutiny, Whitmer's ban on landscaping work and the closure of garden centers and nurseries prompted some of the greatest resistance, a wave of frustration voiced all around. Mary Oliver, a naturalist poet, writes, "Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

(Continued on Page 7.)

## ... Garden

(Continued from Page 6.)

national seed trade having increased tenfold during the past 15-20 years. Therefore, unrestricted international movement of seed is critical to ensure food security.”

Does Wojciechowski expect a rise in people planting their own food? “Yes we



**Displays at Wojo's**  
(Photo by Darlene Carey)

do,” he says, “just like when the economy collapsed in 2008 - 2009, there was a large increase in vegetable gardens. History seems to be repeating as many are preparing

their own “COVID-19 Victory Garden.”

According to modernfarmer.com, “During World War II, Americans were urged to plant “Victory Gardens” as the nation faced potential food shortages. Popularized by women’s clubs and patriotic posters, the movement caught on, and an estimated 40 percent of the nation’s supplies of fresh vegetables were soon produced in backyards, front yards, church lots and school grounds. The COVID-19 crisis has yet to seriously threaten the food supply, but the sight of empty grocery store shelves has led to calls for “corona victory gardens.”

Wojciechowski said garden centers in the southern U.S. have expanded their supply of vegetable plants and seeds, and Wojo’s also has increased the number of vegetable plants to be available for the spring.

So when asked what Michiganders can focus on in preparation for the gardening season, Wojciechowski states, “Work the soil in their gardens, keeping the soil

loose and worked up regularly ahead of planting will help keep your weeds down and you will have softer ground to plant in once the time is right.”

While Gov. Whitmer extended the “stay-at-home” until May 15 (and now to May 29) she stated lawn services, garden shops, landscapers and nurseries may reopen, but must adhere to “enhanced” social-distancing rules, which means restricting the number of workers to those “strictly necessary to perform the in-person work.”

When the fear of COVID-19 subsides, the protests echo, and the spring is no longer silent, what takes root are words of wisdom; “Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination,” Mary Oliver writes. “How will you, the lonely, imagine this place we inhabit together?”

*EVM Staff Writer and photographer Darlene Carey can be reached at [darcar7@hotmail.com](mailto:darcar7@hotmail.com).*

## ... Nurse

(Continued from Page 3.)

*burden your family with the horrific decision of letting you die versus continuing to suffer.”*

Shelly’s Facebook post says much about the emotional toll on those who must daily face the tragedy of the COVID-19 virus, not only in their workplaces and with their patients. Not only do they feel the grief of losing a patient, but they must also deal with the continual fear that they may become infected themselves, or bring the virus home to their families.

Adding to those worries is the fact that so many doctors, nurses and other health care workers must face the virus without the necessary protection. Across the nation, there are endless stories of medical personnel having to go into patients’ rooms with patchwork masks, gloves, gowns, or faceshields as the hospitals scramble to find adequate supplies. In the most technologically advanced nation in the world, household sewing circles are creating masks, and high school shop classes are asked to make face shields. States have been forced to compete with each other for scarce supplies as the virus

moves from one “hot spot” to another. More than a few hospitals have faced protests over the lack of protective gear. (Even with full protective gear, the risk is significant for health care workers.)



**Shelly Rettburg-Chuleas, in face mask and cap made by her sister and nephew**  
( Selfie provided by Rettburg-Chuleas)

Shelly’s face mask and cap were handmade by her nephew and her sister.

Someday, perhaps soon, in spite of all the bickering between the state and

national governments, there will be enough protective gear for all hospital workers, as major industries begin to fill the void. That will be great news for all medical workers, as well as their patients. They will all be able to breathe a small sigh of relief, especially as the curve flattens.

But whenever that happens, we shouldn’t forget the courage and tenacity all medical workers showed when they had to make do with either makeshift protection, or none at all. They went to work, not knowing if they would have the needed masks and gowns, and not knowing what it would mean for their own health, and that of their families.

While the nurses, doctors and other health care workers deserve all our thanks for what they do under challenging circumstances, we shouldn’t forget all the police officers, firefighters, sanitation workers, postal workers, truck drivers, journalists, store clerks, and many others who don’t have the luxury of staying home as many of us do. If this crisis has done anything, it may have given us a new appreciation of what an “essential” worker is. The typical hedge fund manager or accountant can probably do most of his or her work from the safety of home. The

(Continued on Page 8.)

## ... Nurse

(Continued from Page 7.)

clerk at Wal-Mart, the truck driver, or the cop on the corner can't.

And while the frustration of those who are facing major financial problems with the statewide shutdown is understandable, and real, we shouldn't lose sight of the true human cost to those whose lives are threatened with the virus, and those who put their lives on the line to care for them. With more than 25 million unemployed, we need to do whatever possible to

aid those hurting financially. But until the virus is history, and both employees and customers feel safe, business won't bounce back to what it was before.

This crisis will end, not with raucous protests, or bombastic presidential tweets, but with the dedication, commitment, and scientific knowledge of those who are on the front lines, day in and day out.

In the end, they all deserve our heartfelt thanks that go beyond mere words.

EVM Columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at [paul.rozenki@mcc.edu](mailto:paul.rozenki@mcc.edu).



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### Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint: 9,554

Because of the governor's order, no pipeline replacements were conducted in April. Totals as of March 20 were 9,554 lead or galvanized pipes replaced, 25,409 pipes excavated. No date has been set for resuming work.

A total of 15,526 pipes have been discovered to be copper service lines.


### Unclassified ads

• **Three-bedroom townhouse:** Available Aug.30, partially furnished, hardwood floors, refrigerator, range, 1½ baths, laundry, off street parking. In the center of it all on cul-de-sac Avon near Kearsley St. Walk three blocks or less to UM-F, MCC, Cultural Center, downtown. References and credit check requested. On site management. \$650 a month plus utilities. E-mail: [ecuster@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ecuster@sbcglobal.net). Or write: Apartment Box 9, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503.

• **Tools Needed:** We are mentoring a student enrolled in auto class at Mott. We are in need of tools. Please check grandpa's, dad's mom's tool box for donation or sale of wrenches, pliers, screwdriver sockets compression gauges etc; Thank You! IT TAKES A VILLAGE and there's none better than East Village. Call Jerry at 714-342-7531.

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# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

*"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers— beginning after our publication date of May 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our June issue, email your event to us by May 24 to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com).*

## Flint Institute of Arts

The FIA is providing several places you can click on from the home page of their website. There are nine in all. Two of these feature kid's activities for two age groups. Plus, there are tours of the galleries, lectures, and videos to be found. FIA may open again for visiting on May 10, but wait and see.

Go to [flintarts.org](http://flintarts.org).

Free (but there's a place to donate)

## Sloan Museum

At-home science activities, a virtual tour, and videos are available. They are currently renovating, but their summer programs and Scout programs will take place at Longway Planetarium. Registration information is also on the website. Go to [sloanlongway.org/courtland/](http://sloanlongway.org/courtland/) to find out more.

Free

## Longway Planetarium

Flint's Longway says, "in trying times give stargazing a try" and they provide a Sky Guide available for download.

For more info go to [sloanlongway.org](http://sloanlongway.org).

Free

## Events Calendar

Several Tele-Town Hall meetings are listed on this site. As of EVM's date of publication, none are listed other than some that have already occurred. There may be meetings to come in May. The ones listed are focused on the COVID-19 crisis. Check for meetings in May. Go to [member.flintandgenesee.org/events](http://member.flintandgenesee.org/events) to register for any future Tele-Town Hall meetings that will be posted.

## Jigsaw Puzzles

On this site are existing puzzles or you can upload your own pictures and create your own puzzle. There are many sites for this activity and levels of difficulty. Google cited this as one of the best. Go to [magicpuzzles.net](http://magicpuzzles.net) to find out more.

Free

## Exercise at Home

There are a lot of exercise classes offered online. Fast Company is popular and many types of exercise are available. The YMCA also offers on-demand videos and more are on YouTube as well. Go to [fastcompany.com](http://fastcompany.com), [ymca360.org](http://ymca360.org), or [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) for more info. Many are free.

## Go for a Walk!

On the day of this writing, the sky was clear, it hit 72 degrees, there was very little wind, most trees were budding or blossoming, and the birds were chirping happily. Do yourself a favor and get in on some lovely Michigan spring weather while getting a little workout.

Free

## Go for a Drive!

Gas hasn't been this cheap in a long time, so why not take a drive? Pack a picnic lunch or just make it a shorter drive. It will get you out of the house and give you new surroundings. Just the price of the gas.

## Give or Get a Haircut

Whether you've done it before or not, there's help available for how to cut hair online. Short men's styles are a little trickier, but hair grows back. And since everyone is spending so much time away from possible critics, two sites that offer techniques are:

<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2020/04/23/haircut-how-shape-your-own-hair-during-coronavirus-shutdown/5143897002/> (women's)

and [byrdie.com/how-to-cut-mens-hair](http://byrdie.com/how-to-cut-mens-hair).

There are also lots of YouTube tutorials.

Free



Ed Custer's *East Village Magazine* logo reimagined for each issue by Patsy Isenberg

## Commentary

# What Flint already knew when pandemic hit: When policy poisons, community saves

By Robert Thomas

### Editor's Note:

*For most of the past year, East Village Magazine has been working on a very special film project. Titled "Together — A Message from Flint," the film, created in partnership with the League of Women Voters/Flint, is a "get-out-the-vote" project and more. It aspires to be an effective tool for any activist or group whose objective is to mobilize people for working together on the common good. It promotes the power of unity and sets an emotional tone of receptivity and openness toward collaboration. It embraces the fundamental American value of e pluribus unum.*

*Bob Thomas' musings about COVID-19, Flint's history, and the message this has for the rest of America, strike us as powerfully relevant. While his political views are his own and not necessarily those of EVM, we fully subscribe to his concluding suggestion that we are better, together.*

Like an old crow perched on the very thin wire of elder mortality, I see dead bodies and lethal viruses everywhere. While COVID-19 is particularly dangerous to this village elder, paying acute attention to the human power game being played out around me during this pandemic is even more crucial to my daily survival and the survival of my community.

When I heard the lieutenant governor of Texas strongly suggest we elders self-immolate on the altar of Mammon in the intertwining interests of corrupt political and economic systems, I knew my viral dangers were more than biologic, but no less lethal.

The red glare of the virus' global destructive path clearly illuminates a rat's nest of vaccine-proof human viruses colluding with COVID-19's scorched earth policy. Cons, cults, corruption, greed, and stupidity coagulate to dance with COVID-19 in a macabre portending of a perfect viral storm. A pandemic biologic virus awash in a cauldron of equally lethal human viruses, explains fear and loathing as a state of being and a manipulative tool of conscious human power.



**Sign on a car at an April 25 rally, 6th anniversary of the start of the water crisis**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

My location is critical to my assessment and orientation.

Here in Flint, it is Yogi Berra's déjà vu all over again when it comes to lethal viruses of human origin, propagation, and transmission. We have been thoroughly schooled in chicanery, confirmed by failed leadership at every level and its dire consequences for we the people.

We have had our constitutional right to vote revoked by an emergency manager state law that was twice voted down by we the people. The law continues to stand because it remains financially enabled, not democratically determined.

We have learned what it means to be controlled and poisoned by economic and political policy.

We have learned we were nobod-

ies, collateral damage in a rigged deck casino, awash in the corrupt territories of Mammon where even religious cults were promoting hateful division and the idolatry of money and power. What with preachers proclaiming the Gospel of Wealth and an atheist in the White House mandating that COVID-19 would disappear, "like a miracle," the con was definitely on.

Like biologic viruses, cons replicate as situations dictate. What the con requires is carriers, the power of the cult. The enablers of the supremacy of the Great Leader, the ringmaster of the con, are indispensable to the shepherd's dark arts of command, control, and magical thinking. The Great Leader's essential voice is the Pravda of propaganda, the voice of the con and the cult. The language, Gibberish, issues forth like the divisive fumes from the Tower of Babel.

Then along comes COVID-19, a real game changer at every level of human existence. Biologic viruses don't care about power or making a buck; they just go on being viruses following the natural order of their evolution. There are no economic, political, or religious ideologies that COVID-19 respects. But it becomes daily apparent that human viruses have found various ways to take advantage of the pandemic — economically, politically, and religiously.

Economically, I watch neoliberal capitalism shape-shift into coronavirus capitalism.

Politically, I daily witness corruption at the highest levels of business and government.

Religiously, I watch ministers preach the voodoo of snake oil sales-

*(Continued on Page 11.)*

## ... Flint knew

(Continued from Page 10.)

men, and then die from the consequences of their blind faith in delusional deities of their own construction.

Two events transpired to shift my perspective from economics, politics,



**City Hall protest September, 2016**

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

and religion to our existential morality play in which human good and evil joust for supremacy.

The first event was a conversation with a seasoned medical frontliner who is family. One need only listen to the medical heroes in this viral war to hear truth speaking to power about the lethal failures of leadership at the highest levels. As my personal medical hero put it, "I used to know what was expected of me when I went to work; now I have no clue because there is NO PLAN at the top from my employer."

The second event was the Great Leader of the United States "musing" about ingesting disinfectant to miraculously kill COVID-19 "in about a minute." What his suggestion omits is that if you follow this prescription, you will be dead about a minute after you kill the virus.

As a rule of common sense, I abhor leaders who suggest one drink the hemlock at their behest.

In the case of the Reverend Jim

Jones, he had his sheep wash down his poisoned cult baloney with lethal Kool-Aid. While Jim is a piker in the human history of Great Leader serial killers like Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot, he will forever remain the monster who sticks in my craw.

Before Jones shepherded his faithful flock to their Guyana self-sacrifice for the Great Leader, he gathered them via his church in San Francisco. At that time, I drove a city bus that serviced the neighborhood in which his church was located. Many of his sheep were my regular passengers. My abiding memory is they were decent, church-going people who had found a shepherd they could follow to the Promised Land — which he did, and they responded faithfully, to their eternal regret, I presume.

The major difference between the con and COVID is morality, essential to the survival of our species due to the powers of human consciousness. COVID doesn't respect anything but its nature to proliferate. Exploitive human viruses are all about that and much more. Conscious human predation at the expense of its weakest members and our earthly garden is a terribly destructive power. That we are the most destructive species on Earth assents to the lethal dangers of our human viruses.

While we Flintstones are taking another serious blow to our survival, I would rather be here with my village people, my community, than anywhere else because here, no amount of pettifogging and gaslighting propaganda will ever change what we have learned the hard way; we lived it and survived. We are standing our ground based on our lessons learned.

We learned to hang together, rather than separately.

We learned to howl until good spirits heard us and solidified the collective howl.

We learned the dire results of being poisoned by policy.

We learned the beautiful power of social concern and the necessity of the common good.

We learned to exercise our 1st

Amendment right to speak truth to power.

We learned the cancerous damage the metastasized replication of hate and divide does to the common good and the *E Pluribus Unum* of village life with neighbors.

We learned to share, cherish, and protect our common humanity from the forces of evil.

We are better together.

*Flint resident Robert R. Thomas is an EVM board member, frequent book reviewer, and former cable car driver in San Francisco. He can be reached at capnz13prod@gmail.com.*

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- Small group tours \$15/person starting May 16th – catered to your desired focus, length, and stops for breaks/photos
- Free group rides in May:
  - Tuesday the 19th – 6pm in front of Kettering at Chevrolet and University
  - Wednesday the 27th – 6pm at Tenacity Brewing (don't forget your growler to fill up afterwards)
- Most importantly — get on your bikes and explore Flint!

# From porches to dining rooms, local musicians are playing the pandemic blues

By Tom Travis

As the coronavirus pandemic ensues it seems to be unifying the human race. There isn't a person on the face of the earth that can't somehow relate to it. We drive by empty schools in the middle of the day, empty parking lots at movie theaters and shopping centers. Once busy city streets are now sans the sounds of buses braking and horns honking.

However, if you take a walk down East Court Street, stroll past the college and into the neighborhood, going down Beard Street or up Montclair, or if you saunter by a certain porch in Carriage Town, you just might hear the tunes and sounds of Flint musicians making the best of the pandemic blues.

So many people are discovering new things about themselves and about the world they live in as they hunker down in the four walls of their homes. With so many more eyes glued to phone and laptop screens during the pandemic, there has been a thirst for "what to watch" after the usual screen time entertainments fade away.

So some Flint musicians have taken to their front porches or put themselves on the screen for others to watch and enjoy. *EVM* spoke with some of them to find out how they're keeping their spirits up and their music alive.

## **Kim Streby: "God told me to do this"**

Flint singer and music teacher in the Flint Community Schools is offering Facebook Live performances. Singing in her dining room, Streby is sometimes joined by her son Ronan. Streby pushes play on her boom box and sings along to the accompaniment of Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Karen Carpenter, beloved old standards and musical theater.

Streby says she's not doing it for money.

"God has told me to do this. I'm using the best of my talents to help



**Singer Kim Streby singing on her Facebook Live weekly performance from her dining room**  
(Photo screenshot by Tom Travis)

others," she says. She is even considering doing a fundraiser for a local organization through her Facebook performances.

The schedule for her Facebook Live shows are 7 p.m. Tuesdays and 12 noon on Fridays. Tuesday's repertoire usually consists of standards and musical theater songs. On Friday, Streby turns to spirituals for a shorter performance.

## **Dylan Grantham: "Is this the new normal?"**

Another local musician, Dylan Grantham, describes himself as a singer/songwriter, and while his work is solo in nature, he often collaborates with a bass player and drummer.

Grantham said that when the pandemic hit he was planning on releasing some new songs and had performances lined up. "That all got canned," he said.

Grantham reflecting on what to expect, "It's so unknown what shows are going to look like in the future. Most

shows are cancelled through September but what will they look like? What will they be like when we return to normal, or is this the new normal?"

For a live performer, Grantham said, "It's difficult to not be able to play with fellow band members. What I miss most about having to stay home is the collaboration and playing and practicing with my buddies."

Being a singer/songwriter, Grantham said he's looking for inspiration from the pandemic experience but he has nothing new pandemic related yet. Grantham said that through the pandemic he's personally discovered that people really appreciate when you reach out and check on them.

Grantham, who lives with his family, said his pandemic daily schedule usually involves listening with his mom to the daily Cuomo press conferences and then they both cringe as they listen to the White House press conferences, he said.

## **Alesia Byrd and Wendell Johnson: concerts on the porch**

Taking to their porch, Flint Symphony Orchestra violinist and



**Singer/Songwriter Dylan Grantham performing live**  
(Photo screenshot by Tom Travis)

String Department Chair at The Flint Institute of Music, Alesia Byrd-Johnson, and her husband, Wendell

(Continued on Page 13.)



## ... Musicians

(Continued from Page 12.)

Johnson, have been performing their way through the pandemic. The Johnsons perform either on their front porch or indoors in their home. Their performances can be seen at their personal Facebook page.

"I never thought I'd live to see something like this," Byrd said.

Byrd continues to teach via online tools like Zoom. Some of her students who are very young — too young to even have a Facebook account or to maneuver online tools — these youngest students have to rely on their parents to help them navigate this new experience of learning to play a string instrument while watching their teacher on a screen.

Byrd said that she tries to make videos the student can watch throughout the week that will help the student to stay engaged, involved and interested. Byrd noted that she has one senior high school student that anticipates performing her senior recital online via Zoom.

Byrd is often joined by her husband who plays guitar and sings for their Facebook Live performances. Johnson described the scene when they play on their front porch, saying that sometimes neighbors come up on the sidewalk to listen, while some park in their car at the curb, and still others bring a chair to sit socially distanced.

Byrd recalled, with warmth in her voice, about her young cello student who lives across the street from her and joined her and her husband. The student brought out his cello and from his own porch across the street joined in playing together with his teacher.

Wendell has been a part of a "jam band" on Friday nights for many years. Johnson, Byrd, and many of their friends come over and hang out in the basement to "jam" to their favorite tunes for hours at a time. Both said they really miss doing that.

Byrd said about their first virtual online performance, "As soon as we did it the first time, the first night, my husband had such a big smile on his face. He said that felt so good, that was a release.

"It's a way of getting the weight off



**Alesia Byrd-Johnson and husband Wendell Johnson performing on Facebook Live from inside their home on an evening too cold to play outside.**

(Photo screenshot by Tom Travis)

of having to think about this thing, some way to get away," Johnson said. "When you play music you can't think about other things, so it's a way to focus on something else. It's an emotional release and it's also a connection to these other people listening in and commenting."

Byrd added, "You can play music and not physically touch anyone. When we played on the porch one night some neighbors said they heard the music up on Court Street.

Byrd said anyone is welcome to watch from the sidewalk if they're out walking or to watch their evening performances. They live at 1116 Beard St.

### **Erik McIntyre: Live gigs wiped out, easing into virtual**

Flint guitarist Erik McIntyre has taken to virtual online teaching and performing during the pandemic. Erik says he's been slowly easing into the world of virtual teaching. "As this was going down (the pandemic), I had a lunch gig, but no one was there. So I still played and it was broadcast online. I got a good response and made some tips."

McIntyre said since then he's been using the time to explore a new video and multi-track app to do some recording. McIntyre collaborates with musician friends in Toledo.

McIntyre said he's not spent a lot of

time doing live performances online. For his online teaching sessions he has been meeting with students online but adding a video that they can take with them to view again and again throughout the week. He's found online teaching can be labor intensive due to technology issues.

McIntyre is used to having three to six gigs a week. But he said, "A couple of months of that has just been wiped out." But yet he said some people



**Flint musician Eric McIntyre playing guitar on his front porch during the pandemic**

(Photo screenshot by Tom Travis)

who had had gigs scheduled before the pandemic have kept him on. He recalled he had been hired to play at a wedding. The wedding party still wanted him to make some recordings. So McIntyre got his musician friends together and played some songs. He was paid for those recordings.

Early on in the pandemic McIntyre said he was hired by Blue Llama Club in Ann Arbor. The club was allowing bands to play in the restaurant without customers present. The club would broadcast the band per-

(Continued on Page 14.)

## ... Musicians

(Continued from Page 13.)

formances on its Facebook page and allow the band to collect tips. McIntyre said he opted not to do that, as the stay-at-home executive order was just going into effect.

## ... COVID life

(Continued from Page 16.)

felt their energy, their life-affirming cascade of hormones and emotions, their way of making me feel like I have a purpose for being, since that chaotic last day of school when the security advocate came into my room and foreshadowed the announcement of school closing indefinitely. Of course the kids were excited — like the day before a potential snow day, but this was different. This was a bit frightening.

We are now adapting to a united solitary world ... We have to teach them from afar.

My pastor's wife shared an anecdote of an experience she and her son had. He didn't understand how to do his assignment and neither did she. He bemoaned that he couldn't just ask his teacher or whisper his question to his elbow partner. They both cried a little about how there is so much more to school than just academics. He missed his friends, his teacher, and the whole ethos of the school. Part of his life was missing. I felt the same way, but knowing they would be on the other side of my computer screen, and we would be there for each other were enough to get me up and moving. My classes have mandatory Zoom meetings on Mondays also. It's good to see each other.

**Paul Rozycki,**  
**political columnist and staff writer:**  
**"At least the grass will be cut"**

As retirees, my wife and I don't have to decide about choosing between going to work, risking exposure to the virus, or losing our income, as so many do. The house is paid for, we don't have student loans, and we don't have any unusually large bills to worry about.

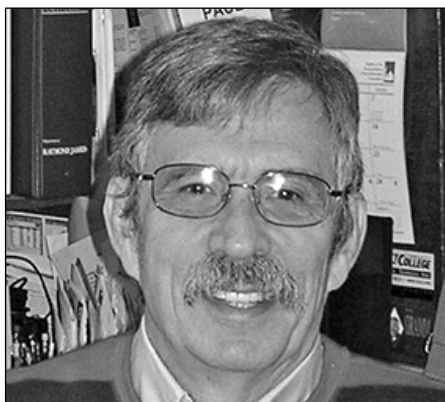
When we need to make the infrequent trip to the grocery store, there are

"I'm still kind of in this limbo," McIntyre said. "I'm not exactly sure what I'm going to do. I'm grateful because my parents have been helping me out with food. I've had some students and fans donate through tips. It's been nice actually to not have to drive all over the place to perform

odd mixed feelings. On one hand, there is some enthusiasm. "Great, we've got something to do!" But then there is the haunting worry. "Is this trip really necessary? Am I likely to pick up something? When is a good time to go, when there won't be too many people there?"

We've seen more TV than we've seen for years. It's really been great to see all the reruns of Ken Burns' documentaries on the Roosevelts, WWI, and the 1918 Spanish influenza on public TV. The travel programs are a decent distraction during lunch or dinner.

We've also discovered lots of old, long-forgotten programs on the various legacy channels. It's kind of fun to see the old Johnny Carson shows from decades ago, and even "Gunsmoke" seems better than I recall it as a kid. Other shows raise



**Paul Rozycki**  
(Photo by Nancy Rozycki)

doubts about "the golden age of television." It's also an odd feeling when "Jeopardy" is the main focus of your evening plans. Even 10-year-old basketball games are starting to look interesting.

A few weeks ago, I was almost happy to see that the grass had grown enough for me to go out and start up the mower for the first time this year. I was even more surprised that it did start, after sitting in the garage for the winter.

And, of course, the virus has brought pain and disappointments. Two

gigs. I've been more free to practice — practicing on my porch while people walk by. They kind of enjoy the music I'm playing and that makes me feel good."

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relatives of our friends have been sick with the virus for several weeks, and they are only slowly improving. Two people I knew have died.

I find that I miss even the "routine" meetings that were part of my week more than I expected. I think it's been almost three weeks since I filled up the tank in the car — though I'll have to go out and get gas for the mower soon. Some of the things that I was going to do "when I get the time" still don't seem to be getting done. I've planned on starting to organize my books, and declutter some of the closets. It hasn't happened. I blame it on the fact that Goodwill is closed, but I don't think that's the real reason.

So we'll wait and hope for the curve to flatten, the numbers to decline, and a return (someday) of something resembling "normalcy." I suspect that even then, I'll still have cluttered closets and disorganized bookshelves. But at least the grass will be cut.

**Patsy Isenberg, staff writer:**  
**"We all have something**  
**to fear every day"**

Each day I seem to have a different attitude. There've been days when I am depressed and feel kind of hopeless. Then there will be days when I tell myself to lighten up and keep enjoying life despite the "new normal." One thing though, is that when another problem pops up it's harder to cope with because my mind is so preoccupied with all that goes along with trying to avoid catching the virus that I can barely handle the extra problem.

I don't like going out and prefer to stay home. I don't like wearing a mask and gloves and I'm constantly trying to remember what needs sanitizing and what order to do it all. I think masks will get better, though.

I keep falling back on the thought  
(Continued on Page 15.)

## ... COVID life

(Continued from Page 14.)

that if we had more testing available it would alleviate a lot of fear in people. I think this will go on for a lot longer, until there's a vaccine. I just watched a Ken



**Patsy Isenberg**  
(Selfie)

Burns documentary about New York City. The last episode (added after the first several from 1999), and made in 2001, was all about the attacks on 9/11. It was hard to watch, but actually reminded me that people get through hard times. This pandemic is different in many ways, but of all those crises people my age have lived through, (there've been so many), this changes our lifestyles so drastically and we all have something to fear every day. I saw a man walking his dog the other day who I've spoken to before and this time he was wearing a mask. I said hello to him and we talked a little about the pretty spring day. He said, "I'm 71 years old" — my age exactly — "and I've never seen America in worse shape."

**Coner Segren, staff writer**  
**"Everyone looks urgent and frozen in amber"**

I am one of the people experiencing the coronavirus pandemic from a distance, where everyone looks urgent and frozen in amber at the same time. As a student at U of M, all my classes moved online about a month ago, and the transition has been a little jarring, despite the best efforts of the faculty, who have nonetheless been very

helpful. As a substitute teacher, my job has also evaporated with all the K-12 schools closing down, which has been tough, because I've found myself missing a lot of the classes I've come to know over the past year and a half on that particular job. In addition to K-12, the semester at U of M is over, and that all means a new kind of stasis around the corner.

It's often an uncomfortable distance because you know there is nothing you could do to change the course of events except stay home and prevent it from spreading. So, it's lots of waiting and seeing. Seeing empty schools. Seeing the empty parking lot of the thrift store by my house on its half-off sale day, when it would normally be overflowing with people. All of it is a little surreal. Being shut in puts into perspective a lot of the little things you take for granted, like going to see a movie or going out to dinner or even just speaking person-to-person at the credit union. And then you realize that you're one of the lucky ones, one of the people



**Coner Segren**  
(Selfie)

who doesn't have to go to work for low pay and then on top of that have to work with an overwhelming paranoia in the pit of your stomach that you could catch it simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Madeleine Graham, staff writer,**  
**from the Linden Lane Apartments:**  
**"Tough measures" for the safety of all**

The safety of all has resulted in some tough measures. Only two people at a time are to do laundry. Only two people on the elevator at a time. US mail notifications are sent to our phones via text

message when the mail is delivered. A lot of people are walking to the Dollar Tree



**Madeleine Graham**  
(Photo by Fred Cobb)

for essential items.

**Zach Neithercut, staff writer:**  
**"The blessing for me ...**  
**has been time"**

All things considered, this whole experience has truly been a mixed bag for me, both a curse and a blessing. The curse is the fact that I or someone I care about might come into contact with the virus and get sick. Especially being a Type I diabetic myself, I've had my fair share of days filled with anxiety and low mood. However, I've had time to take a step back and really reflect both on my life and life as a whole and where it



**Zach Neithercut**  
(Selfie)

might be heading. I've been able to be more mindful of the fact that I'm alive without constantly being on autopilot and rushing out the door for the next thing. It's a time to learn more things about myself, others, and the world. The blessing for me during this experience has been time.

# Village Life

## Seven EVM writers recount their COVID-19 lives: 85 miles of walking, every day new fears

*Editor's Note: Like everyone else, East Village Magazine's staff — none of whom are full-time employees and who juggle many other lives — have been sheltering in place. We've stayed in contact by email and phone, and haone Zoom writers' meeting where we rejoiced in seeing each other's faces — from 10 different rooms, with 10 different sets of books, plants, pictures behind them — and figuring out how to keep EVM going in a time of crisis.*

*At that meeting, our writers made it clear they are coping with the pandemic by doing what almost all of them do best: writing about it. We agreed that would be one good way to process what is going on. So here, personally and candidly, are excerpts from what they reported from their own lives. Full essays are available on "Coronavirus Diaries" at eastvillagemagazine.com, along with complementary essays by Teddy Robertson and Jan Worth-Nelson.*

### **Tom Travis, Assistant Editor: 85 miles of pandemic walking**

Almost every day during the pandemic quarantine I have been walking the streets of Flint. I've donned my brand new, seldom-worn, Nike running shoes, jogger sweats, blue spring jacket, beanie hat and some mornings, gloves. And now, a gaiter mask.



**Tom Travis**  
(Selfie)

I began doing Facebook Live videos because, even though I rolled my eyes at others doing it, I actually wanted to figure out how to do it. I needed to figure out how to do a live event on Facebook without all my friends seeing what a fool I was. To my amazement people watched, and then they commented, and then they said they liked the walking videos. Some even love them. Some who really can't get outside because of physical limitations said they watch on their computer and "walk with me."

I ended up turning my love for Flint and exploring unique, historical and naturally beautiful areas into a pandemic walking tour Facebook Live event. Some ask me to sing, or turn the camera so I show my face. I'm not ready for that. That'll be the next level. Some have even asked me to do walking tours in the suburbs of Flint, but I decline. Flint is my vibe.

Over the last five weeks of the pandemic I have walked 158,706 steps, which translates into just over 85 miles. That means I could have walked to Port Austin, or back and forth to Lapeer twice, or gotten some cheese in Pinconning, or gone to Battle Creek or even to Detroit. But I chose to walk the streets of Flint.

**Tammy Beckett,**  
staff writer (and teacher)  
"So, I just *am* ... and sometimes I  
just can't move"

Sprawled across my loveseat with my feet dangling over the arm, listening to the gurgle and splashes of my fountain, there are no other sounds than the occasional meow from one of my two feline roommates.

There are no other people here. I have TV and music, but I don't usually have them going. I'm a water baby and the sound of the water comforts me. A

friend mentioned one of the most interesting things about this time is how the earth is healing herself. Skies that have been overcast with pollution for decades are now clear blue. Animals are walking freely where they usually hid from humans. It's not hard to imagine that they would rule the world if it weren't for us. We're derelict in our duties as stewards of the earth and all its inhabitants.

So, here I am. I'm not going stir crazy or bored out of my mind, but sometimes I am anxious. Sometimes I just can't move. My mind tells my body to get up and do something, anything,



**Tammy Beckett**  
(Selfie)

don't just lay here, playing on your phone.

For the first two weeks, it was like waiting for a job interview. That sense of uncertainty and possibility, of make or break, or maybe a complete waste of time because the outcome is already decided before I ever walk into the room. So, I just am. And, I can't move.

Then, like an unexpected gift or a chance re-acquaintance of an old friend, just as suddenly as everything had frozen, it all miraculously thawed. "We have a mandatory Zoom meeting Monday at 9 a.m. to discuss reopening school as online classes ..." my principal chirped on the phone. And plans needed to be made to welcome the children. I hadn't seen them,

*(Continued on Page 14.)*