

East Village

Magazine

June 2021



Photograph By


Edwin D. Carter

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Commentary

The right to vote. It's not just about Democrats or Republicans – It's about democracy

By Paul Rozycki

Guess what? There was cheating in the 2020 election.

And guess what? There was so little of it, in a nation of 330 million, that it scarcely mattered.

And from what we know, there were both Republicans and Democrats doing it.

According to a *Washington Post* survey, there were 16 cases of cheating last year — about one for every 10 million votes cast. Even the Republican leaning Heritage Foundation claimed to have found a little over 1200 cases in the last 40 years. Many other studies found similar results. Most of those cases were attempts to vote for someone else, and they were quickly caught.

There was the story of one man in Pennsylvania who asked if he could vote for his son. The poll workers turned him down. He returned an hour later, in sunglasses, claiming to be his son, and tried to vote. The workers saw through the scheme, and he now faces felony charges. But that was one man, not a thousand, and not a million.

Perhaps the most bizarre case was the case of a Colorado man who got caught voting for Trump twice, once for himself, and once for his dead wife. There was one small problem. He was also accused of murdering his wife, but he wanted to give Trump an extra vote. Do you suppose he voted for him because he was the “law and order” candidate?

No serious evidence of wide-spread vote fraud

Yes, there were a few people who tried to cheat and vote more than once, vote in a second state, or for another person. But there were very few. After more than 60 court cases in front of both Republican and Democratic judges, essentially all of the charges of massive fraud have

been dismissed. Recently a Michigan judge dismissed a final lawsuit claiming there was fraud in Antrim County. There is no serious evidence that thousands of ballots were dumped in a river, voted by dead people or illegal aliens, flown in from China, or shifted from Trump to Biden by some foreign computer program.

The challenges of the 2020 election

To be sure the 2020 election was a challenging one, where election workers in thousands of local communities were expected to adjust to last-minute demands for social distancing, revised deadlines, and an increase in absentee/mail-in voting because of the COVID pandemic.

For the most part they did a remarkable job dealing with all the changes as the voters turned out in record numbers to cast their ballots. Yes, there were mistakes, but they were usually corrected quickly as the ballots were tallied. The remarkable thing is that with all the last-minute changes, local officials managed well. Donald Trump learned that when he tried to register in Florida using his 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. White House address. The local election board caught the error, and he entered his Mar-a-Lago voting address. After all the checking and double-checking, the 2020 election may have been the most honest in our history.

Yet the idea that this was a stolen election was the motivation for the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and has led many Republicans to argue that Biden is not the legitimate president. Even after the riots at the Capitol, 147 Republicans voted to not certify the election for Biden. In recent months that has led to a move to limit voting rights in nearly all the states.

(Continued on Page 12.)

Cover: Demo in progress on E. Third Street



Photo of the Month: Wrought Iron Gate on Avon Street

(Photo by Edwin D.

Flint's Pride Festival reflects community identities and prioritizes health

By Melodee Mabbitt

This year, Flint's Pride Festival will once again be shaped in response to the need for disease prevention and centered on supporting identities that are most vulnerable within Flint's LGBTQ+ communities.

In response to COVID-19 precautions, planning is underway for Flint's Pride to include its annual cookout and a series of small events throughout the coming summer, rather than the annual festival in June.

It won't be the first time Flint's Pride celebrations have been affected by disease. Flint's tenth annual Pride Festival was held as a virtual event last year because of the pandemic. And the event's history is itself rooted in disease prevention and centered on identities within vulnerable populations.

"We're not just regular event planners. We're also disease prevention," said Stevi Atkins, CEO of Wellness AIDS Services, which has been central to organizing Flint's Pride celebrations.

"All of the communities we serve are at greater risk of death or harm because of the lack of cultural competence," Atkins said. "Health disparities occur because of lack of cultural competencies including racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and especially transphobia. Our Black Trans women are still being murdered at rates that are unconscionable to allow."

"We have had individuals from the community give feedback and basi-



cally imply that our event is too Black" Atkins said. "It has been a challenge to help the community understand that Flint is over 60 percent BIPOC [Black, indigenous, and people of color] and our event needs to at least reflect that."

Atkins said Flint Pride was developed partly in response to an outbreak of HIV in 2009 in Black men ages 17 to 37, especially those who identify as queer, gay, or bi. To reach vulnerable populations, HIV organizations had to be flexible over the years, offering services and testing at gay bars, parks, and other places that you wouldn't typically find healthcare. Wellness has followed that approach, she said, but Flint has had fewer gay bars and public spaces for LGBTQ+ gatherings, so Atkins said there was a need to get creative."

"At the time in Flint, there was no LGBTQ+ visibility at all," Atkins said. In 2009, RuPaul's Drag Race television series was just beginning and FX network's series Pose had not yet appeared to bring "ball culture" into the mainstream. Ball culture developed as an underground subculture of Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in New York City, in which people "walk" for trophies, prizes, and glory at

(Continued on Page 5.)

... Pride

(Continued from Page 4.)

events known as balls.

In Flint's Black LGBTQ+ communities, the ball community houses serve as alternative families to Black LGBTQ+ youth who often compete in drag performances and ball walking competitions to earn needed income by winning a pageant or category.

Making forays into the ball community houses was necessary for Wellness AIDS Services to be able to connect in 2009 with the communities being most impacted by the local HIV outbreak, Atkins explained. As they began to build relationships, especially with Black house fathers, it became clear that something more was needed.



"It is hard to see yourself in progress, in history, if you don't know that people who look like you were there," Atkins said. "It was actually Trans women of color pushing back at Stonewall. That is important to know in order to be able to see yourself in history."

The Stonewall uprising was a series of spontaneous demonstrations in response to a police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969, and is widely considered one of the most important events leading to the fight for LGBTQ+ rights.

Wellness organized Flint's first Pride Festival in 2010 not only to help raise visibility of LGBTQ+ communities, but to build relationships external to small social groups by connecting LGBTQ+ communities and sharing feelings of being cared for and valued in a larger set of communities, and to celebrate the history of Black Trans women as central in this work.

Flint's first Pride Festival was a small event in Kearsley Park with about 150 attendees, one food vendor, one sponsor, two tables set up by PFLAG and Wellness AIDS Services, and of course, drag performances.

"We started having mini-balls at our first Pride event," Atkins said, noting that Wellness was able to obtain their first physical location in 1986 because of local drag performers who donated their tips to help pay for the space. "It felt very community and the population we hoped to reach was who showed up," she said.

In the following years, Flint's Pride Festival grew through an in-kind partnership with University of Michigan – Flint, and moved to the university's pavilion on Saginaw Street downtown.

Pride has continued to have balls, drag performances, and voguing competitions every year. "Having the space for local drag kings and queens is really important to us," Atkins said.

Flint's Pride Festival has always been a smaller and more intimate affair than Pride festivals in larger cities, she said. In places like New York and Chicago, complaints among activists include concerns about Pride becoming too "corporate" as sponsors want their brands to seem supportive without making any sincere forays into LGBTQ+ communities, Atkins said.

That is not true in Flint. Though attendance and expenses have grown, Atkins said obtaining sponsorships continues to be a struggle, largely funded by Wellness' own general fund. However, Atkins believes the event sponsors are reflective of sincere supporters from within Flint's community.

At the last in-person festival in 2019, Pride had grown from the university's pavilion, across Saginaw Street, and into Riverbank Park. More than three thousand people attended the event, which included more than 60 vendors, ranging from inclusive religious organizations to artists to community organizations.

To be inclusive, organizers emphasize creating spaces for artists to sell their work and keeping vendor fees low by allowing nonprofits or people unable to pay to approach Wellness to find a way to be included.

Progress on LGBTQ+ issues locally has also contributed to the steady growth of the Pride Festival in Flint.

"Through the years, we have al-

ways had something to celebrate," said Atkins noting national marriage equality passing in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015, the passing of Flint's local human rights ordinance around housing and accommodation in 2012, which Wellness worked with local activists Tunde Oladiran, Dale Weighill, and Nayyirah Shariff to spearhead and pass. Last year, Mayor Sheldon Neeley officially declared June as Pride Month in Flint. Last April, Commissioner Domonique Clemons, D-Flint Township, led the effort for Genesee County Board of Commissioners to change the county's anti-discrimination policy to include protections for natural hair, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and recognized June as LGBTQ+ Pride Month.



Pride Fest 2019 downtown Flint
(Photo source: Flint Pride Fest Facebook page)

"Every year it felt like more and more progress until 2016," said Atkins in reference to the election of reality television gameshow host and former one-term president Donald Trump. "Really in Michigan, we started to slip backwards before Trump. Governor Rick Snyder and his administration had a lot of anti-LGBTQ+ language and legislation during his time."

Though Flint's Pride has never experienced violence or protests from opposition, there have been hard years like the Orlando Pulse shooting in 2016 when Pride created space for grieving and acknowledging that terrorist attack at a gay nightclub. "Kildee offered a great speech on it that year," Atkins said, not-

(Continued on Page 6.)

Redistricting, social equity and water costs among topics discussed at Flint Neighborhoods United monthly meeting

By Coner Segren

Potential Michigan redistricting losses based on Census-2020 numbers, establishment of a new urban institute dedicated to social equity at the UM - Flint, a proposal to study a flat rate for water in the City of Flint, and the Genesee County Land Bank's Clean and Green program were among topics discussed at the latest Flint Neighborhoods United (FNU) meeting.

FNU still holds its monthly meetings by Zoom. The next meeting is scheduled for 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, June 5. The Zoom link can be found on the FNU website or Facebook page.

Michigan prepares for upcoming redistricting

According to the 2020 Census, Michigan is expected to lose a congressional seat in 2022 due to a population decrease. With the 2020 Census completed, Michigan is set to begin the

statewide. According to the new law, congressional districts will be drawn by a new Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (ICRC). The commission is bipartisan and follows strict criteria for drawing lines to ensure fairness.

In the past, congressional lines were drawn by politicians themselves, with no guidelines preventing them from drawing them to favor certain political parties and incumbents. According to voting rights and community advocacy groups like Voters Not Politics and Communities First, this essentially amounted to politicians picking their voters instead of the other way around.

"[Gerrymandering] skews election results, and doing this makes political races less competitive, it hurts communities of color, and it thwarts the will of the voters and so this leads American voters to not have their voices heard," said Essence Wilson, co-founder of Communities First, Inc.

The ICRC aims to fix that by having a commission made up of 13 members, 4 Democrats, 4 Republicans, and 5 members who don't affiliate with either party, Wilson explained. These commissioners must follow strict guidelines on how they draw districts, including criteria such as no district favoring any political party, no district favoring incumbent politicians or certain candidates, and all districts representing the state's diverse population and "communities of interest," — groups that share an ethnic, economic, or cultural bond.

"For instance, Otisville might be connected to Columbiaville because they're in the same school district, even though they're in different counties," explained Rick Sadler, a geographer for Michigan State University's Division of Public Health and a consultant for Voters not Politics. "A 'community of

(Continued on Page 14.)

... Pride

(Continued from Page 5.)

ing Kildee has been one of the most supportive elected officials.

Atkins says she looks forward to one day running the front table again at Pride in-person. It is one of her favorite things to do.

"The energy, the vibration, the love. This is what community care looks like. Being able to show our LGBTQ+ population, especially with the intersection of BIPOC, that we care about them is huge for us," Atkins said. "Being able to hug them and to embrace each other and get excited when someone is attending their first Pride. It is just an amazing energy and I love that role of being a hostess to welcome my community into my community."

When Flint began organizing the first Pride Festival, Nayyirah Shariff was working as an organizer for Genesee County Healthy Sexuality Coalition, a group of organizations and individuals interested in lowering rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Though that coalition no longer exists, Shariff continued to be involved through volunteering in the years since.

"For a lot of people, Pride is where you get to wear rainbow wigs and heavy makeup and then you're out there drinking beer. That is what you see in other, larger Prides" Shariff said.

"But then you also see people who bring 'Yes, I am gay and also these other things.' So other Prides may censor the most marginalized people who are Black and Trans women. So by centering those identities and saying Black Trans lives matter, or allowing people to be gay and Muslim, it becomes more than just wearing a rainbow wig and allows people to have multiple identities. Like, intentionally making space for people to declare, 'I'm not just a gay person. I am all of these identities and all of them deserve respect.'"

Flint Pride Festival events this summer will be shared through the Flint Pride Facebook Page.

EVM reporter Melodee Mabbitt can be reached at melodee.mabbitt@gmail.com.

What is Redistricting?

Every 10 years following the **U.S. Census**, district lines for political offices must be redrawn in states across the country to accurately reflect their population.

In Michigan, citizens – not legislators or special interests – will be responsible for drawing district lines. This will help make elections fair and representative for everyone.



process of redistricting or redrawing of congressional districts. The redrawing will be crucial to deciding which party controls the state legislature and who the state sends to Washington, D.C., according to several spokespeople addressing the issue at the FNU meeting.

This round of redistricting will be the first since the passage in 2018 of Proposal 2, the ballot initiative which outlawed partisan gerrymandering

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of June 6. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city, which, because of the restrictions starting to be lifted, are beginning to expand. To submit events for our July issue, email your event to pisenber@gmail.com by June 20.

Flint Mural Plays

Presented by Flint Repertory Theatre
June 5 to August 31, starting at noon.
All around the city.
Listen to 25 new micro audio plays by various playwrights, each corresponding with a different mural around Flint. Listen on the PixelStix app on phones or online at FlintRep.org.
Special events on 4 consecutive Saturdays beginning June 5. All begin at noon.
For more info visit flintrep.org/flintmuralplays.

Flint Arts & Craft Market

Saturday, June 12, noon to 6 p.m.
This event features handmade goods and art by people from Flint and surrounding areas.
There will also be live music all day.
Brush Park
120 E. First St., Flint 48502

Flint City Bucks vs. Kings Hammer FC Soccer Game

Saturday, June 12, 7:30 p.m.
National Champion (2019) Flint City Bucks face off against Kings Hammer FC (Cincinnati) at Atwood Stadium
701 University Ave., Flint 48503
For more info visit flintcitybucks.com/2021-schedule.

Flint Public Library Used Book Sale

June 17
10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday
Flint Farmers' Market, Pavilion
The Friends of the Flint Public Library are selling a variety of used books, CDs, DVDs on the third Thursday of every month.
Flint Farmers' Market
300 East First St., Flint
For more info visit fpl.info.

Juneteenth Citywide Celebrations

June 18-20
Berston Field House
Black Wallstreet Vendor Expo, Friday, June 18, 3 to 6 p.m.
City Hall to Berston Field House
Parade from City Hall to Berston Field House- June 19, noon.
and festival at Berston Field House Saturday, June 19, 2 to 6 p.m.
Riverbank Park
Gospel Festival June 20, 3 to 6 p.m. Please bring your own lawn chairs.
For more info visit flintjuneteenth.com.

Black Buckham Juneteenth Festival

Sponsored by Comma Bookstore.
Saturday, June 19, 1 to 9 p.m.
There'll be commerce, food, music, art, and dance with WSG/The Eclipse Band.
Buckham Alley
Flint, 48502
For more info call 810-768-3128.

Nature Photography Hike: Shore Bird!

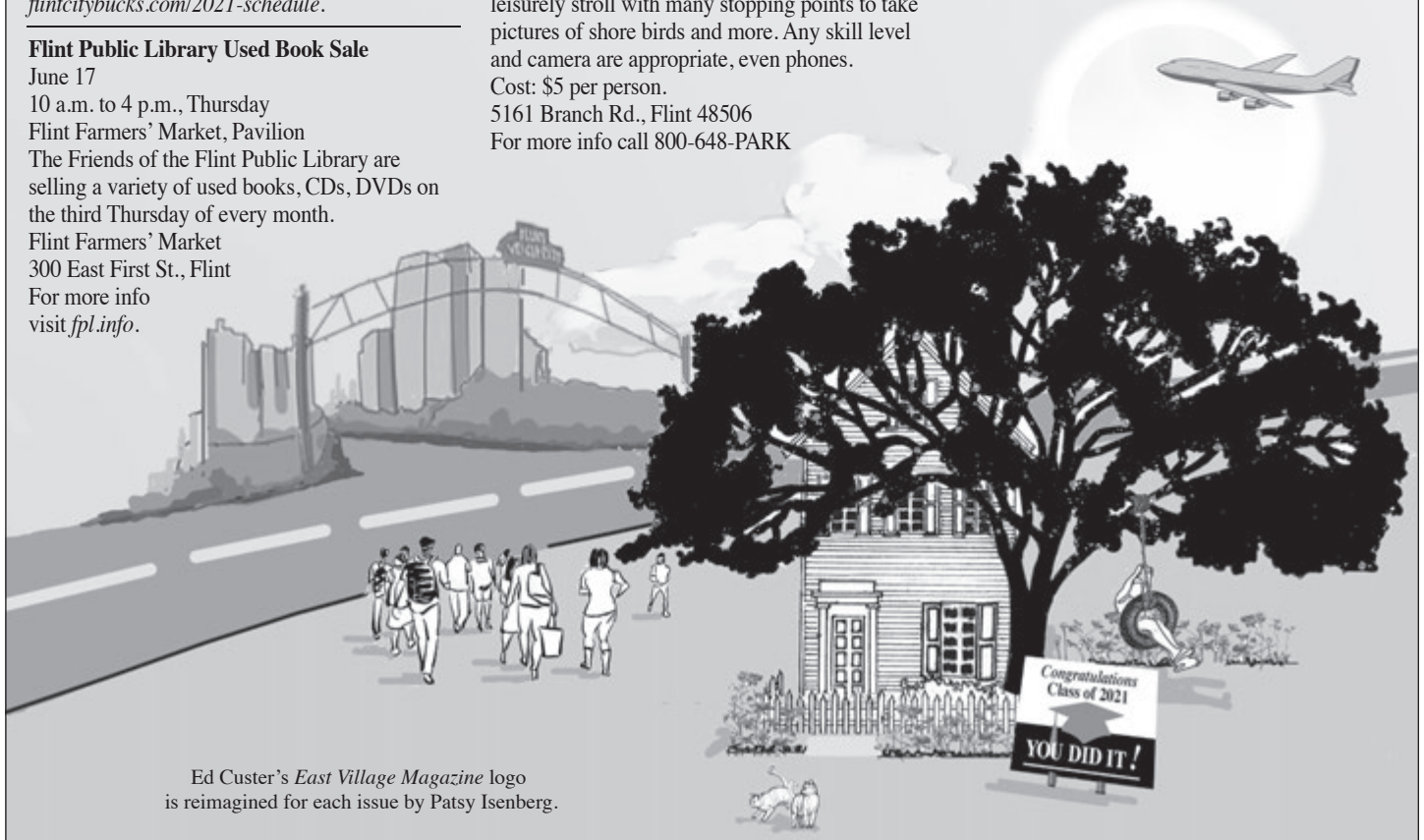
Presented by Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission
Saturday, June 19, 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Ages 12 and older are welcome to join in a leisurely stroll with many stopping points to take pictures of shore birds and more. Any skill level and camera are appropriate, even phones.
Cost: \$5 per person.
5161 Branch Rd., Flint 48506
For more info call 800-648-PARK

An Evening With Damien Escobar

Presented by The Whiting.
Escobar, musician, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and humanitarian will present a musical mix of classical, jazz, pop, R&B and hip hop in this evening's performance.
Cost: \$17.50 - \$50 per person.
The Whiting
1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint 48503
For more info visit: tickets.thewhiting.com/8716.

Full Moon Hike

Presented by Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission
Friday, June 25, 8:30 to 10 p.m.
Hike under the stars at For-Mar. All ages welcome. There are a few small hills and exposed roots and is at least one mile long.
For-Mar
2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton 48509
For more info call 810-648-PARK or visit: geneseecountyparks.org/events/full-moon-hike-33/.



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

Sports Beat

Flint City Bucks open defense of USL2 championship with convincing 3-1 win over Toledo

By Harold C. Ford

“It’s hard defending a national championship; it’s harder winning one.”

—Dan Duggan, chairman and CEO, Flint City Bucks

The Flint City Bucks football [soccer] club opened the 2021 season with a convincing 3-1 win over Toledo Villa Football Club May 15 at Atwood Stadium before a reported 1700 fans.

The Bucks’ next home match [game] is set for Saturday, May 29 against the Dayton Dutch Lions. Start time is 7:30 p.m. at Flint’s Atwood Stadium.



At the May 15 match-up, the Flint side [team] dominated play in the first half—both in time of possession and field position—as Toledo’s offense struggled to get the ball past midfield. The speed of Flint’s midfielders and defensemen turned back any advances by Toledo’s offense.

The lopsided play emboldened Isaac Walker, Flint’s goalkeeper, to repeatedly leave his net, move beyond the goal and penalty areas, and bark orders to teammates, thus serving as a de facto on-field coach.

Nonetheless, the first half ended with Flint holding a precarious 1-0 lead on a goal by Flint’s Charlie Sharp in the 18th minute.

Play was more balanced in the second half. Defenses dominated as offensive rushes were mostly thwarted at midfield.



Dan Duggan, Flint City Bucks chairman & CEO.
(Photo by Harold Ford)

Subbing for Sharp at the 78th minute, Ids Hannema pounded home goals in the 83rd and 86th minutes to secure the win for Flint. Kainan Dos Santos scored Toledo’s lone goal at the 89th minute of the 90-minute contest.

The victory was the first win for Bucks’ coach Andy Wagstaff, a former Bucks player and assistant coach, who took over from Demir Muftari in January 2020.

Second match

In their second match May 25, the Bucks played Kings Hammer of Cincinnati to a scoreless tie at Xavier University. Kings Hammer coach Paul Nicholson has the rare distinction of a winning record — now 2-1-3 (wins-losses-ties) — against the Bucks, the most successful franchise in USL2 history.

The Bucks have won twenty division titles and four North American championships.



Flint & Toledo line up for national anthem sung by Flint’s Kevin Starnes.
(Photo by Harold Ford)

(Continued on Page 9.)

... Sports

(Continued from Page 8.)

Championship pedigree

The Bucks are the defending national champions of United States League Two (USL2). The club netted the championship Aug. 3, 2019 with a goal by Ayuk Tambe in the second 15-minute overtime period. USL2 matches were halted during the pandemic year of 2020 except for a handful of friendlies [matches that don't count in the standings].

Referencing the pandemic-cancelled season, Costa Papista, team president, told *East Village Magazine*: "The silver lining is that we got to retain our status as national champions for an extra year."

Asked if he was optimistic about this season, Dan Duggan, team chairman and CEO responded, "Very."

"We feel we're going to have a better team than last year's [2019] team," he said.

USL2

The Bucks are one of nine clubs in the Great Lakes Division of the USL2's Central Conference. Other clubs include: Kalamazoo FC (MI); Kings Hammer (OH); South Bend Lions (IN); Oakland County FC (MI); Toledo Villa FC (OH); Grand Rapids FC (MI); Fort Wayne FC (IN); and Dayton Dutch Lions (OH).

Two other divisions in the USL2 Central Conference include the Heartland Division (seven clubs) and the Mid South Division (eight clubs).

USL2 has three additional conferences: Eastern Conference (three divisions with 22 total clubs); Southern Conference (three divisions, 23 clubs); Western Conference (three divisions, 14 clubs).

Thus, USL2 currently has four conferences, 12 divisions, and 84 clubs. Sixty-six percent of USL2 athletes are NCAA Division I college players; 68

percent are domestic players.

Fans can visit the USL2 website at <https://www.usleagueutwo.com/> for further information.

Bucks' home matches

The Bucks will take on the Dayton Dutch Lions in their next home match [game] Saturday, May 29; The start time is 7:30 p.m. at Flint's Atwood Stadium.

The remaining home matches for the 2021 Bucks are: May 29; June 4, 12, 26, 29; July 10, 16, 18, 23, 25, 31. All home matches are played at Flint's Atwood Stadium starting at 7:30 p.m. except for playoff contests starting July 16; those start times are to be determined.

The Bucks will play four friendlies at home in August (14th, 21st) and September (11th, 25th) all starting at 7:30 p.m.

Many of the Bucks' matches can be viewed on TV / CW46. <https://thecw46.com>

Information about the Bucks can be accessed at their website: <https://www.flintcitybucks.com>

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

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Three-Bedroom Townhouse

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Available August. Can be partially furnished. Hardwood floors, refrigerator, range, 1½ baths, laundry, off street parking. In the center of it all on cul-de-sac Avon St. near Kearsley St. Walk three blocks or less to UM-F, MCC, Cultural Center, Downtown, Farmers Market, three parks. Easy freeway access. References and credit check requested. On site management. \$695 a month plus utilities. No pets.

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AC, laundry, dishwasher, well insulated, and off street parking.

Can be furnished. \$625 per month includes water. No pets.

References and credit check requested.

E-mail ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write:

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502 Crapo St.

Flint MI, 48503.

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\$46 million in stimulus funds land in city's coffers: online survey asks Flint residents what to do with it

By Tom Travis

A check for \$46 million was deposited into the City of Flint's bank account last Wednesday, according to the city's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Shelbi Frayer. It is the first payment from the federal government's American Rescue Plan (ARP) stimulus money. Recently the U.S. Treasury updated the amount Flint would receive from \$99 million to \$94 million.

Frayer said in a follow-up email that she expects another check for \$48 million in two years, before 2024. East Village Magazine reported in April on the announcement of the stimulus money coming to Flint.

Now the question is how to best use the federal stimulus bonanza.

Mayor Sheldon Neeley is inviting Flint residents to chime in with their thoughts, suggestions and opinions.. The U.S. Treasury has yet to release a "final" set of rules and guidelines on how the stimulus money for munici-

- Blight elimination
- Infrastructure, i.e., water, roads
- Neighborhood development (home repairs, renovations, rehabilitation),
- Job creation and business development, and
- Public safety.

According to the city's website: "Mayor Sheldon Neeley is asking residents to provide input on



how the City of Flint should prioritize funding received as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. The City of Flint is expected to receive about \$99 million as part of the \$1.9 trillion package that also provides direct assistance

to fund COVID-19 vaccinations and testing as well as mortgage assistance, renters assistance, and stimulus checks.

"This is short-term funding that must be spent by 2024 and additional details still are emerging on how the dollars can be spent.



palities. However, they have released preliminary rules and guidelines.

The City of Flint website has an online survey residents can complete to voice their opinions and suggestions. The survey can be completed by clicking this link.

The survey asks residents to rank in importance five areas for the stimulus money:

"Based on input from residents over the last year and a half, Mayor Neeley has outlined five potential priority areas. All residents are invited to take this opportunity to both rank these priorities and share additional areas to consider for potential funding.

Additional comments are welcome at input@cityofflint.com.

City Council already weighing in on spending proposals

The City Council has had heated debates in recent weeks concerning how the stimulus money should be spent. In a special Finance Committee meeting Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward) suggested the stimulus money should be included in the city's budget.

The city's Chief Legal Counsel, Angela Wheeler, said that placing the stimulus money in the budget would be "illegal" because the budget and stimulus money are from two different sources.

The city council is in the throes of working on a biennial budget for FY2022 and FY2023. The council has until the first Monday in June 2021 to approve the budget. Until then the council will work on amendments and changes to the budget.

How residents can weigh in

Residents can weigh in with their thoughts in many ways.

- Vote in this poll: surveymonkey.com/r/FlintFundingPriorities
- Send an email to input@cityofflint.com
- Mail comments to:

City of Flint Budget Input
1101 S. Saginaw St. Room 203
Flint, Michigan 48502

• Write comments and drop them off at Flint City Hall in the red drop box outside

• Call (810) 237-2000. All callers will be asked to leave a message with their comments, which will be transcribed and included in reports with other submitted comments.

EVM Managing Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomntravis@gmail.com.

... Viral time

(Continued from Page 15.)

The past drew close in the witching hours

I read until 1 or 2 a.m., adrenalin-pumped from daytime tasks. No surprise, really, that friends from past decades began to visit me in the “witching hours” of those nights. I realized how close to me was my past, especially friends of childhood and adolescence. If they were still living, we were suddenly joined up in the same reality. But, as I described in another *EVM* column, in the “witching hours” the dead also wander, return young and alive to console and laugh at our earthly predicament.

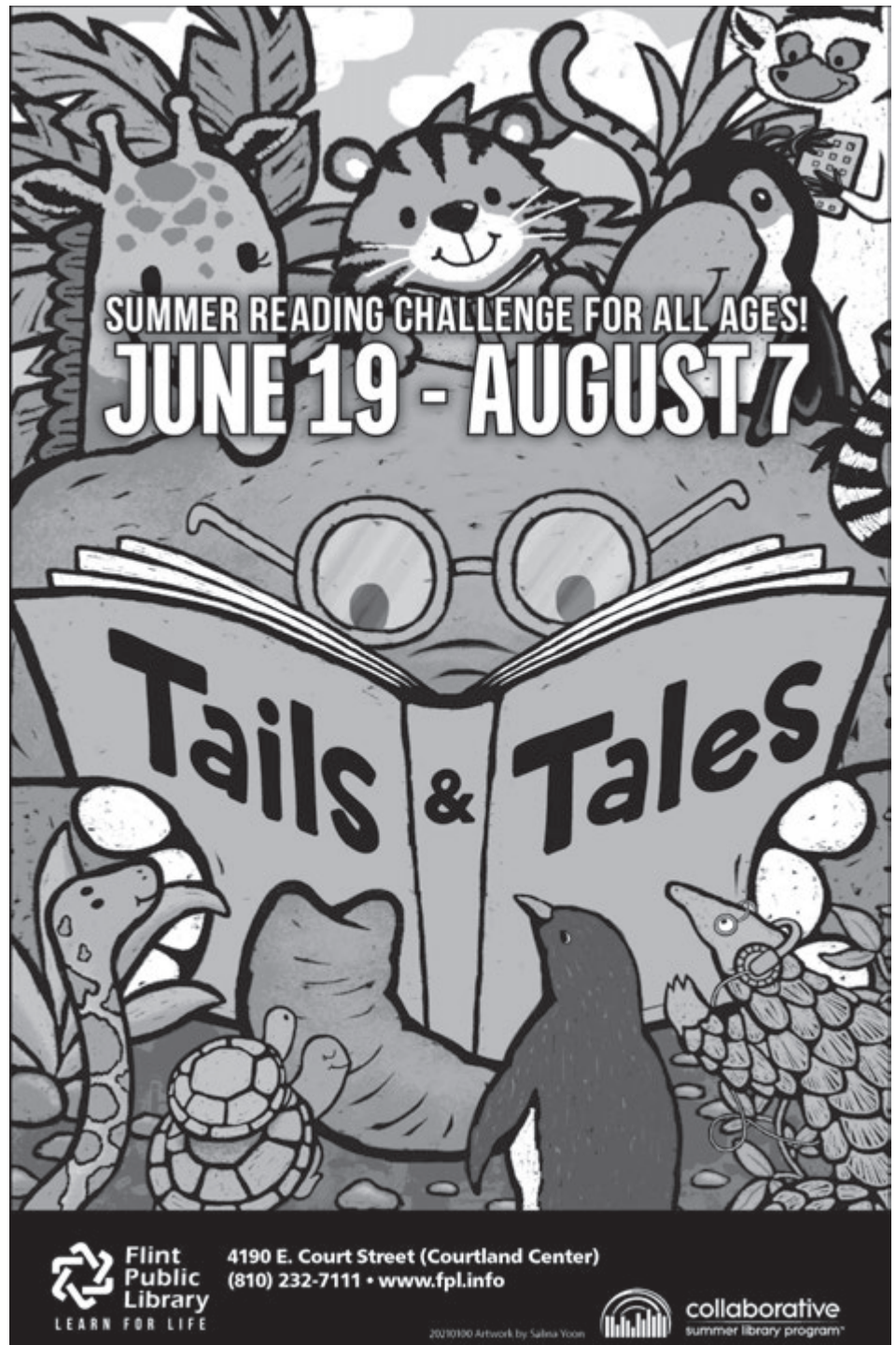
Friends from the witching hours of last spring, very much alive, are still with me a year later. Four of us from high school, now in our 75th year, began to email regularly. And the dead? They sometimes turn up at their designated hours; they seem relieved.

The chores that mustered my energy for three months--I feel good about them. The old photos and letters got reduced from six boxes to three. They fit on a shelf where I can see them and no longer lurk under the bed. When my mother's coats and furs were picked up later, in August, I reached a milestone not just in months of pandemic survival, but in my emotions over the decade since her death.

And so we plant again

My 2020 refrigerator calendar tells me that the last frost date was forecast for April 23 and that I was planting cherry tomatoes on May 5. On May 28, my partner Dennis left LA and drove to Flint in two days, sleeping in the car near Sterling, Colorado, somewhere east of Denver. He pulled in around midnight on May 29 and we've spent the winter here.

I didn't waste the strange, unforeseen time of spring 2020. We had a bumper crop of Sweet 100s tomatoes that summer and, somewhat later in



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this frost-edged May of 2021, we have planted again.



EVM occasional columnist Teddy Robertson, associate professor emerita in history at UM - Flint, can be reached at teddyrob@umich.edu.

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...Right to vote

(Continued from Page 3.)

The move to limit voting rights

Under the guise of preventing election fraud, 47 states have begun to revise their election laws, introducing 361 bills that would make it more difficult to vote. At the end of March the Michigan legislature introduced a package of 39 bills, many of which would limit access to voting. Though



Voters lined up outside City Hall to vote in the 2020 election
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

the details vary from state to state, most of these attempts to limit the vote have several things in common.

- Most would limit or make absentee voting more difficult.
- Many would make early voting more difficult.
- Many would require stricter voter ID laws.
- Some would limit Sunday voting, with major impact on minority voters.
- Many would limit the time to register to vote or request an absentee ballot.
- Most would make it easier to purge voter rolls, with the risk that legitimate voters would be eliminated.
- Some would limit voter registration drives.
- Some would prevent state and local officials from sending out voting applications.
- Many would limit or eliminate drop boxes for absentee voters.
- Many would make it more difficult for students to register and vote on

their campus.

- Some of them would limit the power of local officials to conduct their elections.
- One state would prohibit giving food or drink to those waiting to vote.

To be sure, there is a need to review our election processes in light of the pandemic, and the increase in absentee or mail-in voting. Certainly voting rolls should be kept up to date, procedures could be improved, and the actions taken in response to the pandemic need to be formalized. And some of those reasonable ideas are tucked into the tsunami of bills, as a sweetener, in many state legislatures.

But the overall intent is clear. These bills are being pushed by Republican lawmakers because a dramatic increase in voter turnout in 2020 gave Biden a seven million vote victory. The goal of these bills is to reduce that record turnout by making it more difficult to register and vote. Some see the laws as a return to the Jim Crow era of decades past.

The attempts to expand voting rights

Yet, in response to these actions that would restrict the right to vote, there are signs that those who oppose the restrictions are pushing back. More than 40 states have introduced measures that would expand the right to vote, make registration easier, allow for more absentee voting, and restoring the right to vote for those with past convictions.

Similarly, the U.S. House is considering a bill that would protect voting rights on the federal level.

Unintended consequences

Finally, there may be unintended consequences in the attempts to limit the vote.

While Democrats did well in 2020 with a wider use of the absentee/

mail-in ballot, at least for the presidential election, it's not certain that will hold true for the future. Historically absentee voters have tended to be older, and more Republican, and there's no guarantee that without Trump to run against, that the Democrats will retain their advantage. It's possible that in the future, the proposed limits will deter as many Republican voters as Democrats.

Sometimes the attempt to limit a right may cause people to become more energetic in exercising that right. A few years ago North Carolina took action to limit voting, particularly for Black voters. According to some reports, the response was a significant increase in Black voter turnout. The attempt to limit the vote caused even marginal voters to get energized and go to the polls. Sometimes nothing motivates people more than telling they can't do something.

The impact on democracy and the election system

The attempts to limit voting are clearly aimed at giving Republicans an advantage over Democrats in future elections. But the real impact goes far beyond giving one party a political benefit. The right to vote is the most basic aspect of democracy. By limiting that right these bills undermine the trust we have in the most basic of our democratic institutions — our election process.

The impact could be more critical, and last longer, than either a Republican or Democratic victory. Responding to both voter restrictions and gerrymandering, former Attorney General Eric Holder expressed the views of many when he said "I am really worried that our democracy will be fundamentally and irreparably harmed. We will still have elections every two years or every four years but they could be rendered close to meaningless."

It's up to us to pay attention and make sure that doesn't happen. It's about more than just the next election. And it's about more than just Democrats and Republicans. It's about the most essential element of democracy ... the right of everyone to vote.

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

June Humor

Kofi Brown artist/author – houseofkofi@gmail.com



**"I DIDN'T GET THE MEMO
ABOUT MY ABDICATION,
HUMAN."**

**Lead/galvanized
tainted pipes replaced
so far in Flint:
9,997**

According to city sources as of May 21, 2021 there have been excavations of pipes at 27,007 homes and 9,997 lead and/or galvanized steel pipes have been replaced.

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...Neighborhoods (Continued from Page 6.)

interest' captures groups that are similar to each other, but that don't follow political boundaries. That's one of the goals of this redistricting."

For those with more questions or concerns with redistricting, Communities First, Inc. can be contacted at redistricting@communitiesfirstinc.org.

Communities First also has scheduled a public hearing on the issue for 6 p.m. June 1 at the Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center.

U of M-Flint launches new urban institute dedicated to social equity

University of Michigan-Flint's new Urban Institute for Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice is now fully operational, according to Jan Furman, executive director of the new unit and an emeritus professor of English. The Institute, launched in November 2020, is intended to help interdisciplinary, community-focused research projects find funding and media promotion, with a focus on supporting and promoting equity.

"Our mission is to interrupt what I think is a prevailing deficit narrative of our city, which too often emphasizes what's wrong with Flint and not all the great work that's happening," Furman said. "The institute's work is harnessing the expertise that we have at the university, identifying community partners, and securing funding for projects and studies."

According to Furman, the focus of the Institute is on youth-oriented projects, designed to provide resources for young people from birth to college age. One such project at UM-Flint is "Family, Friends, and Neighbors," a group of child-care providers who advocate for changes to state-policy that sideline children from marginalized communities.

Above all, the Urban Institute will be focused on community engagement. According to Furman, all Institute proposals will be a collaboration

between university faculty and community partners.

"We are committed to a continuing collaboration with community partners and foundations, and then ultimately finding ways to disseminate our work as one way of disrupting reductive stories about who we are, at the university and in our city," she said.

The Urban Institute can be contacted at urban-institute@umich.edu, Jan Furman, executive director, can be reached at jfurman@umich.edu, and Thomas Bell, managing director, can be reached at thomn@umich.edu.

Mayor Neeley says Flint needs to stabilize water costs

Mayor Sheldon Neeley told FNU participants he hopes to soon conduct a study to determine a flat rate for water in the City of Flint. Neeley said the City had been unable to conduct this study due to a moratorium on water shut-offs which ended March 31, as well as habitual non-payment by certain commercial businesses.

"The City of Flint is going after those habitual non-payers in the commercial area," Neeley said. "Everybody has to pay their bill and their fair share

for us to level off so we can get a sense of what a flat rate would look like."

Despite the moratorium on water shut-offs ending in March, Neeley reiterated he refuses to shut off water for residential water users because of non-payment. Neeley said the funds for water in the City of Flint have stabilized with money flowing from the water sewer fund into the general fund.

Land Bank's Clean & Green Program hits record participation

The 2021 Clean & Green program, which cleans and maintains vacant properties owned by the Genesee County Land Bank, officially began on April 28. This year 69 community groups are participating in the program, a record high, according to Raynetta Speed, community outreach coordinator for the Land Bank.

Last year, the program maintained nearly 3,700 vacant properties every three weeks in and around the city of Flint. The schedule will be the same this year, with properties maintained every three weeks, concluding in September.

EVM reporter Coner Segren can be reached at csegren@umich.edu.

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Commentary

Viral time revisited, 2021— personal panic, wine, and the witching hour

By Teddy Robertson

We were all so new at balancing mortal threat and daily life. Inept, but resourceful.

That's how it felt a year ago this May when East Village Magazine staff shared their first experiences of the COVID pandemic. That's odder than you might think---reporters usually don't want to be part of a story.

I can hardly recall the details of Spring 2020 now; I had to look them up. Each new order blotting out memory of the previous one. We rocketed through the month of March. Just look at this list for a shocking reminder:

- March 10: two COVID cases in Detroit revealed and a state of emergency declared
 - March 11: state colleges move online
 - March 13: K-12 schools close
 - March 16: bars and restaurants shuttered
 - March 17: the first COVID-related death confirmed
 - March 21: Detroit automakers shut down and the US-Canada border closed
 - March 23: non-essential workers were directed to stay at home
 - March 28: Michigan COVID cases total 4650
 - March 30: the rest of the school year in classrooms canceled.
- (From ClickOnDetroit website)

By April 8, Michigan COVID cases numbered over 20,000, with 959 deaths. Fury at the governor's April 9 executive shut down order ("Stay Home, Stay Safe") triggered a protest called "Operation Gridlock" at the state capitol (April 15). Restrictions on businesses eased, but the stay-at-home order was extended to May 15 (April 24). Vital Records listed the state death toll at 3,448. (From ClickOnDetroit website). You can look up the rest.

Personal panic rises up on a flight from LA

And each of us had our individual reactions. What I remember is my personal panic. The feeling began as vague unease during my flight home to Flint from LA. I'd been in Southern California with Dennis, my partner, over the winter. Angelenos were already using the elbow bump; things seemed cool. When I boarded the last leg of my trip in Chicago, I watched a woman about my age fussily wipe down her own seat area. She shifted systematically to the top and back of the seat in front of her. "Should I be doing this?" I wondered.

That question morphed with each day's new statewide executive order, orders then strangled midafternoon by presidential press conferences. What should I be doing now? Find masks with filters (and not try to make my own)? Wear gloves to wipe down surfaces and store groceries in the garage for three days? A contractor friend dropped off disposables to fit my small hands, but I soon abandoned the wiping and waiting.

Words and phrases took on new meaning: social distancing, mitigation, essential workers, a "pause." Safety measures were now protocols. Using media lingo made me feel as if I'd joined a bunch of grown-ups playing "doctor" or "scientist."

I experimented with Instacart and ordered groceries online, not much stuff for a person alone. No point in grocery "Senior hours" for me. Suddenly calls on my cell phone came from Georgia: would I take X instead of Y? I discovered a new laundry detergent thanks to a kid who suggested a substitution---his mom's favorite version of Tide.

"I'll just drink them one at a time"

A harried Meijer employee told me on the phone that Shipt could deliver wine. From screens of Meijer's wine choices, I patched together a case of sauvignon blanc. The Shipt team in black company tee shirts (a young couple on their way home to Mt. Morris) delivered my order in early evening. They apologized for bringing the bottles in bags; all the case boxes had been used up.

Storing the bottles in the garage for the three suggested days, the woman asked if I were having a party.

"No," I replied, "I'll just drink them one at a time."

The garage in Michigan spring kept the bottles chilled. I found out I preferred New Zealand whites to California ones. I bought a one-year membership with Shipt. I perfected a kale, tomato and bean soup made in batches. It went well with the dry white wine.

I had my standards: I never took the wine to bed.

Sore hip bones, old photos, my mother's furs

Between multiple daily phone calls from Dennis and friends, my private sea of uncertainty churned. One particular admonition drilled into me as a school kid bubbled up: "Don't waste this time!"

I sorted boxes of photos and old letters. When my hip bones rebelled with weeks of sitting, I worked standing. I switched tasks and cleared out closets. I even photographed my mom's 1950s coats and furs. I emailed the pictures to the Theatre costume shop at UM-Flint: could they use a leopard-trimmed opera coat?

(Continued on Page 11.)

Village Life

Flint family navigated giving birth and seeking out protections from COVID-19 during pandemic

By Jenifer Veloso, Flintside

ASL interpreting provided by Myles Hudkins

EVM is pleased to collaborate with local media outlet Flintside by reprinting this article with their permission. Non-profit community journalism is vital to an informed community. EVM recognizes the quality journalism our fellow local community journalists provide to the Flint community. We offer this article by Flintside in an effort of collaboration and to encourage good journalism. ~ Ed.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought massive amounts of fear and uncertainty to people all over the world. For the Shepps family of Flint, they had an added stress: in November of 2019, just before lockdowns and quarantines started en masse nationwide, they found out they were expecting their first child.

"Once the pandemic kind of hit, I never thought it would really impact my pregnancy, but we were worried," said Katie Shepps.

"We were worried, but initially we didn't realize how much it would impact us until it really became serious," added her husband Jeremy Shepps.

The Shepps are also Deaf and, seeking out services related to both Katie's pregnancy and navigating through the pandemic, were definite challenges.

"As we approached that March timeframe, we started to become more worried about it (COVID-19) affecting us personally, especially me as a pregnant mother," Katie said. "Will it affect my baby who I'm carrying? Jeremy was concerned he couldn't be in the room with me [during the delivery]."

Jeremy was ultimately able to be present for their son Kyle's birth, and Hurley Medical Center provides ASL interpreters at any time of the day,

which also helped with their care. The Shepps were able to meet their interpreter at an ultrasound appointment prior to the delivery. The interpreter shared the moment with them during their delivery in the hospital and even stayed with the family overnight.

"We were so focused on that moment itself and having the baby when

obtain their COVID-19 vaccines due to vaccine accessibility for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing facilitated through the Genesee County Health Department. The GCHD has been working with the Communication Access Center to ensure that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing have decreased barriers preventing any members from not getting the vaccine.

The GCHD has been providing ASL interpreters at vaccine clinics at Bishop Airport while coordinating other logistics as well.

"We did get the vaccine," Katie said. "The Communication Access Center is an interpreting agency. They kind of took it into their hands to inform the Deaf community about vaccines becoming available for them and were able to host a clinic for that. So we were able to get it. I felt like we were updated with a lot of the information, a lot of things because we were very involved in Facebook, involved with the news, and involved with the

Deaf communities. So we felt pretty up to date on information."

Kyle is now almost a year old. The Shepps were able to start a beautiful family during a time that was filled with fear for so many.

"I just want people to know and understand that we're just two regular people who have jobs," Jeremy said. "We have an income, we have a house that we pay for. We have a child that we're raising and we're the same as you. The only thing that's different is that we can't hear well. And that's really it. Everything else is the same."

Jenifer Veloso, neighborhoods editor at Flintside.com, can be reached at jveloso@flintside.com.



Kyle, Katie, and Jeremy Shepp at home
(Photo by Jenifer Veloso)

they handed us our son, we didn't mind that, you know, the interpreter was present," Katie said. "I guess when we sit back and think about it, you know, it's a little bit interesting that you kind of just have someone present there, but during that time we didn't think anything about it, you know?"

Because of the pandemic and social distancing restrictions, the Shepps were not able to participate in birthing or breastfeeding classes prior to their delivery.

"We're lucky he's still young," Jeremy said. "So we're very fortunate in that regard, but you know, there are some missed opportunities that have happened because of COVID."

The family has also been able to